

# Lesson 12 | May 21, 2023

## God's Word Cites Outside Sources

**Study Text:** Joshua 10:6–14; 2 Samuel 1:17–27; Acts 17:16–32; Titus 1:7–14; Jude 11–16

**Central Truth:** Elements of truth from outside sources are found in the Bible to undergird Scripture and assist in engaging culture.

### Key Verse: Acts 17:28

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (KJV).

"For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize that the biblical authors used extrabiblical sources in their writings.
- Students will appreciate that extra-biblical sources can contribute toward understanding and engaging Scripture.
- Students will attempt to use extrabiblical sources in their study and communication of Scripture.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Perhaps you recall the arduous task of writing research papers during your high school and college years. You were probably required to cite a certain number of sources and provide documentation about where the information came from. The writers of the Bible also cited outside sources for a variety of reasons. These citations connect the biblical accounts with other historical writings. Identifying these connected writings can help us better understand the authors' methods and intended message.

### Opening Activity—Outside Connections

*Ask. What are a few books, movies, or stories that illustrate or support biblical themes or truths? How?*

**Say:** Much like we tried to do in compiling this list, the biblical authors and speakers thought carefully how they could most effectively communicate God's truth in their cultural contexts. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Biblical authors and speakers, conveying God's Word under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, occasionally used sources outside the Scriptures to engage their audiences and communicate truth. At times they were supporting their historical accounts by noting other historical records. Other times they cited recognizable poetry or sayings to create a point of connection with their audience. They were not diluting or compromising God's message or conforming it to the culture. Instead, they used these sources to effectively communicate a message. Studying how they used these extrabiblical sources can inform the way we use similar tools to engage in dialogue with the world and proclaim the gospel.

## **Part 1—Israel’s Narrative Reinforced with History**

### **The Book of Jashar**

Joshua 10:6–14

*Say:* The Book of Joshua records an astonishing account of God’s assistance to Israel in battle. When Joshua needed extra daylight hours to complete the victory against the Amorites, he addressed the Lord in a prayer which stopped the sun and moon in their tracks. The author cites an additional source supporting his account: “Is this event not recorded in The Book of Jashar ?” (verse 13, NLT). For those who were familiar with this book, the reference likely instilled confidence in the veracity of the miracle. For us today, noting it during our study further cements the accuracy and trustworthiness of the biblical account. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jews and Christians alike would love to be able to read more in The Book of Jashar, but sadly, it was not preserved. It is mentioned one other time in the Bible, in a passage we will look at in the next section. Both biblical citations from this otherwise unknown literary work are poetic in style and deal with mighty feats in Israel’s battles. Perhaps that was the nature of the entire book, though that cannot be known for certain.

Citing an outside reference is not unusual in Scripture. Extra-biblical sources are referenced in both the New and Old Testaments. For example, the author of Esther cites The Book of the History of the Kings of Media and Persia (Esther 10:2, NLT). Luke explicitly acknowledges his research for writing his Gospel, which probably involved conducting interviews and using earlier written accounts (like the Gospel of Mark). “Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account” (Luke 1:1–3, NLT).

#### **Resource Packet Item 1: Outside Sources Cite God’s Word**

Distribute the information sheet and briefly comment on the way historical works validate the people and events recorded in Scripture.

#### *Discuss*

? Had you ever thought about the biblical writers or speakers doing research or using outside sources as they wrote God’s Word under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

? What significance might the biblical authors’ usage of sources have for the way we study and communicate biblical truth?

### **The Song of the Bow**

2 Samuel 1:17–27

**Say:** The next biblical passage included in The Book of Jashar is a beautiful and moving poem celebrating the military prowess and character of Saul and his son Jonathan upon the occasion of their deaths in battle. David composed the poem, and the author of 2 Samuel includes it in his historical account. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A diligent student of Scripture can glean interesting perspective by noting times like this when the writers quote other texts. These quotes can reveal additional engaging information about the biblical authors, characters, and content. In this instance, the notation that the poem was included in Jashar reveals that King David's writings were captured outside the Psalms. Often our mental images of biblical characters are limited to what God's Word reveals. But thinking through instances like this one can bring us steps closer to understanding the lives of the great men and women we study.

Poetry has made important cultural contributions in societies for time immemorial. The Psalms, the Song of Solomon, written oracles of Israel's prophets, and other biblical books use poetry to communicate God's truth. While we are certain God by His Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors, we do not know exactly how He did so. But we can observe that God worked through the languages, literary forms, and customs of the ancient societies in and around Israel.

