

Grace OPC High School Sunday Class Teaching Notes			
Year:	1 of 4		Date: Week 6
Quarter:	2 of 4	Bible Study/Survey	
Lesson Title:	Bible Helps, Dictionaries, Atlases		
Lesson Purpose:	To consider more of the helps that are available to us for Bible Study and to understand how to use them, their strengths and weaknesses.		

## 1. Introduction

Last week we looked at concordances and language tools – lexicons, interlinear Bibles, Bible software. We came to the following conclusions:

- Concordances come in three major types: general, Englishman's, and topical.
- General concordances allow us to look up verses quickly and to do English language word studies.
- Englishman's concordances allow us to do original language word studies without needing to know the original languages.
- Topical concordances allow the student to study topics in the scriptures and do topical studies.
- Language tools allow the student some access to deeper meanings of Greek and Hebrew words.
- Special care must be taken in using original language tools as a lack of knowledge of Greek and Hebrew grammar and usage can hinder the student in finding the correct meaning of a word for a text.

This week we will look at other helps that are available to us. Some we find in our Bibles themselves, and we will also look at Dictionaries and Atlases.

## 2. Bible Helps

Often the last place we read in our Bibles is the Introduction and the prefatory remarks – yet these usually explain to us helps that the publishers built into the text to assist us with our understanding. Here are some typical examples:

### 2.1. *Italicized Text*

Note the italicized words in the following passage:

**Romans 1:9** For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son, is my witness *as to how unceasingly I make mention of you*, (NASB)

What do the italics mean? At the front of the Bible it says: “Italics are used in the text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek but implied by it.” So we need to be careful not to base an argument on an italicized word in a Bible verse! We would not pick the verse above, for example, to support or enhance an argument on the primacy of preaching.

### 2.2. *God, GOD, Lord or LORD?*

We need to pay attention to whether the word Lord is capitalized or not, especially in the Old Testament. Several Bibles use this technique to indicate a difference in the original language – but what is that difference? Here is what the introductory notes to the NASB say:

In the Scriptures, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for the Deity is God, a translation of the original Elohim. One of the titles for God is Lord, a translation of Adonai. There is yet another name which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH (Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 42:8). This name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it has been consistently translated LORD. The only exception to this translation of YHWH is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, Adonai. In that case it is regularly translated GOD in order to avoid confusion.

It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh, however no complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation.

See the following example:

**Psalms 110:1** The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” **2** The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” **3** Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You *as the dew*. **4** The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.” **5** The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. **6** He

will judge among the nations, He will fill *them* with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. 7  
He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up *His* head.

### 2.3. *Alternate Readings*

In some places in the Bible, it is possible to render the Greek or the Hebrew in more than one way. Often this is because a literal rendering would seem strange in the English Language. In these cases, the translators often choose the rendering they believe to best represent the intention of the author but give the literal or alternate reading in the margin. As the NASB introduction says:

In addition to the more literal renderings, notations have been made to include alternate translations, reading of variant manuscripts, and explanatory equivalents of the text. These notations have been used specifically to assist the reader in comprehending the terms used by the original author.

There are several alternative readings in Psalm 110:3:

**Psalm 110:3** Your people will volunteer freely [literally, will be freewill offerings] in the day of Your power [or, army]; In holy array [or, the splendor of holiness], from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew [or, The dew of Your youth is Yours].

### 2.4. *Small Capitals*

The NASB uses small capitals to help the reader identify an Old Testament quote in the NT:

**Romans 1:17** For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Usually a side note will tell you where the passage comes from in the Old Testament

### 2.5. *Poetry*

Some Bibles (e.g. NIV, NASB) use special formatting of the text to indicate that the original is in poetic form rather than narrative:

Exodus 15:20-21:

20 Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing.

21 Miriam answered them,  
"Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;  
The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea." (NASB)

### 2.6. *Cross-References*

Many Bibles will contain cross-references to given verses. These can be helpful in tracing out a line of thought in Scripture and in finding related verses. However, the cross-references are not inspired – they are produced by someone who has decided which verses are inter-related!

## 3. Bible Dictionaries

These are useful sources of information on a whole variety of topics, from geography to the customs of Bible times, from theology to archaeology. They can provide us with some very useful insights into the Scriptures we are studying. Like other helps, of course, they carry with them the particular leanings of their authors or editors and we must bear this in mind as we use them so that we do not get led astray. As an example, here is the entry for Laodicea in the New Bible Dictionary:

**LAODICEA.** A city of SW Phrygia, in the Roman province of Asia, in the W of what is now Asiatic Turkey. It was founded by the Seleucid Antiochus II in the 3rd century BC, and called after his wife Laodice. It lay in the fertile valley of the Lycus (a tributary of the Maeander), close to \*HIERAPOLIS and \*COLOSSAE, and was distinguished by the epithet 'on Lycus' from several other cities of the name. It was at a very important cross-road: the main road across Asia Minor ran W to the ports of \*MILETUS and \*EPHESUS about 160 km away and E by an easy incline on to the central plateau and thence towards Syria; and another road ran N to \*PERGAMUM and S to the coast at \*ATTALIA.

