

**Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 22, Word Meaning**

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Another fallacy or misstep in doing word studies is the fourth one is sort of the opposite of number one. The first one we discussed was what is often known as an etymological or root fallacy where the origins or the history of a word is given too much weight in determining what a word means at a certain time. The opposite is to go the other direction and is what is often called anachronism or semantic anachronism.

That is reading a Greek or Hebrew word in light of a later meaning. Now once again, this is not to say that understanding modern Greek and Hebrew, modern Hebrew meanings don't help at all or have no influence at all on what or might not shed some light on what a word might have meant in its original context. But again to assume that a later meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word is necessarily what it meant in its original context is certainly a fallacy and instead again what is as important is what that word meant at a given time in history for our purposes in biblical Hebrew or first century Koine Greek.

For the average student though perhaps more difficult or what they might be more prone to do that do not have access to the original languages is to perhaps read Hebrew and English, the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words in light of later English translations for example. So when we translate Greek and Hebrew words to think necessarily that the way we have translated it, the meaning of that word in our modern-day English can be read back anachronistically into the ancient text or furthermore the fact that many of our modern-day for example English words are derivatives from Semitic or even Greek words such as anthropology comes from is based on the Greek word anthropos or we talk about pneumatic tools, tools that are

run by air from the Greek word pneuma that could mean air or wind or breath or spirit. So many of our words sometimes in English are derivative of ancient roots in Greek or sometimes other languages.

So sometimes a danger is not only to read ancient words in terms of the English words that we've translated them with but also to interpret a word in a Greek or English word in terms of our modern-day derivations of those words. For example one really easy example again that I've called from a couple of other sources that have recognized this and not only have I read examples but I've also heard this committed in pulpits is the and one of the more well-known ones it's actually quite a quite silly example is the example from second Corinthians and Paul's discussion of and his instructions to the Corinthians regarding their giving and in chapter eight I think chapter eight chapter eight and verse nine I think is the one I want though that might not be it the text where Paul tells the Corinthians and instructs them to give because God loves a cheerful giver and perhaps some of you have heard this the word cheerful is the Greek word hilarion from which we get the English word hilarious and I've seen others point to this but I've heard examples of preachers who would say therefore what God really wants is a hilarious or a giving to the extent that we laugh and we're ecstatic. The problem is that's reading the word hilarion in Greek in anachronistically in light of our English word hilarious which is now means something very different from how Paul was using the term so be aware of reading later meanings of words back into the original Greek and Hebrew word meanings again especially for most of us for most of you English especially if you don't know Greek or Hebrew the danger of reading a Greek or Hebrew text in light or Hebrew word in light of the English word we use to translate it thinking that what the word means in English is what it would have meant in Greek or when certain English words are derivative of early words and thinking then that our English

word again approximates what it meant what the Greek or Hebrew word meant in its original context.

I've already given you an example of a student that in a class I took that misunderstood or could not understand why Paul would use the word hope or the word that we translate hope why he would call our salvation and especially our future salvation a hope could not understand that based primarily on the what the student was doing is confusing the the Greek word that we translate hope with what we usually mean by hope when we use it in English usually we use the word hope as something that we wish will happen but we aren't certain whether it will or not whereas the Greek word that is usually translated hope is at least in Pauline text frequently refers to something that is a certainty that one can stake one's life upon so kind of the opposite of number one reading later or earlier meanings into the Greek or Hebrew text the opposite is reading later meanings back into the text again the meaning of the word in its context at that point in time must be determinative. A fifth fallacy or at least a fifth thing to avoid is what I call not reinventing the wheel that is to recognize that much hard work has been done in lexical analysis and that does not mean that there's not still a lot of work to be done there is we're uncovering new material or learning new methodologies and new ways of of studying words so there's a lot much to be done and certainly it would be wrong to conclude that the final word has been said yet at the same time when much work has already been done and conclusions are fairly firm is I'm a big one on not expending energy by doing something that's already been done I'd rather use my energy on other areas perhaps that haven't been done so just be aware of not reinventing the wheel and simply rehashing and reproducing work that's already been completed and finally number six don't become obsessed with words that is as we've already said words combine to make clauses and clauses combine to make sentences sentences combine into paragraphs and paragraphs combine into entire

