

Biblical Hermeneutics

Dr. Robert Stein



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Because Your Spiritual Growth Matters

Biblical Hermeneutics
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ISBN: 9781087362519

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Printed in the United States of America

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/biblicalhermeneutics>

Overview

Title: Biblical Hermeneutics

Speaker: Dr. Robert Stein, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Dr. Robert Stein covers the history of the English Bible and then moves into the rules for interpreting the biblical text, including the role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process. He then spends considerable time moving through the different genres of literature (e.g., proverbs, poetry, parables, narrative).

GOALS

1. Establish a working vocabulary for interpreting scripture
2. Familiarity with the various genres of scripture and their respective rules for interpretations
3. Understanding of authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and the formation of the cannon

REQUIREMENTS

1. 30 sessions
2. 2 hours per week (lesson and discussion)

PREREQUISITES

None

FORMAT

Audio

BiblicalTraining.org

BiblicalTraining.org is not-for-profit ministry that gives all people access to a world-class Christian education at no cost. Our classes range from new believers to biblical literacy (“Foundations”), deeper Bible study (“Academy”), and seminary-level training (“Institute”).

We are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit and rely solely on the donations of our users. All donations are tax deductible according to the current US tax codes.

DISTINCTIVES

World class. All Bible classes are taught by world-class professors from major seminaries.

Holistic. We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

Configurable. Ministries can use BT lectures as well as their own to design their educational program.

Accessible. BiblicalTraining is a web-based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

Community-based. We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

Broadly evangelical. Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

Partners. We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.

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Your Speaker

Dr. Robert Stein taught for nearly thirty years at Bethel Seminary. Dr. Stein is a senior professor of New Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky. Twenty years ago, Robert was elected with tenure to the faculty and to the Mildred and Ernest Hogan Chair of New Testament at SBTS. He is a world-recognized scholar of the Synoptic Gospels and a widely published author of books and journal articles concerning hermeneutical issues and the gospels.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary

STM, Andover Newton Theological School

B.D., Fuller Theological Seminary

Student's Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Listen or watch the lesson. The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

Take notes. This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

Questions. Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.

Meeting. Meet together with your group.

MEETING TOGETHER

While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study.

A group provides encouragement to finish the class.

Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs.

Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.

Mentor's Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

Your role is to facilitate. This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

Preparation. Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, "What is the Lord teaching you this week?"

Creativity. What works to help one person understand may not help another. So listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

Correct error. This is difficult. If someone says something that isn't right, you don't want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. So look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person's comment was incorrect.

Focus. Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

Lead the discussion. People don't want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

Silence. Don't be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought-provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

Discipleship. Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus' Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.

Men and women. Be aware that men and women tend to learn differently. Don't ask the men to become women in how they answer.

Privacy. All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group unless otherwise specified.

Goal. The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is transformation. Don't be content with people getting the "right" answers. The Pharisees got the "right" answer, and many of them never made it to heaven (Matt 5:20).

Relationships. Share everyone's name, email and phone number so people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week using Slack or WhatsApp.

Finish well. Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

Prayer. Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don't do the quick "one-prayer-covers-all" approach. Manage the time so all of you can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.

1

Introduction

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

A. Overview of the Course

B. Recommended Reading

Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Revised Edition
by Williams W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L.
Hubbard, Jr.

*Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the
Rules* by Robert H. Stein

4. Discussion of the various genres found in the Bible and their respective rules of interpretation

QUESTIONS

1. What do you hope to learn from this class? What questions about biblical interpretation do you hope this class will answer?
2. What different genres of Biblical literature are you aware of? Why do you think it is important to be able to identify the genre of the text you are studying?
3. Why do you think it is important to be precise and consistent in defining the terms we use in discussing biblical interpretation?

2

Early Beginnings to the Present

I. THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

A. Anglo-Saxon dialect

The Anglo-Saxon dialect began in the 5th century as an amalgamation of languages. Sometimes referred to as Old English, it became the common dialect of England.

