

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

September, 2008, #27



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe page](#) .

In this newsletter:

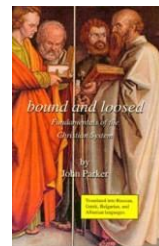
The Makeup of the Bible and Principles for Reading It
Your Preacher Is Leaving – Plan for It!
Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers
Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books
Smile of the Month
Jerrie and John this Month

The Makeup of the Bible and Principles for Reading It, by John Parker

Below is Chapter 3 from my book *Bound and Loosed* (Henderson, Tennessee: Hester Publications).

The Makeup of the Bible

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek *biblia*, meaning “books,” a word which originally referred to the papyrus material on which writings were made in ancient times and which later was applied to the various books of the Bible. Another term for these books is “scriptures” (cf. Dan. 9:2; Mt. 21:42; Mk. 14:49) (Unger, 8).



The Bible consists of 66 books. Since the end of the second century it has been the custom to divide them into the 39 books of the Old Testament, which are the Hebrew writings, and the 27 books of the New Testament, which are the Christian writings. Strictly speaking, however, the term “Old Testament” refers to the covenant given to Moses (2 Kings 23:2; 2 Cor. 3:14) and “New Testament” to the new covenant of Christ (cf. Mt. 26:28) (Unger, 9).

The books of the Old Testament may be further divided as follows:

Law	Genesis-Deuteronomy
History	Joshua-Job
Major Prophets	(long prophetic books) Isaiah - Daniel
Minor Prophets	(short prophetic books) Hosea - Malachi

The books of the New Testament may be divided as follows:

Accounts of the Gospel (the life of Christ)	Matthew - John
History	Acts
Paul's Epistles	1 Corinthians - Philemon (and possibly Hebrews)
General Epistles	James - Jude
Prophecy	Revelation

Approximately forty different inspired men wrote the Bible during the period of about 1450 B.C. to 100 A.D. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (except for a few passages in Aramaic), and the New Testament was written in Greek (Unger, 8 - 11ff.).

The principal subject and theme of the Bible is the love of God for man and his salvation of man through his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 3:16). It begins in Genesis 1 - 3 with the creation of man and his subsequent fall into sin, and then devotes the rest of its pages to the preparation for the coming of Christ, his ministry and vicarious death, and the establishment and work of his church, concluding with the prophecy in Revelation of the final victory of Christ and his people at the end of the world.

Principles of Reading and Interpreting the Bible

In Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the author tells about a good-hearted farmer who is also a preacher. Huck and Tom Sawyer rescue the slave Jim from captivity on this man's farm, and they do so with such an elaborate and romantically absurd plan that the good old fellow is thoroughly confused when it is told to him. Huck says,

It kind of made him drunk, as you may say, and he didn't know nothing at all the rest of the day, and preached a prayer-meeting sermon that night that give him a rattling reputation, because the oldest man in the world couldn't-a understood it. (212)

Unfortunately, people sometimes take the same attitude toward the Bible that this preacher's audience did regarding his sermon: that the Bible is a wonderful but mysterious book that is not supposed to be understood, or at least only to be understood by Bible scholars. But this attitude contradicts the very purpose of God in giving us the Bible, to reveal his will to us so that we can know and obey it:

PSA 119:105 NKJV Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

2 TI 3:16 NKJV All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In order to understand the Bible and derive the greatest good from it, you should observe these principles of reading and interpreting it.

1. Read with confidence that you can understand the Bible. God wants you to know his will; therefore he has given you a book which you and others can understand.
2. Read with confidence that the Bible is relevant to you.

After Huck Finn was adopted by the widow Douglas, she tried to teach him about Moses:

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers; and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by-and-by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him; because I don't take no stock in dead people. (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 28)

Huck failed to realize the relevance of the story of Moses to himself. Just as Moses had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, scholars observe, Huck himself had been adopted by the widow (Baym, 28n). Many people make the same mistake that Huck did: they fail to see that the Bible is relevant to them and their situations. No other book so directly addresses your present situation and needs as does the Bible. Give it the chance to affect and help your life.