discourses so don't become so obsessed with words but realize that words are not the ultimate bearers of meaning or carriers of meaning so don't don't focus on words to the detriment of other methods now having discussed briefly issues related to how we understand words what they are what they do and understanding common methodology for approaching them and some of the fallacies to avoid let me give you just one example of how that might work from Galatians chapter five the well-known flesh versus spirit text where Paul contrasts the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit and I want to focus in on that word flesh in Galatians chapter five which is the Greek word sarx but the word sarx English translators in Ephesians Galatians 5 frequently translate it with the English word flesh but this word could be chosen for a couple of reasons again the first step is to choose the word I've chosen this word for a couple of reasons number one it appears to play a significant role in this context in comparison to the spirit word spirit but also English translations differ in the way they translate it some English translations use the single word equivalent in English flesh other translations such as the original NIV translated at sin nature by translate also it's there's a possibility of misunderstanding this term if I translate it with the word flesh in English should that lead me to the conclusion that Paul is talking about the physical flesh or the physical body as somehow complicit in or in sin or the body itself is sinful or evil so that the word flesh here in Galatians 5 would seem to provide a fruitful term for study second as far as the field of meaning what could this term possibly mean how is it used particularly in the New Testament and in first century Greek if you consult a couple of the tools that I mentioned earlier and other New Testament lexical type tools you'll see that the word can have a broad fairly broad range of meaning and some different different meanings and functions for example the word flesh as it does in English could refer to the physical flesh so the fleshly part of the body that covers the bones or it could be used in reference to the entire body Paul a couple places uses an idiom such as flesh and blood referring to the entire physical being the entire body

once physical existence so it could refer to the entire body physical existence it's used in a couple places when Paul refers to my own flesh referring to his ancestors his relations so physical relations but it also could be used a fourth possibility is sometimes you see it used as as humanity in opposition or rebellion against God or or humanity as susceptible to sin and as opposed to God which is more kind of more of a spiritual more of a almost metaphorical usage of a term that's usually used to refer to physical actually physical flesh now obviously the first thing to note is it can't mean all of these that is when Paul uses the word flesh in Galatians 5 or sarks the word we translate flesh it probably does not mean all of these at the same time so the context most likely will disambiguate meaning that is point to one of these meanings as the appropriate one in the content in the context notice also the contrast with the spirit this would suggest that Paul is not primarily especially if spirit means holy spirit the contrast is not primarily between physical versus spiritual but that Paul probably has something in mind in other words he's not against the physical flesh he's not anti-flesh or against the physical body and sees the physical body as somehow evil or sinful in and of itself instead better is to understand well let me go back to the as an example then the NIV the original NIV translating it as interestingly the new the 2011 NIV has reverted back to the single word flesh but the original NIV translated sarks in Galatians 5 again not everywhere but in Galatians 5 in contrast with holy spirit the spirit walking in the spirit they translated flesh as sin nature however to many this could this might inappropriately suggest that the sin nature is some ontological part of my being or some separate impulse or some separate part of me that produces sin or something like that and perhaps because of potential misunderstanding of sin nature or some that were unsatisfied with that definition the 2011 version of the NIV has switched to use the word flesh a better I think understanding of the word when you look at it in its context and relying on some other tools for help is that here the term flesh that we translate flesh in English refers to my entire self my entire physical spiritual makeup my