B. French influence

In the 11th century, William the Conqueror from France conquered England and thus brought a French influence which eventually became the English language.

II. EARLY TRANSLATIONS

The Latin Vulgate was the bible of the early church but most people in England couldn't read or write. Bible stories were learned through art; e.g. paintings, stained glass windows, traveling troubadours who told stories through songs.

A. John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe translated the 1st bible into the English language from the Latin Vulgate in 1382. He was a pre-Luther/Calvin reformer. This translation occurred before the printing press and was thus handwritten.

This translation led to criticism of the clergy as people began to read the Bible for the first time and recognize discrepancies in the character and practices of the religious leaders. In response, there was a “clamping down” on the use of translations in the common language. By 1414, it became a capital offense to be caught reading the Bible in the English language.

B. William Tyndale

In 1526, William Tyndale published the 1st Bible in English to be translated from Greek and Hebrew texts. It was printed in Germany due to opposition from Henry VIII in England. This was an excellent translation that served as a basis for most English translations that followed including the KJV. Tyndale was a Luther supporter and adopted Luther’s revised order of NT books.

Tyndale was kidnapped by followers of King Henry VIII and was burned at the stake outside of Brussels in 1536.

C. Miles Coverdale

Cloverdale was a disciple of Tyndale who printed the 1st Bible in the English language in completion. He was the 1st person to separate the Apocrypha from the rest of the OT. Previously, these books were intermingled with the OT books of the original Hebrew. The Cloverdale Bible was also the 1st Bible to use versification. Previous translations divided books by chapters, but not by verses.

D. Thomas Matthew (John Rogers)

John Rogers was another follower of Tyndale who published the Matthew Bible in 1537. He was also martyred after his true identity was determined.

E. Richard Taverner

The Taverner's Bible was published in 1539 with King Henry VIII's approval. This was largely a revision to the Matthew Bible.

King Henry VIII became supportive of the reformers due to his desire for divorce. By the time of his death, in 1545, England had become a predominately protestant society.

F. The Great Bible

Published in 1539, this Bible was named due to its size. It was the 1st authorized Bible (authorized by Henry VIII). This Bible sought to be more palatable to the Roman Catholic clergy by reverting back to the traditional ordering of the NT books.

G. The Geneva Bible

Published in Geneva, this bible was very Calvinist (as evidenced in the substantial marginal notes) and was the popular translation during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

H. The Bishop's Bible

The Bishop's Bible was authorized by the Church of England and published in 1568. It was the result of a rejection of the Geneva Bible by the Bishops in England.

I. The King James Version

In 1604, King James I ordered a new official translation without footnotes; to be assembled by England's top scholars. The KJV was published in 1611 and became one of the greatest translations in the English language, superseding all previous translations. Interesting note: almost 90% of this translation had Tyndale roots.

J. The Douay-Rheims Version

This version was a direct result of the Council of Trent. In an effort to satisfy English speaking Roman Catholics, it was derived from the Latin Vulgate rather than the original Hebrew/Greek texts. According to the Council of Trent, the Latin Vulgate was deemed to be the final authority. This is no longer the position of Roman Catholic scholars.

III. MODERN VERSIONS

Over the years, the number of new translations have increased dramatically. Existing translations are constantly being revised with minor updates, usually resulting in gradual and less dramatic changes.

QUESTIONS

1. In a time when only the religious elite had access to the Bible, what is the importance of translating the Bible into a language accessible to the masses?

2. What Bible translation do you use? Why?

3

Hermeneutical Issues Involved in Translation

I. THERE IS NO ONE TO ONE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LANGUAGES.

According to C.H. Dodd, the 1st axiom of translation: There is no such thing as an exact word equivalent when going from one language to another.

Different languages as well as different cultures pose problems for translators.

E.g. in Mat 1:18 Mary is said to be betrothed to Joseph. Later in verse 24, Mary is referred to as his wife. In that culture, an engagement was legally binding and required a divorce to break. Our culture has an entirely different understanding of an engagement.

