

## **Effective Bible Study: Lesson 5**

### **Ingesting the Text and Establishing a Main Theme**

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Once we have asked a lot of questions and established the Occasion and Purpose of a text, we want to draw closer to establishing the main theme of a text. This is all about zeroing in on one major issue or situation to which the text is pointing. As Charles Speer put it, "The main theme is the one main theological truth that, if accepted by the recipients, will correct whatever the problem may happen to be." So, as we begin this lesson, let's be clear on how this breaks down.

Occasion – this establishes the problem or issue. This is what you have been reading the text, asking the questions and digging around for. (e.g. Paul keeps writing about this fill-in-the-blank issue in this text.)

Purpose – this is all about correcting the problem. How to go about working on the issue. (i.e. The way Paul states this fill-in-the-blank appears to be the way the problem is fixed.)

Once you get to that, you are closer to establishing a main theme. The main theme would say, "This book is about this," or "This bulky passage is saying this." It's the summary. The basis. The big KA-POW! That's what you are trying to get to.

Understand that these exercises will help you ingest the Bible. Those of you who have stuck with this have likely noticed this requires no small work. These assignments haven't exactly been light. This one is no exception. One of the things that can help you come to that conclusion is a practice known as "paragraphing." That's when you break down a book or a text and put it back together the way you see it. So, for example, let's say we were to do the big book of Romans. It has 16 chapters. One might break it down like this (verrrry roughly):

1:1-17 – Introduction

1:18-3:23 – Humans are lost without Christ

3:24-4:25 – All are saved through faith in Christ

Chpts 5-8 – The saved need to be sanctified (or made holy)

Chpts 9-11 – God wants the Jews saved

Chpts 12-15 – Loving and serving others so they can be saved by Christ

Chpt 16 – Closing Remarks

Main theme of Romans – God calls people saved through faith in Christ, not the Law.

That is what you'll do this time with the book of Jude, BUT... this time you will use two other versions/translations than you are normally accustomed to. We do not have time, nor will much time be taken to argue over the validity/accuracy of various English translations. We'll leave those discussions to people who want to argue over words. The truth is, we all have our preferred version, or the version we were raised with, or the version the preacher insisted was the correct version. Fact check: If you really want to know exactly what the Bible says,

REALLY?! You need to learn Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Until then, let us talk about how awesome it is, and praise God, to have a Bible in English, especially modern English. A really great way to study the Bible, and thanks to the internet we have all of this at our fingertips, is to read a text from at least one version out of each of the three various categories of English translations. We are not going into detail what makes the difference between the various translations of Scripture. There are three general philosophies of Bible translation: formal equivalence, functional equivalence, and optimal equivalence. It's an interesting study but one we won't cover here.

But a great way to get the feeling for a text is to look at how the various English translations split it up and phrase it. For this exercise, you are going to read at least two other English versions of the text, other than what you are currently reading from. And you need to make sure you read one from each of these three different categories:

Literal – YLT, ASV, NASB, AMP, KJV(?)

Paraphrased – NIV, NLT, ESV, NKJV

Super-Paraphrased – MSG, NCV, NLV, GNT

\* If you go to [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com), you will have access to all those versions and more (and you will be able to learn the above abbreviations). That website also has a "settings" feature on every page which allows you to view the text without headings, verses, footnotes, cross references, etc. This can be accessed by clicking the image of the "cog" in the upper right, above the text. It will not, however, remove paragraph breaks.

Now, having gotten a good idea of the text's Occasion and Purpose from having already applied lessons 2 and 4 to Jude, this assignment is where you start breaking up the text for its main theme. When these texts were originally written, there were no chapter or verse breaks. Just one long text. Take the version you have been reading from and write out the text completely without any paragraphs or verse breaks. In other words, write it out as one long text (or copy and paste the text and get rid of the verses and paragraphs). Once you have done that, read it again and this time, you put the verses and paragraph breaks where you think they belong.

Take a sheet of paper and turn it sideways. I have posted a photo of "Example-1A" in the comments section below \*NOTE\* the example has only five rows. Some books and texts may require more or less than 5, depending on the text. You may identify 3 to 10 in Jude. Break the text down as shown in the paper. Now make notes in the first column noting how you would break it down. ("vv." is short for "verses"). If you have questions about the breakdown, see the "Romans" example above. You will likely notice an introduction and conclusion, but how does the middle break up? After you have broken the text up into various parts make notes of the various parts AND summarize each part with a few words. The main theme of each small text.

After that, make notes of where your preferred English version makes the breaks and they may be similar to others. (It might be the same as yours or it might be different).

Now, if you are already reading from one of the versions listed above, choose one from each of the other two categories and read those versions of Jude. If your version isn't listed above, try to figure out what category your version might fall into, then proceed to choose one version from each of the other two categories. Make notes in the other two columns (labeled Version 2 & 3) of how the other two versions break up the text. Where do they put separate headings? Where do they start a new paragraph? Make notes of those two.

Finally, in the last column, after observing, how the other versions break up the text AND how they say it, adjust for what you think the final breakdown should be. It might actually be different than what you observed the first time you started this exercise. When you have finished your notes, look them over. Think about it, meditate and pray about it and write out what you think is the main overlying theme of the book of Jude. If you were to summarize it in just one statement, how would you summarize it?