entire self as weak and susceptible to sin it refers to my entire self as under the influence of this present evil age and relying on the resources of the present age so to rely on the flesh then in this sense to rely on the flesh that is who I am my entire physical and spiritual being as as belonging to and under the influence of and relying solely on the resources of this present evil age my entire self is susceptible and weak and susceptible to sin then is what produces the vices listed in Galatians 5. So probably something along that line is what Paul is asking the readers to avoid when he says the deeds of the flesh are these that is the when in reliant when I rely upon my the resources of this present evil age when I rely on my myself as part of this present age acceptable to sin and weakened towards sin then inevitably I will produce the deeds of the flesh however he asks them to walk in the spirit in the new covenant holy spirit and to produce the the fruits of the spirit. So word studies are important it's important to understand the meaning of key words and key lexical features in a biblical text while keeping in mind the different dangers and fallacies that could be committed and to avoid them and also again ultimately to realize that words are not the ultimate bearer or carrier of meaning that again words combine to make clauses and clauses sentences and sentences paragraph and paragraphs come together to produce entire discourse and so if one only does word studies you've only dealt with part of how a text communicates meaning which then leads us to the next thing to consider in interpretation and hermeneutics and that is the issue of grammar and context and so I want to make a series of observations related to how do we analyze the grammar of a text how do we analyze the broader context again I'm basically directing this at those who do not know Hebrew and Greek those who are Greek less or Hebrew less obviously if you know Greek and Hebrew you have access to a lot more resources and are able to go in a lot more depth than I will discuss here but beyond just understanding the meaning of words there's a need to understand then how words are put together to form phrases and clauses and sentences how those are put together to

form paragraphs how paragraphs then relate to each other and are put together to form entire books or documents or discourses and what I want to do is focus just a moment on grammatical analysis and make some observations both in what you how you might employ grammar in a limited way in trying to understand a text especially with only access to an English translation but also how you can evaluate other tools that do discuss the grammar of text.

First of all with when it comes to grammatical analysis that is I'm using the word grammar fairly loosely but looking at at how words are combined into sentences how sentences and clauses get combined again looking kind of at the grammar of passage and how it works. Here probably a more formally equivalent translation is of help a form even a formal equivalent that is a more literal translation will not capture completely and perfectly the grammar of the Hebrew and Greek text but it'll hopefully bring you closer to it than other types especially more dynamic equivalent types so if one wants to do a grammatical study it would help to have at least one or more more formally equivalent or literal translations at one's disposal if you don't know Hebrew or Greek. Also commentaries can be of great help in alerting you to grammatical issues and how those might be significant for interpretation.

Let me just give you a couple of guidelines and again due to my area of interest and focus I'll focus on the Greek language and grammar and how that might influence the way one interprets a text especially by means of evaluating tools that might make grammatical observations. One important thing to recognize is the difference at least in in both Hebrew and Greek the difference between the tense system of those languages and for example the language of the New Testament. I'm sorry the language of modern-day spoken English the translations of the Greek and Hebrew text especially with the New Testament Greek what you will find is English the English verb system is

primarily though not exclusively but primarily temporally oriented that is when we think of tense we think of the English verbs indicating past present and future with both Hebrew and perhaps and especially Greek the time of the action past present and future was not necessarily indicated by the tenses themselves but would have been indicated by other things in the context.

Instead especially with the Greek tense system what was indicated is what scholars call aspect or how the author chose to look at the action how the author chose to view the action irrespective of when the action took place or even how objectively it actually occurred the Greek verb tenses would simply tell us how did the author choose to view it how did the author choose to look at this action and I just want to make a couple comments on two of the main tenses in in Greek one of them is what is called the Aris tense you'll see commentaries and other works describing the Aris tense the other is what is known as the present tense and the genius of these two present of these two tenses has often been described with an analogy that again this is not new to me I'm borrowing it from a couple of others but one could compare aspect in Greek tenses that is how the author wants to look at the action with the analogy of a parade that is if I am if I am in a blimp or a helicopter and let's say there's a parade that takes place I'll use another American example if there's a parade that takes place on July 4th to celebrate Independence Day and that parade begins at nine o'clock and it ends at twelve o'clock if and I want to make it clear I'm referring to the same parade with these what I'm going about to say if I am a news correspondence flying above that parade in the helicopter in a helicopter I see the parade in its entirety I don't see it necessarily as it develops and unfolds I'm not interested in in how long it took or or how it developed or the different parts I just see the whole thing from beginning and end I see the parade in its entirety however taking that same parade if I am an observer on the street corner I could see the same parade from a completely different perspective a