II. A GOOD TRANSLATION SHOULD:

A. Be based on the best manuscripts.

Generally speaking, manuscripts dating closer to the original writing are preferred simply with respect to the likelihood of copy errors. Tyndale, and later translators for the Geneva and King James Bible, used a Greek New Testament published by Erasmus of Rotterdam in the 16th century. Erasmus used the best Greek manuscripts available at the time. Subsequently, thousands of Greek NT manuscripts, dating centuries earlier, have been discovered. Thus, modern translations have the advantage of using these.

B. Be based on the latest knowledge of language and culture.

E.g. biblical poetry wasn't recognized or understood until the 17th century.

C. Be accurate.

Liberties taken by translators can lead to inaccuracies. There are also examples where translations were carefully made but errors were introduced inadvertently in the printing.

D. Be understandable.

Some translations can be accurate in their formal equivalence of words, but the resulting sentences can be difficult to understand.

E. Be contemporary.

Language/ word meanings tend to evolve over time. This is especially true in modern times where word meanings can change over a relatively short time frame. This will result in the need of new or revised translations on a more frequent basis.

F. Be universal.

Some translations have targeted specific groups. This becomes problematic and lead to misinterpretations when other groups are exposed to it. Translation committees should be diversified to help minimize this issue.

G. Be dignified.

A translation should be accurate but avoid being unnecessarily harsh or crude.

H. Avoid a theological bias.

This is hard to do but, nevertheless, should be a goal in translation. Some translations are blatantly biased. E.g. The New World Translation is the official Bible for the Jehovah Witnesses. This translation goes to great lengths to rewrite or avoid references to the Deity of Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Does learning of the difficulty of translation increase or decrease your confidence in the text of your English bible? What questions does it raise for you?
2. Why might it be important to reference multiple translations in your study of the bible?

3. We are all beneficiaries of the careful and arduous task of translation, with many accurate and readable English translations. Are there individuals in your life that God is calling you to share his Word with? Are there translation efforts for other peoples and languages that God may be calling you to support?

4

Various Issues Involved with Translation

I. NEED FOR NEW TRANSLATIONS

No translation can ever be the final one, due to the evolving nature of language. Changes in word meaning occur even more frequently today than ever before.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “WITHOUT ERROR?”

Inerrancy pertains to what the original authors meant by their words. A translation is error-free to the extent that the translators faithfully reproduced what the original authors intended.

III. TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHY

A. Word-for-word

A word-for-word translation seeks to find the nearest English equivalent, on a word by word basis. The Tyndale Great Bible, the KJV, the RSV, and the NAS would all be considered word-for-word translations.

B. Thought-for-thought

In a thought-for-thought translation, the goal is to reproduce what the author was expressing rather than merely finding the closest word equivalent. Examples of thought-for-thought translations include the NIV and the Revised English Bible.

IV. TRANSLATION PREFERENCE

Thought-for-thought translations are preferable for reading through larger portions of Scripture, simply based on readability and understanding. However, for more detailed study (e.g. literary analysis and comparisons of the Gospels) a word-for word version is required.

V. COMPARISON OF RSV AND NRSV

A. The NRSV has done a good job re-phrasing verses that are no longer contemporary or simply structured poorly.

1. Example: Zechariah 3:3

2. "Thou" and "thines" were changed to "you" and "yours" in the NRSV.

However, the NRSV has perhaps gone too far in its effort to avoid sexist language. Luke's Gospel intentionally places male and female examples side by side in stories and parables. This effect has been lost in the NRSV.

VI. INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMITTEE TRANSLATIONS

Committee translations are more reliable just by the fact that a group can resist the preferences or mistakes of one individual.

VII. THE USE OF FOOTNOTES

Caution should be taken concerning footnotes, particularly in a study bible. Too much credence can be given to a comment simply because "it's in my Bible". It is good to remember that it is Scripture that is infallible and not someone's opinion on the meaning that happens to be included as a note at the bottom of the page.