3. Read with the understanding that the Bible is authoritative. This is God's word, and man must obey it if he wishes to be blessed by God (Acts 5:29; Heb. 4:12).
4. Read with an open mind. Do not begin with preconceived ideas about what the Bible says or what you want it to say. (Gross examples of this attitude include nineteenth-century attempts to justify slavery by references to the Bible's injunctions for first-century servants to obey their masters.) Rather let the Bible speak to you and accept what it says.
5. Read with recognition of who is being spoken to. While we are to learn from all of the Bible (Rom. 15:4), some of its laws, especially those of the Old Testament, were given to men living before the Christian age and are not to be regarded as binding on us today. For example, we are not to build an ark because Noah was told to build one, or to offer animal sacrifices because the Israelites were

commanded to offer them. The New Testament, however, is binding on us, and we are to obey its teachings.

6. Read with an awareness of the historical background of the passage you are reading. The events of the Bible took place in history, and the background of each passage should be considered for a proper understanding of it.
7. Read with an awareness of the context of the passage you are reading. Do not isolate a verse and ignore the verses that are surrounding it, but rather consider the verses together so that you will have the whole of the message conveyed in the verses. For example, Paul's instruction in 1 Cor. 12:31 for Christians in Corinth to desire to obtain the best miraculous gifts is in the context of a passage addressed to a congregation in New Testament times on whom miraculous powers had been bestowed. When that context is considered the reader sees that such a command was limited to that special, first-century situation, not to all Christians in all times.
8. Read and harmonize *all* of what the Bible says on a subject, not just what one verse says on it. For example, Acts 16:30-31 discusses what is necessary for salvation, but Acts 2:38, Rom. 10:9-10, and Mk. 16:15-16 also discuss what man must do to be saved. All of the verses must be obeyed, not just one or a few of them.
9. Read with both faith and common sense. The Bible is not a mysterious treatise unrelated to the real world, but a logical and sensible book for rational people.

One should use common sense, for example, in regard to the language of the Bible. Its accounts of events — such as the creation story (Genesis 1-3), the story of Jonah and the great fish (Jonah 1-2), and the virgin birth of Christ (Luke 1-2) — are true and historically accurate, and the language used in describing these accounts should be regarded as literal.

The language used in some other parts of the Bible, however, is obviously intended to be figurative or symbolic and should be read with the writer's intention in mind. When Isaiah speaks of "the four corners of the earth," for example, or when Jesus calls his disciples "the salt of the earth," they are obviously speaking figuratively and not literally. Symbolic passages are found in several passages in Revelation. Similar combinations of literal and figurative language are found in the literature of all times and nations, and we should not be surprised to find them in the Bible as well.

Bible handbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias will aid you in reading and understanding the Bible. But the important thing is just to *read* it: read it with the confidence and knowledge that God is speaking to you and that you can hear and obey his word.

Your Preacher Is Leaving – Plan for It!

by Jerrie Barber

It has been my observation that churches and preachers do better when there is a long ministry. When they are effective, they get to know each other and the community. They can build relationships that are mutually beneficial.



I have the opportunity to visit where the preacher has been at the same congregation for more than a decade. I have had that situation more than once in my years of ministry.

But at some time, that ministry in that place with that preacher is going to end. I think it is helpful when all involved realize that, talk about it, and plan for the transition.

One of the frequent ways I hear people dealing with that reality is denial. “We love our preacher. He has been with us twenty-five years and he is *never* going to leave.” “Our preacher is also an elder. He doesn’t want to leave and he has job security.”

The preacher is leaving. I have known preachers who have been at a church for many years, felt secure, and suddenly found out they were leaving. I have known preachers who also served as elders who left – sometimes by their choice, at other times not by their choice.

Every preacher will leave his present congregation in one of four ways:

1. He may leave at the second coming of Jesus when everyone else in the congregation leaves (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).
2. Within the next seventy-five to one hundred years most preachers reading this will die.
3. Elders have the choice of making changes.
4. Preachers can decide to quit preaching, move to another congregation, or retire.

Any of the last three are emotionally and spiritually challenging. I have not observed the first one.

Since this event will have an impact on the congregation, the preacher, and his family, I think it is good to think about it, pray about it, and plan for it. I have tried it with and without planning. In my experience, talking and planning are better.

Jesus prepared His disciples for His leaving. “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Matthew 16:21, NKJV). They were upset (Matthew 16:22, 23). They didn’t understand (Mark 9:20-37). They fussed about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (Luke 9:43-48). But he kept telling them (Luke 22:14-23). They continued to get upset with each other (Luke 22:24). He increased the details and words of comfort (John 14:1-6).

Although Jesus planned and prepared His friends for His leaving, it did not take away the panic and the pain. But after He left earth, they carried out His mission.