completely different aspect I look at it as it develops and unfolds I can stand right in the street corner and see the different bands and the different floats moving before before me again it's the same parade but whether I'm looking at it as a whole from a helicopter or whether I'm an observer on the street corner seeing it develop and unfold and seeing its details those are simply different ways of looking at the exact same parade the same is true with New Testament Greek the Aristents could look at an action as a whole as if the author stands back and just sees the whole event whether it was a real brief event and happened instantaneously whether it was repeated whether it took place over a long period of time the Aristents would be as if the author stands back and looks at the action as a whole the present tense would be as if the author decides to enter the action and see it internally as it develops and unfolds in in front of him that would be similar to the present tense again whether the action was short or long or repeated that could only be determined by the context all the present tense said was the author looked at the action as from its details how it developed and unfolded as opposed to the heiness it just said there it is and looked at it in its entirety often the Aristents in Greek is considered kind of the default tense that is again if you turn on your computer and you start to type in your word processing processing program there's usually a default size of font often 12 and that will automatically come up unless you want to click and choose a different size font an 8 or a 10 or something like that or again your computer will have a default printer that is the printer that it automatically chooses you will select it and that's a default printer unless you want to choose something else that's the one that will come up the Aristents in Greek that you can you can find referred to in textbooks and commentaries the Aristents was the default tense that is the tense the author would use unless he had some reason to use something else what that means is that and how this perspective on Greek determines the way that we analyze the language and again if you're a non Greek reader or non-Hebrew reader you are reliant mainly on commentaries and other tools to help you but

how this helps us I think to avoid a misunderstanding of Greek tenses for example you still find this often although we're starting to learn to avoid it but you'll still often find things in commentaries or other especially more popular Bible study tools you'll see things like the Aorist is used to indicate that the action was once and for all or it was instantaneous or it was urgent it was final you'll see things like that however again if the Aorist is the default tense that just looks at the action as a whole probably we shouldn't as students we shouldn't make anything of the Aorist we can probably safely move on from it and we should avoid we should avoid commentaries that put a lot of stock in the Aorist and make those kinds of state statements about the Aorist that it was instantaneous or once for all or indicated some special type of action actually the opposite is true again the Aorist was the tense used when the writer didn't want to say anything specific about the action it was the default tense so be aware of yourself making too much out of the Aorist but be aware of commentaries and other tools that might make too much out of the Aorist the present tense also the present tense you'll often see described in commentaries and other tools even popular biblical studies tools you often find the present tense is described as the present tense is used when the action is continuous or habitual or ongoing over a period of time however again the present tense is used simply when the author wants to look at the action as developing and unfolding no matter how long or how short the action actually transpired and again i've done some work with the present tense and i found that sometimes the present tense is used a very short actions sometimes it's used a very long actions you can't tell except from the context all the present tense does is say the author it's as if he enters the action to kind of see its makeup how it develops it's it's kind of a close-up look a more close-up perspective on the action than the Aorist is so what that means for example is that sometimes the author might use the present tense to simply draw attention to an action in contrast to the default Aorist that just summarizes it an author might use a present tense to focus on to focus more