VIII. COMPARISON OF GALATIANS 3:23-29

A careful comparison of this passage between the KJV, the NRSV, the NASB, the NIV, The REB, and the Living Bible; will reveal some theological differences. While none of these are severe enough to lead to heresy, the differences exist, nonetheless.

QUESTIONS

1. In describing inerrancy, Stein notes that the translation of the original language texts into English is not inerrant but what the Biblical authors meant by these words and the English to the extent that the English translation faithfully reproduces that, it is without error. Knowing this, the translators bear a burden in producing an English translation that correctly captures the authors words and intentions. How does this look different between word for word and thought for thought translations? How does translation approach effect the readers ability to decipher what the author meant?

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An Introduction to Hermeneutics- Part 1

I. ORIGIN OF THE WORD "HERMENEUTICS"

Hermeneutics is a transliteration of a Greek verb, hermeneu, which means "to interpret".

II. THREE COMPONENTS INVOLVED IN COMMUNICATION

A. The author (encoder)

B. A text (code)

C. A reader (decoder)

III. WHAT DETERMINES MEANING?

There are three theories:

A. The text gives meaning.

1. Semantic autonomy

In this viewpoint, the text itself is autonomous. The text has meaning apart from the author's intentions. In fact, the author is totally irrelevant.

2. Problem

The problem with this view is it fails to acknowledge that texts are inanimate objects. The abilities to think and reason are necessary to give meaning. Paper and ink certainly don't have that capacity. It is inaccurate to say, "The text means this", because the text itself can't mean anything.

B. The reader gives the meaning.

1. Dominant view of today

The more current view today is to say that the reader is the determiner of meaning. This is not to say that the reader deciphers or discovers the meaning; the reader actually gives meaning. With this viewpoint, it follows that there can be multiple meanings for the same text. The text functions much like an inkblot, with each person seeing something different.

2. Problem

If the Bible really has all these meanings, it really doesn't mean anything.

C. The author gives the meaning

The traditional approach to hermeneutics is to recognize that it is the original author who is the determiner of meaning. If there is a debate on meaning in one of Paul's letters, and Paul walked in the room; the debate would be settled. If you were trying to determine what Paul meant in a particular passage in Romans, you might look at what he has said on the same subject in Galatians. This is the common sense approach. The Bible should not be treated as some autonomous piece of art but rather, a form of communication.

1. Bible translation

In evaluating a translation, you should not consider how much you like the language of the text; rather you should ask how accurately the translators reflect the intended meaning of the author.

2. Law

A current debate today involves the Constitution. Should the Justices be free to determine meaning (reader approach) or should their jobs be restricted to interpreting what the original Founders of the Constitution meant by their words.

3. Art

The same debate has occurred with art, e.g. in the restoration of Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel

4. Music

5. Literature

Whether art, music, law, or literature; the impetus on making the receptor the determiner of meaning is really a rebellion against the authority of the originator.

D. Objections to authorial meaning

1. "Intentional fallacy"

This expression was coined by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe Beardsley in 1954.

a) Cannot experience the life of the author

The first objection to authorial meaning is to say we can't go back and experience what the author was experiencing when he wrote the text. This is true, but we aren't trying to relive his inner feelings/emotions. The goal is simply to understand what he was seeking to communicate.

b) Author may not be competent

This may be hypothetically true but as Christians, we believe that the biblical authors were inspired. This means that God, through His Spirit, enabled them to adequately express what He intended to communicate through them.

2. "Radical Historicism"

This recognizes the vast amount of time and culture differences between today and ancient times. This is a real problem that should not be minimized. However, there are certain aspects to humanity which do not change, based on the fact that we have all been created in the image of God. This commonality is a critical asset in interpreting the meaning of ancient writers.