Next month, I plan to discuss some suggestions for planning to leave.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, selected by John Parker

Let me be your servant:

Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty;
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly: let me go with you;
I'll do the service of a younger man
In all your business and necessities.
[An older man's case for being allowed service]
As You Like It 2.2



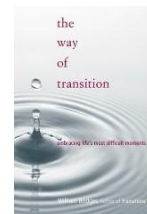
O good old man, how well in thee appears
The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweat for duty, not for meed!
As You Like It 2.2

Why, who cries out on pride,
That can therein tax any private party?
Doth it not flow as hugely as the sea,
Till that the weary very means do ebb?
[No person is alone guilty of pride: it flows everywhere]
As You Like It 2.7

Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you:
I thought that all things had been savage here.
[A confession by a young man who thought all in the forest was savage.]
As You Like It 2.7

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

The Way of Transition: Embracing Life's Most Difficult Moments, by
William Bridges, Copyright © 2001 by William Bridges



This is the third book by William Bridges that I have read. They have all been profitable. The first, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, is the theory of transition (August 2006 newsletter). The second, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, is practical (September 2006 newsletter). He gives guidelines for learning and growing during transitions.

This third book relates how he dealt with the transition of his wife's sickness, her death, and his remarriage. Mr. Bridges wondered if what he had said and written on

transition was actually true. The first quote is while they were on a trip and her condition became worse:

“This positive-thinking stuff is crap,” she said to me one evening as I sat on her hospital bed. “But then, so is negative thinking. They both cover up reality — which is that we just don’t know what is going to happen. That’s the reality we have to live with. But it is easy to see why people take refuge in optimism or pessimism. They both give you an answer. But the truth is that we just don’t know. What a hard truth that is!” (page 24).

“You make what seems a simple choice: Choose a man or a job or a neighborhood – and what you have chosen is not a man or a job or a neighborhood, but a life.” - Jessamyn West (page 58).

Smile of the Month

Have you heard preaching that sounded like this?

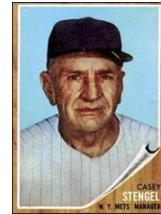
Casey Stengel: Address to Congress, July 9, 1958

Interviewer: I was asking you, sir, why it is that baseball wants this bill passed?

Casey Stengel: I would say I wouldn’t know but I would say the reason why they’d want it passed is to keep baseball going as the highest baseball sport that has gone into baseball and from the baseball angle. I am not going to speak of any other sport. I am not in here to argue about other sports. I’m in the baseball business. It’s been run cleaner than any baseball business that was ever put out in the hundred years at the present time.

Interviewer: Mr. Mantel, do you have any observations with reference to the applicability of the anti-trust laws to baseball?

Mickey Mantel: My views are just about the same as Casey’s (*Great Speeches of the 20th Century*, Audio Cassette, Volume 3).



Barber Clippings

Gail and I are enjoying our interim before the next interim. We finished at Eddyville, Kentucky, August 10. I start part-time with Hendersonville, Tennessee, October 1 and begin preaching there the first Sunday in January. We have unpacked (even though we didn’t move furniture) and enjoyed some time together – such as our first trip to the Tennessee State Fair last week.

I am scheduled to teach a combined adult class at Hendersonville October 5 and Keith Parker and I will preach at the morning services. We will be talking about the transition.

I have enjoyed speaking at Macedonia in Blue Ridge, Georgia, Paris, Tennessee, Bernie, Missouri, and Berry’s Chapel since the last newsletter.

I have a meeting at Munfordville, Kentucky, September 19-21.

I just learned of a book that will be released tomorrow, September 16: *Enemy of the State: The Trial and Execution of Saddam Hussein*, by Michael A. Newton and Michael P. Scharf. This book will be interesting to me because of the subject and one of the authors. Mike Newton is a deacon at Berry's Chapel church of Christ.

You can learn more about the book at: www.enemyofthestatebook.com .

Jerrie Barber

jerrie@barberclippings.com

www.barberclippings.com

<http://barberclippings.blogspot.com/>

756 Woodland Way

Nashville, Tennessee 37209

Home phone: (615) 356-8371

Cell phone: 615-584-0512

John Parker

In my freshman classes at Lipscomb University I am focusing on classic Christian hymns and material from my and Paul Seawright's book on great British hymns, to be published by New Leaf Press. My wife Jill is developing material on the life and teachings of Jesus for use in her teaching ladies classes beginning in the spring. It will include photographs which we took on our trip to Israel this summer.

John H. Parker

Johnparker22@aol.com

www.interimcofc.com

(615) 373-4462

To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe page](#) .