specifically or draw more attention to so what that means is you you need to avoid comments on your own or be aware of comments and commentaries and other tools that say the author used a present tense so it means continuous action or ongoing action or durative action or or habitual action or something like that the present tense itself does not indicate that whether an action is ongoing or habitual you can only tell from the context or continuous or something like that so be aware of of using the present tense to draw illegitimate conclusions especially be aware of commentaries and other tools that that place a lot of stock in the present tense meaning the action is continuous and ongoing or something like that again often in comparison to the Aristents the present will function when the author simply wants to to take a more close-up action wants to perhaps focus in a little more detail on an action than he would if he used an Aristents another example that you'll find in grammars to be aware of just to give you one other is conditional statements you're aware of and in you've you frequently use or read conditional statements it's an if then statement if this then this so if i say if the student studies greek diligently then she will receive an a the main part of the sentence she will receive an a is conditioned upon the first part if the student studies greek diligently so the the fulfillment of the action she will receive an a is conditioned upon or dependent on the if part if that person studies diligently greek has a construction known as a first class condition construction and you often find commentaries and other tools say that when there is a first class condition you'll see that language first class condition you should translate it since that is the if part actually means it's actually happening it's since so since you are studying greek you will receive an a so you often find commentaries and other tools of locating first class condition sentences in greek and therefore drawing the conclusion this is really happening it should be translated not if that's that's not strong enough but you should translate it since the problem with that is there are just too many instances where that isn't the case in the new testament and so for example matthew chapter 12 verse 27 i think it is

in matthew chapter 12 jesus is in conflict with the pharisees who have accused him of casting out demons in the name of satan and jesus responds by saying if i cast out demons in the name of satan or beelzebub then by who then by whose authority do you cast them out that's a first class sentence if jesus says if i jesus cast out demons that's a first class sentence should we translate that since is jesus saying yes since i am casting out demons there's all kinds of examples like that so just beware of commentaries that place a lot of weight on first class conditions and say it should be translated since the point of all this in a sense is to recognize greek is a language like any other language and it's illegitimate to inject too much precision into it to expect to make it do too much to expect too much out of it it yes it was a a a completely adequate means of god's communication of his revelation to his people in the first century but at the same time uh it's certainly illegitimate to treat it in a way that is unnatural so my point is just uh be aware in your own analysis but be aware especially as you read commentaries and other tools uh be aware of those that would demand too much precision of the language or make it do things that it's really not meant to do and it would place too much stock in little grammatical nuances but again you'll have to use commentaries and other tools if you're greek-less or hebrew-less which is fine but you'll have to use other tools to help you make grammatical observations but but be aware of of those that overanalyze the grammar one example that we've already looked at actually but one example that might help with understanding how grammar can make a difference and we talked about this in relationship to translation but the translation issue in this text is actually a grammatical one and that is that section in ephesians chapter 5 and in ephesians chapter 5 in verse 18 we find a well-known imperative to not be drunk with wine but to be filled by the spirit if you have a rather literal wooden translation you'll see that what follows in english translation is a series of participles at least in english they're often translated with a a form of the verb with ing on the end so you'll see a series of participles after verse 18 so he says don't get

drunk with wine which is debauchery or least debauchery but instead be filled with the spirit literally speaking to one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs singing and making music in your hearts of the lord giving thanks to god the father for everything and all those participles singing speaking giving thanks they all go back and modify the command to to be filled with the spirit and i think they simply explain and describe what does that mean what does that look like interesting though though and again this is where english translations differ is what do we do with verse 21 which most english translations seem to translate as a separate verse and some of them even begin a new paragraph but actually verse 21 submitting to one another verse 21 that verb submit is another participle in this string of participles it probably goes back to the command be filled with the spirit so a better way to read this text then would be don't get drunk with wine but be filled with the spirit which means speaking to one another in psalms hymns spiritual song singing and making music to the lord always giving thanks to god the father for everything and submitting to one another so submitting to one another is part of what it means to be filled with the spirit so grammatically what you do with that verse and even comparing english translations might make a difference in the way you interpret this text another thing to pay attention to especially in english translation with english translations this can even be done but it's uh at times um a little more accurate to do it with the greek text and that is to pay attention to connectors such as the buts and ands and therefores and and whenever or because or for those words that function to connection to connect words or even clauses or even sentences or even sometimes paragraphs so it's important to understand the force of of connectors again the therefores and the buts and and the because of this or something like that i tried to determine what that says about the relationship of the words or paragraphs or sentences to each other that's part of helping to trace the flow of thought through the passage again to to consider different literary types this is probably more significant particularly in in epistolary literature that often depends on a tightly knit argument that