QUESTIONS

1. Prior to this lecture, who or what would you say assigns meaning to a text?

2. What are the implications of saying that the text itself assigns meaning? What are the implications of saying the reader assigns meaning?
3. Why should we concede that the author assigns meaning to a text? How does the inspiration give us hope as we discern the meaning of scripture?

4. Read Luke 24:45. When studying scripture we're not only dealing with an inspired text, but we also have a God who is able to open our minds to understand. How then do prayer and bible study function hand in hand? Take time to ask God to open your mind to understand his words.

6

An Introduction to Hermeneutics (part 2)

I. THE ROLES OF THE THREE COMPONENTS

A. Author

1. Meaning is history and therefore unchangeable.

The author may change his view or even recant what he wrote previously. However, the author cannot go back and change his original intended meaning. This is locked in history.

2. The author wills a meaning.

The existence of a text means that there was an intentional effort on the part of an author to communicate something.

3. Meaning has implications.

An author is not going to communicate a principle by listing every hypothetical situation. We need to ask the question, "What is the 'pattern of meaning' or principle that is being conveyed?" These implications may extend even to unconscious meanings. E.g. Paul said, "Do not get drunk with wine..." Obviously, the implication is not to take substances into your body that would cause you to lose control of your faculties. This would have implications for bourbon, marijuana, etc.; substances that Paul would not have been aware of in his day.

Note: The literal meaning of a text is what the author (writer) of the text meant by the words. Literal interpretation does not mean we interpret everything literally because, in many cases, imagery or hyperbole is used that was not intended by the author to be taken literally.

B. Text

1. Share-ability of symbols

a) Norms of language - words

No one seeks to write a book which cannot be understood. Instead they abide by the norms of language, using words in accordance to how they will be understood by the intended audience. If a word is used outside the norms of language, a note of explanation should be added. (E.g. John 2: 19-21. John adds a note to explain that Jesus was referring to his body when he used the word "temple".

b) Norms of utterance - context

How words are constructed (rules of grammar) as well as context are essential in communicating in a way that will be understood.

2. Subject matter

The subject matter can be studied strictly for information. This is a perfectly legitimate reason for studying a text. However, if your goal is to learn about meaning, you have to ask more than "What was written?" You begin to ask, "Why was it written?"

C. Reader

1. Must decipher literary form

Determining the literary form is the 1st step because different forms have different ways of conveying meaning. E.g. a parable would not be interpreted in the same manner as narrative.

2. Ascertain authorial meanings of symbols

There are symbols, etc. that were used by the original author and understood by the original audience but are now foreign to us (2-3,000 years later). It is important to seek to learn the meaning of these symbols in order to arrive at the correct interpretation.

3. Seek significance

We can discover implications but we don't create them. The author retains control of meaning and thus the implications of what was written. This extends even to the "unconscious" implications.

On the other hand, the reader has control over the significance of what was written. Significance is how the reader gives credence or credibility to what the author said.

QUESTIONS

1. Define the following: Meaning; Implications; Significance.
2. How does properly defining meaning, implications, and significance - and who assigns each - effect the way you study the bible?
3. What did you find particularly challenging in this lecture? Why? How were you encouraged by this lecture?

7

Vocabulary for Interpretation - Part 1

I. MEANING

Definition of meaning: The pattern of meaning the author consciously willed to convey by the words or shareable symbols he/she used

All three entities are present in this definition. The author wills to communicate. The text is represented by the words/symbols. The reader is present by the shareable nature of the symbols.

II. IMPLICATIONS

Definition of implications: Those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning he/she willed.

A. Galatians 5:2

Paul was speaking to people who were being persuaded that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient. The Judaizers were convincing them that they must also be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul refutes this specifically in the conscious meaning of his words.