God cared so much about communicating His Word effectively that He ensured it was well-written and understandable, using and adapting various literary conventions to His purposes. For example, while the Gospels are unique in recording the life of God's one and only Son, they show some similarity to Greek bioi (lives, from which we derive our term biography). Paul masterfully adapts the Greco-Roman letter-writing conventions in his powerful Epistles to Christian communities. And John was not creating a new literary style in penning Revelation (in Greek, Apokalypsis) but drew upon the Old Testament apocalyptic genre to communicate effectively to his original readers in the seven churches of Asia Minor. His imagery, primarily from the Old Testament, at times even draws upon ancient symbols, used by the Spirit to communicate God's message.

### ***Discuss***

? What makes song or poetry such a powerful form of communication?

? How has God's message and love been communicated most effectively to you?

## **Part 2—Paul Engages Cultural Views of God**

### **The Altar to the Unknown God**

Acts 17:16–26

**Say:** Just as God was concerned to communicate His message effectively, so was the missionary-minded apostle Paul. One outstanding example is his address to the Athenians in Acts 17. After his visit among the Bereans, Paul traveled to the historic cultural center of Greece and preached Christ at Athens. He quoted an inscription from a pagan statue to transition from his audience's errant beliefs to the truth. We can learn a great deal by carefully considering how Paul's use of a

non-biblical source to share the gospel might work in a modern context. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul's personal background uniquely prepared him to be the leading apostle to the Greek world. His home city of Tarsus was a multicultural center, and his family had somehow achieved highly desirable Roman citizenship. Scholars debate whether Paul had received a classical Greco-Roman education in addition to his Hebrew education in the Pharisaic tradition or had simply picked up his rhetorical skills in less formal cultural interactions. Either way, he was a persuasive communicator in the Greco-Roman context. He was fully prepared to engage the debating society in Athens and other Greek cities, where he joined in the marketplace discussions and proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Athens, Paul's message intrigued the philosophers so much that they arranged for him to speak at the Areopagus. (This word, meaning "hill of Ares," is used both for a prominent hill and the prominent council that held its meetings there.) In his opening words, Paul immediately connected the gospel with the city's religious heritage: "THE UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23, KJV) they observantly worshipped was the very God he could make known to them! Paul proceeded to introduce them to the one God who was so different from and vastly superior to other gods.

### ***Discuss***

? In what ways might your background uniquely prepare you to share Christ in a particular setting?

? Paul used points of connection in sharing the gospel. How might you do this at your jobsite or neighborhood this week?

## **The Poet's Description of God**

Acts 17:27–32

**Say:** Paul's address in Athens is a model of contextualizing the gospel: expressing it in language and framing it amid ideas that speak to a specific culture. It should not be surprising that God would go to such lengths. The ultimate contextualization is the Incarnation. How could finite human beings hope to comprehend the infinite God without Him coming in the flesh and dwelling among us? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul followed the leading and heart of God in expressing the good news of Jesus in terms with which Athenian philosophers could connect. He even quoted from their own poets to make his point. The line "we are his offspring" (Acts 17:28, NLT) comes from a Stoic poet named Aratus three hundred years earlier, who may himself have been quoting another Stoic philosopher, Cleanthes (330–230 BC). Paul did not endorse the Stoic quotation but used it to support his own point—that the Living God desires us, the creation of His hands, to seek Him.

How else did Paul seek to engage these philosophers? He clearly framed sin that gives offense to God as "ignorance" (verse 30). The Greek word he used would have resonated with these lovers of wisdom. This verse hearkens back to the beginning of Paul's address, where the unknown god

is ignorantly worshipped. It is from such ignorance that Paul called on the Athenians to repent (verse 30). His association of ignorance with idolatry (verse 29) would also make sense to Stoic philosophers, who disdained those in their own culture who thought of the gods in such material terms. They conceived of god as a life principle or force in nature, not the personal, redeeming God who cares for and desires relationship with humanity He created.

Paul clearly worked to build bridges and share the gospel in a way his audience could grasp, but he never compromised the truth. He may have anticipated that the preaching of the Resurrection would turn some of their interest to scorn. These Greek philosophers would have appreciated an argument for the immortality of the soul, but a bodily resurrection would not have appealed to them. Paul did not change his message to make it more acceptable to his hearers. Solid contextualization preserves truth while expressing it in terms relating to the audience.

### ***Discuss***

? Have you ever felt that gospel truth was being compromised in some way in an attempt to engage the culture? If so, what could have been done better?

? What are some examples of non-biblical knowledge that you could use to point others to Jesus?

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Contextualizing the Message**

Distribute the case study and divide the class into two or more small groups, depending on the size of the class. Ask half the class to discuss the first scenario while the other half discusses the second. Then ask them to share their responses.