moves from line to line or verse to verse or whatever again with with narrative literature we're mainly interested in in the connection between paragraphs and how the story develops so sometimes the the detailed grammar of the the verses themselves and sentences is not as important as what's going on at the story and the paragraph level uh the the other thing though with connectors and this isn't the only way to identify relationships between sentences sometimes you still have to identify what's what's the relationship between this verse and the one that comes before it or the one that comes after it or what's the relationship of this paragraph to the previous one but even with connectors even when you have the help of connectors like a therefore or a but or because or in order that or something like that even then sometimes it's difficult to tell what are they connecting uh are they simply connecting two words are they connecting sentences are they connecting paragraphs so all i'm saying is you you need to work with the text and try to figure out the the function of each section what what is this sentence doing here what is this verse doing here how does it work in the entire paragraph a good example is uh that's even i think in the revealed in the english translation in an english translation is romans chapter 5 and verse 12 this is a section that begins a comparison that paul makes between christ and adam where he compares and contrast what the the the act of adam in sinning what that did to the human race which now is uh uh corrected and reversed in the one act of jesus christ the act of christ uh obedience of christ that is his death in the cross this comparison and contrast between adam and christ is introduced by an interesting construction that most english translations simply say therefore so i'm looking at the niv version it says therefore just as sin entered the world through one man other translations might be a little more wooden and literal and translate it closer to the greek text which is because of this literally because of this just as sin entered into the world and he goes on to the the comparison the question is what is the because of this indicating well obviously it's showing that something has happened previously that is a

cause for this comparison between adam and christ something paul has just said is a cause because of this because of something he's just said now he launches into comparison between adam and christ but the debate is what is paul referring to because of this because of what uh some is is paul referring back for example to the previous verse in chapter 11 of chapter i'm sorry verse 11 of romans 5 paul ends by saying not only is this so but we also now rejoice in god through our lord jesus christ through whom we have now received reconciliation so is it because of that statement or is the is the because of this or the therefore does it refer back to chapter 5 1 through 11 does it refer back to the entire first 11 verses of chapter 5 or does it go back earlier perhaps it goes all the way back to chapter 3 verse 21 where paul begins explicitly to discuss justification by faith or does it go all the way back to chapter 1 and verse 18 which is kind of the beginning of the body of the letter to the roman so uh you know sometimes it's going to be difficult to tell exactly you know what do some of the when i see a therefore or because of or for uh or whenever or consequently or a word such as that is is it's sometimes going to be difficult to know well what's it connecting back to how far should i go back that's all part of hermeneutics and interpretation and trying to put the text together to make sense of it wrestling with the grammar with a connection of clauses and words and paragraphs and things like that to move on from grammar and to discuss briefly uh to and to kind of broaden out from from just words to looking at how words are combined into sentences and paragraphs to broaden out and look at the entire literary context so more broadly you need to ask the question and look at how does my passage fit within the broader context or or literary flow of the entire book or more specifically if if i am dealing with a text in the older new testament how does it relate to what comes before it how does it grow out of it how does it prepare for or relate to what comes after it you need to be able to to explain how your text fits within the context a very simple illustration of how this is important and how it's ridiculous even in our own day to ignore this is none of us goes to a movie store or to a