In Martin Luther's day, the church was selling indulgences in exchange for grace (the promise of being saved). Paul would have had no knowledge of indulgences; they didn't exist in his day. However, if they could be explained to Paul, he would say that is exactly the sort of thing I was talking about. The implications of Paul's pattern of meaning would include anything that adds a stipulation to being saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

B. Deuteronomy 22:8

In biblical times, the roof was a common place to go to experience an evening breeze. Most people today don't have roofs that are accessible. This doesn't mean that this passage is irrelevant to the modern reader with a steep pitched roof. There are all sorts of implications of which the biblical author may not have been aware but, nevertheless, fall within the pattern of meaning in regards to concern for the safety of others. E.g. a fence around a swimming pool should be the responsibility of an owner for the protection of children.

C. 1 Corinthians 16:20

How a greeting is expressed will vary from culture to culture but the warmth of the greeting does not.

D. Psalm 150

Should worship be limited to only include the instruments specifically listed by the writer? The implication seems to be praising God with the totality of what we have available.

E. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

The use of phylacteries and mezuzahs may still be present in Jewish tradition but not in Christian tradition. However, the principle here is for God's people to keep His word before them.

F. Mark 7:5-7

This is interesting because Jesus pulls an implication out of the words of Isaiah and applies it to the Pharisees. These were not the hypocrites that Isaiah had in mind but it fits his pattern of meaning.

G. Mark 7:20ff

This is another example of implications found within the text. If you compare the parallel passage in Matthew (Mat. 15:10-20), you will see that some of the sins listed in Mark are omitted in Matthew while other sins are added in Matthew's version. There is not a problem with these two Evangelists failing to record exactly which sins Jesus specifically mentioned. It would be perfectly acceptable for each of these inspired writers to include their own implications based on specific issues that were present in their respective audiences.

H. Exodus 21:28ff

This may not seem relevant, especially in our culture, but whether or not you have an ox; the passage has implications. An owner's responsibility for an animal in regards to the safety of others is different, depending on whether or not the animal is known to be dangerous.

Note: It is important to remember that the author is in control of the implications. It is not the text itself but the author who worded the text (and what that author meant) that determines the legitimate implications that flow out of it.

I. Exodus 22

J. Narrative

The stories found in the Bible have implications as well. Care should be taken to determine the main point of the narrative before pulling out implications. E.g. the story of Jesus calming the storm is about His supreme authority and power, even over something as unpredictable and untamed as the weather. The main point of this story is not about giving nautical facts surrounding the Sea of Galilee.

K. Acts 1:8

The implications of this commission are that God's people will witness for Him throughout the world. This has specific implications for each believer in regards to their personal circumstance in life.

8

Vocabulary for Interpretation - Part 2

I. SIGNIFICANCE

A. Defined

How a reader responds to the meaning of a text, an act of the will.

B. Applied

While meaning and implications are determined by the author, significance is determined by the reader. It pertains to the volitional aspect of how we, as readers, are to respond to the text.

II. SUBJECT MATTER

A. Defined

The content (or “stuff”) talked about in a text.

B. Applied

This pertains to the descriptive data/facts found in the text; not necessarily concerned with meaning.

III. UNDERSTANDING

A. Defined

The correct mental grasp of the author's meaning

B. Applied

If two people have the correct understanding it would mean they have the same understanding.

IV. INTERPRETATION

A. Defined

The verbal or written expression of a reader's understanding of the author's meaning.

B. Applied

Understanding between people can be the same but their interpretation can be different. In fact, the same person can express their understanding using a different example. Therefore, interpretations may vary even when understanding is consistent/correct. Once an understanding is expressed, it becomes an interpretation.

V. MENTAL ACTS

A. Defined

The experiences the author went through when writing the text. (C.S. Lewis, "Fernseed and Elephants")

B. Applied

Attempts at reconstructing the experience of an author as he wrote, is seldom possible to do with accuracy, even with a contemporary writer. To think one can accomplish this with a biblical author that wrote 2000 years ago, in an entirely different culture, is beyond optimistic. Our job as interpreters is not to try and guess what was going through Paul's mind as he wrote the letter. Our job is understand what he meant by what he wrote.