## **Part 3—Scripture Cites Extra-Biblical Sources**

### **A Cretan Prophet’s Testimony**

Titus 1:7–14

**Say:** We have seen a few examples of Scripture citing extra-biblical sources to communicate God’s truth. But in this letter to Titus, Paul quoted the words of a prophet from Crete who described his people in markedly unflattering terms. By digging more deeply into quotes like this one, students of the Bible can frame them properly and reveal the authors’ true intent. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had left Titus on Crete, Greece’s largest island, with a commission. He was to appoint elders among the churches, with a view toward ensuring sound doctrine. Like Timothy in Ephesus, Titus needed to combat rampant heresy, and one of the ways Paul guided him in this task was to set forth important standards to which church leaders should be held. Reading through Paul’s description in Titus 1:7–9, we recognize qualities still needed and honored in church leadership today.

In contrast to godly leaders, Paul next described false teachers who were causing major problems among the believing communities on Crete. Everything he said about their behavior and character was negative. The well-known quote from the Cretan “prophet” Epimenides of Knossos—“The people of Crete are all liars, cruel animals, and lazy gluttons” (verse 12, NLT)—fits the context. Clearly Paul would not characterize every Cretan citizen in this way, and Titus

and others reading the letter would have understood that. After all, the elders with such stellar characteristics whom Titus would appoint (verse 5) were also from Crete. But Paul used the popular saying to illustrate the heretics' false, harmful, and self-interested ways. Carefully noting these words as an extra-biblical quotation better frames Paul's use of them.

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Popular Sayings**

Distribute the worksheet, and let students work in small groups or have the entire class share popular sayings and discuss their significance.

#### ***Discuss***

? How could failing to recognize the nature of this quote lead to a misunderstanding of Paul's message?

? What larger biblical context would keep us from using the quotation in Titus 1:12 as a license to speak negatively about others?

## **An Intertestamental Jewish Prophecy**

Jude 11–16

**Say:** In verses 14–15 of Jude's letter, he uses an extra-biblical source, The Book of Enoch, seeming to cite it authoritatively. This has raised questions as to whether Jude considered it as having scriptural authority or if he merely cited it as a speaker might quote from a popular book, knowing the audience would find it familiar. The quotation is quite matter-of-fact; we may not be able to resolve with certainty the debate about what Jude himself actually thought, but he does describe it as prophetically spoken. Jude's usage gives a cautionary example for us as we study these extra-biblical quotes. We are wise not to assign authority to an entire work just because a biblical writer has quoted it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Between the writing of the Old and New Testaments, many popular Jewish religious texts were written. Like the Old Testament, the literary styles of these books included wisdom literature, poetry, prophetic oracles, and narrative. While never given canonical status, they were widely read and appreciated among various Jewish and early Christian groups. First Enoch, from which Jude quotes, is one such work. Likely written between the third and first centuries before Christ, the book claims to contain prophecies of the Old Testament character Enoch, who "walked with God: and he was not" (Genesis 5:24, KJV; see also Hebrews 11:5).

The quotation Jude selected is well suited to emphasize God's certain judgment of the wicked—a judgment awaiting false teachers who spread ungodly doctrine and immorality among the flock of God as described in verses 11–13 and 16. Jude's point is true and does not depend upon the divine authority of the citation that supports and illustrates it. His intention was to teach God's judgment of the wicked, not the authority of a literary work, and he engaged his audience effectively by using this quote.

#### ***Discuss***

? Does the distinction between a biblical author's thoughts about a certain topic and what he intends to teach make a difference? Which is authoritative for us?



? How might it be harmful to cite Christian authors today in a way that makes their words appear to be equal with Scripture?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the biblical authors drew upon elements of truth from outside sources to undergird Scripture and assist in engaging culture. There is much to be learned by recognizing and studying their methods of doing so. Christians can use what has been gleaned from these examples to communicate the good news of Jesus to the world and can likewise use extra-biblical sources as tools for both studying and sharing the Word of God. This is commensurate with the biblical model and can be done well without any dilution of the message. Christians belong to, honor, and bear witness to God who communicates with us and reveals himself definitively and clearly in Christ: “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (Hebrews 1:1–2, NLT).

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Consider how you might use extra-biblical resources and tools to enhance your understanding and grasp of God’s Word.
- Ask God if He desires to lead you into a particular avenue of ministry for which you may be uniquely prepared.
- Use a popular book or TV show to start a conversation with a friend or neighbor about God.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Providence Guides As We Discern.  
Esther 4:5–14

Tuesday:

Our Work Reflects God’s Work.  
Ecclesiastes 3:9–15

Wednesday:

Nebuchadnezzar Decrees God’s Supremacy.  
Daniel 3:24–30

Thursday:

Creation Submits to Jesus Christ.  
Mark 4:34–41

Friday:

Creation Testifies of God.  
Romans 1:14–20

Saturday:

Marriage Reflects Christ with Us.  
Ephesians 5:25–32