red box or something like that and we check out a movie we've never seen and we take it home and pop it into our dvd player and then perhaps we uh when the scene selection the the menu scene selection comes up and we check we choose scene 17 and then maybe when we get to scene 17 we fast forward into the middle of it and then we watch 10 minutes of it i i would uh expect that you would be left confused and having no idea what in the world's going on you want to know how the entire story develops you want to know how the plot or how the argument unfolds and develops so that you can understand any given section in the movie the same is true with a biblical text i think one of the most important things that you can do in hermeneutics or interpreting a biblical text is to and one of the most valuable aspects is to be able to explain how your text contributes to the argument that's going on to explain how your text fits where it is what's it doing there what would be missing if it weren't there what does it contribute to the argument how does it fit with or grow out of the previous section how does it prepare for what comes after it and again there there can be a variety of types of relationships often depending on the two whether you're dealing with narrative literature or whether you're dealing with uh epistolary literature there can be a number of types of relationships between the paragraphs in the broader context the broader sections of the text there might be more of a chronological relationship you'll find this particularly in narrative although we said even in narrative that things aren't always arranged chronologically but certain events might be arranged according to chronology at times certain sections might explain something that comes before your text might be an illustration that comes of something that has come before it your text might be the cause of something that comes before it or after it there might be a cause and effect relationship it might be a question answer relationship your text might be answering a question that was raised in an earlier text your text might be arranged according to the particular or general that is your text might give the particulars of a general statement or might be a general summary of what some



particular examples so there there's all kinds of possible relationships comparison and contrast your text might be a contrast or comparison to something that's come before after it so just be alert to a number of possibilities of how and more important than these labels is simply being able to explain what is my what is your text doing there in its context how does it grow out of what comes before how does it relate to and emerge and merge into what comes after it and again at times this can be the most important I think a facet of of interpreting biblical text and sometimes sometimes we will misunderstand the text or at least not understand it clearly until we understand how it fits within the broader context a very simple example that that many others have pointed to as well but it's it's an easy one and kind of an easy entry point into thinking about context is the example from Philippians chapter 4 and verse 13 that as I have you've probably heard quoted in a variety of different ways and chapter 4 verse 13 Paul says I can do everything through him who gives me strength depending on your translation and so we take this text and we utilize it for justification for various things I can I can take an exam that seems to be looming large and is too difficult and I don't feel prepared for because I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me I can get along with difficult family members or relatives or friends because I can do all things through Christ so we usually this is applied to areas in our lives a variety of areas that that we find difficult but we can rely on Christ's strength to help us to overcome these obstacles or accomplish these tasks that appear possible and I don't want to deny that that's indeed true but I want to ask what does this verse how does Paul seem to be using it what might how does it contribute to the argument how does it relate to what comes before it particularly and after it notice chapter 4 verse 13 if you back up and I'll start with verse 10 Paul says I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at least you have renewed your concern for me indeed you have been concerned but you had no opportunity to show it I am not saying this because I am in need so he's responding to the concern of the Philippians and he says I'm saying this not because I have need not because I want

you to give me something and he says for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances I know what it is like to be in need I know what it is like to have plenty I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well-fed or hungry whether living in plenty or in want here's the secret of being content in every situation whether you're you're hungry and in need and struggling to get by or whether you have much it's I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me chapter 4 verse 13 is referring to Paul's ability Christ enabling him to be content in any circumstance whether he has abundance or whether he's struggling to to survive and eke out an existence so sometimes your ability to place a text in its context will have a profound effect on how you understand the text and even help to avoid misunderstanding let me give you a couple of examples I'll start with us a couple from the Old Testament of how understanding the the context or how the argument develops and how that might make a difference in understanding the biblical text the first example I want to take in the utilizing the Old Testament comes from narrative and that is the book of Exodus and particularly Exodus chapter Exodus chapter 18 which is the story of Jethro Moses father-in-law visiting him and Jethro comes to Moses and he sees Moses as the kind of leader of the Israelite nation one of his responsibilities is to function as a judge and so Jethro comes to visit Moses and he sees him acting as a judge and Moses is according to Jethro Moses is back basically wearing himself out and tiring himself out because he's trying to handle all everyone's bringing these cases large and small significant and insignificant to Moses to settle and decide he's kind of functioning as the judge and so Jethro sees this and observes this and basically concludes this really isn't good Moses you are wearing yourself out by trying to do too much you're taking all these cases large and small and settling them and you can't do this you can't do it well so Jethro's solution is you need to delegate the minor cases to other qualified judges and you just take the big important ones and so that's what Moses does and the end of chapter 18 then brings that to a conclusion now the