This strategic position made Laodicea an extremely prosperous commercial centre, especially under Roman rule. When destroyed by a disastrous earthquake in AD 60 (Tacitus, *Ann.* 14. 27) it could afford to dispense with aid from Nero. It was an important centre of banking and exchange (*cf.* Cicero, *ad Fam.* 3. 5. 4, *etc.*). Its distinctive products included garments of glossy black wool (Strabo, *Geog.* 12. 8. 16 [578]), and it was a medical centre noted for ophthalmology. The site had one disadvantage: being determined by the road-system, it lacked a

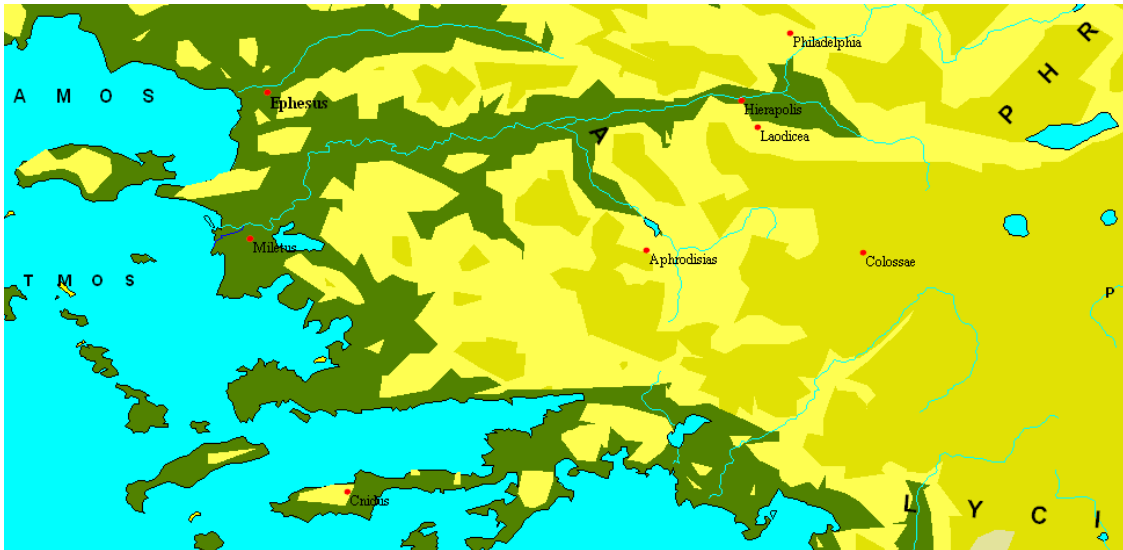
sufficient and permanent supply of good water. Water was piped to the city from hot springs some distance S, and probably arrived lukewarm. The deposits still encrusting the remains testify to its warmth. The site of Laodicea was eventually abandoned, and the modern town (Denizli) grew up near the springs.

The gospel must have reached Laodicea at an early date, probably while Paul was living at Ephesus (Acts 19:10), and perhaps through Epaphras (Col. 4:12–13). Although Paul mentions the church there (Col. 2:1; 4:13–16), there is no record that he visited it. It is evident that the church maintained close connections with the Christians in Hierapolis and Colossae. The 'letter from Laodicea' (Col. 4:16) is often thought to have been a copy of our Ephesians which had been received in Laodicea.

The last of the Letters to 'the seven churches of Asia' (Rev. 3:14–22) was addressed to Laodicea. Its imagery owes relatively little to the OT, but contains pointed allusions to the character and circumstances of the city. For all its wealth, it could produce neither the healing power of hot water, like its neighbour Hierapolis, nor the refreshing power of cold water to be found at Colossae, but merely lukewarm water, useful only as an emetic. The church was charged with a similar uselessness: it was self-sufficient, rather than half-hearted. Like the city, it thought it had 'need of nothing'. In fact it was spiritually poor, naked and blind, and needed 'gold', 'white garments' and 'eyesalve' more effective than its bankers, clothiers and doctors could supply. Like citizens inhospitable to a traveller who offers them priceless goods, the Laodiceans had closed their doors and left their real Provider outside. Christ turns in loving appeal to the individual (v. 20).

#### 4. Atlases

Atlases can be very helpful to us in understanding the geography of a region, the street plan of a city and so on. Most of us have maps in our Bibles that can help us track, (for example) the various missionary journeys of Paul, or to see where Moab was associated in relation to Israel. Here is a map showing Ephesus, Heirapolis, Laodicea and Colossae:



Consider this map and the following passages, which Paul is thought to have written from his house-arrest in Rome;

**Ephesians 6:21** But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

**Colossians 4:7** As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. **8** For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; **9** and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

**Colossians 4:17** Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

**2 Timothy 4:12** But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

**Philemon 1:1** Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, **2** and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

**Philemon 1:10** I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, **11** who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. **12** I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

Piecing these passages together, can you construct a likely series of events and explain what was going on?

- ❑ We know Paul was under arrest in Rome.
- ❑ We know Onesimus, the runaway slave, was the property of Philemon
- ❑ We know he was converted under Paul's ministry in Rome
- ❑ We know Tychicus visited Ephesus and Colossae to bring the people up to date with Paul's news
- ❑ We know that Onesimus accompanied Tychicus on a journey to Colossae
- ❑ We know that Archippus is mentioned in the letter to Colossae and in that to Philemon, and that Philemon had a church meeting in his home.

So it is reasonable to assume that Paul wrote the letters to Ephesus, Colossae and Philemon at the same time and that he entrusted Tychicus and Onesimus to deliver the letters to the churches and update them with his news. At the same time, Onesimus was returned to his master Philemon with a personal letter to him from Paul, asking for his acquittal of any wrongdoing from his former life.

Trace out the journey of Tychicus and Onesimus on the map – see if this explanation seems feasible.

## **5. Conclusions**

- ❑ Our Bibles often contain some very helpful tools for understanding the passages if we understand them and make use of them
- ❑ Dictionaries can also give us some very useful information to understand Bible places, events, times and teachings better but we need to be alert for the leanings of the authors and/or editors
- ❑ Likewise Atlases and maps can provide extremely valuable insights into the geography and history of Bible places and Bible events.