question is why this story in exodus there have been a number of suggestions and this story could be doing a number of things i don't want to say that what i'm about to say is the only thing it's doing but one of the more one of the more common suggestions historically some from the historical critical approach have just seen this story in exodus 18 as describing and explaining the origins of israelites judicial system this is how it came about so kind of a story telling or describing where the judicial system in israel's history emerged at least in more popular literature a very common explanation is chapter 18 of exodus tells us or is an account of the importance of delegating responsibility so chapter 18 basically instructs christians that we should not try to do things on our own and it's instruction as to how to delegate authority and delegate responsibility in the business world or in our other endeavors or even in church situations and ministry contexts or organizations so this is about delegating responsibility and we find in the instructions as to why and how to do that however to me i think the key to understanding this story in chapter 18 is to place it within again its broader context to ask how it relates to what comes before and how it fits into the narrative in the context that has gone on one thing you'll notice is again ignoring chapter and verse divisions which are very can be very important we said before chapter and verse divisions are not there to indicate breaks or or sections they're they're basically there just to help us all get to the right place in a text so ignoring chapter 18 what is interesting is chapter 18 the story of moses and jethro and moses getting worn out by all these cases and jethro having to tell them don't don't do that give the lesser cases of someone else and take the main ones for yourself this comes on right after on the tail end of a story that recounts israel's battle with the amalekites in the end of chapter 17 and if you remember that story is interesting too because israel engages in a rather interesting military strategy moses is standing up on the mountain and watching this battle and as long as he keeps his arms up his hands up in the air israel wins but you have this interesting language of moses is tired out he gets worn out

and tired and when his arms drop israel starts to lose when he gets them back up they win but he can't hold them up and so he has to have two individuals basically prop his arms up and hold them up so that israel is victorious over the amalekites now this is kind of interesting you actually have these two stories then where moses is portrayed as very human and very weak he he's too tight he he can't handle the cases all the the uh judicial cases in chapter 18 they're wearing him out he he can't do it in chapter 17 the battle of the amalekites he can't even hold his hands out it wears him out and he has to have someone help him and hold his arms up so you you have this interesting picture of moses being worn out and tired out and being weak he can't do it uh this interestingly though when you place it in even its more broad con broader context later on in chapter 20 moses is the one that's going to ascend on mount sinai and bring the law down in the context of the flashing and the thunder and lightning and etc etc and even before that if you go back all before that this comes in as part of the story of israel that begins with moses delivering israel out of egypt so he's the one who gathers them and rallies them out of egypt he uh parts the red sea by lifting his staff he he uh provides supernaturally he provides provision for them he provides water in the rock etc etc for the israelites and so it's interesting that moses is portrayed in almost supernatural terms throughout uh throughout the narrative of exodus starting with the deliverance of israel through the red sea through the wilderness and all the ways that moses is an instrument of supernatural provision his staff seems almost to have supernatural qualities to it but now in in chapter 18 as well as this battle of the with the amalekites in chapter 17 moses is portrayed as this this weak person who gets worn out and he can't do it and the question is why would the author portray moses in these terms when when he's almost been a superhero uh in fact one commentary observed that up until this point moses has been portrayed in supernatural terms now he's portrayed as a weak uh and uh as as a very human individual that he can't even hold his arms up so that they they win the battle he can't handle all these cases it's wearing him

out and uh how do we understand this story in chapter 18 in light of this broader context uh in the next session i want to return back to this story and we'll try to answer that question how does chapter set 18 of exodus this portrayal of moses and you know very portrayed as a very weak human being how does this function within the broader context of exodus and how does that make a difference in the way we read it.

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