VI. NORMS OF LANGUAGE

A. Defined

The range of meanings allowed by the words or the verbal symbols of a text.

B. Applied

The norms of language permit multiple meanings for the same expression. A dictionary is helpful in determining this range of meaning.

VII. NORMS OF UTTERANCE

A. Defined

The specific meaning that the author has given to a word, phrase, sentence and the like in a text.

B. Applied

We are able to move from norms of language to norms of utterance by considering context. This is the sentence, paragraph, story; in which the word is used. The most helpful tool to determine specific meaning is a concordance. Here you can find where the author used the same word elsewhere which can be very helpful in understanding his specific use of the word.

VIII. LITERARY GENRE

A. Defined

The literary form used by the author and the rules that govern that form.

B. Applied

Determining the form of literature and applying the appropriate rules are essential for correct interpretation.

IX. CONTEXT

A. Defined

The willed meaning that an author gives to the literary materials surrounding the text.

B. Applied

Context is more than just the words surrounding an expression. Context involves the meaning that is being communicated by the author.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the vocabulary from this lecture did you find most challenging?

9

Vocabulary for Interpretation - Part 3

I. DISCUSSION OF KLEIN, BLOMBERG, AND HUBBARD ON MEANING

- A. "Our goal remains to hear the message of the Bible as the original audiences would [should]"

have heard it or as the first readers would [should] have understood it.” (pg. 11)

This is different than the definition of meaning given in this class. However, the reference to “shareable symbols” brings in the reader. In general, if we understand how the original audience would have understood what was communicated, then you will understand what the author meant. It should be pointed out that there are times when the original author is misunderstood by the original audience. E.g. 2nd Thessalonians was needed to clarify the 1st letter. Therefore, the “should have heard” is preferable to “would have heard”.

B. “We are convinced that the goal of hermeneutics is to enable interpreters to arrive at the meaning of the text that the biblical writers or editors intended their reader to understand.” (pg. 97)

This is much closer to the definition used by this class.

C. “We presuppose the goal of hermeneutics to be the meaning the biblical writers ‘meant’ to communicate at the time of the communication,

at least to the extent that those intentions are recoverable in the texts they produced.” (pg. 98)

Again, this is fairly close to the wording for this class.

- D. “Though a given passage may be capable of being understood in several ways, our goal is to determine what (of those various possible meanings) the text most likely would have meant to its original readers because that is why people communicate: they intend for what they communicate to be understood as they communicated it.” (pg. 133)**

The biblical writers intended to communicate a specific meaning and therefore used language that would be understood. The original audience is the people most likely to understand because they were the writers intended audience. Once again, we should say “should understand” rather than “would understand”.

- E. “The meaning of a text is: that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of its author/editor**

and the probable understanding of that text by its intended readers.” (pg. 133)

This brings the ideas together but, in this class, we will stay with the one definition of meaning.

QUESTIONS

1. Given Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard’s definition of meaning (“Our goal remains to hear the message of the Bible as the original audiences would have heard it or as the first readers would have understood it.”) why is it significant to change “would” to “should”? How does this help us determine meaning?

10

The Role of the Holy Spirit

I. QUOTES

A. J. Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*

“Although God desires to communicate to all people, not just anyone can understand Scripture. The Bible is very clear on that point. Faith is the prerequisite for truly understanding God’s Word. A person who reads without faith may understand some revealed truth, but he cannot expect to fully understand any truth revealed in Scripture. There are several aspects of faith, all of which are essential for the student who would interpret the meaning of Scripture.”

See 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 2:15-18

B. Millard Erickson, Christian Theology

“The objective word, the written Scripture, together with the subjective word, the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, constitutes authority for the Christian. The Reformers from the Reformation on speak very much about the illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit in the process of biblical interpretation. It is a combination of these two factors that constitutes authority”

“Both are needed. The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority. The inward illuminating and persuading work of the Holy Spirit is the subjective dimension.”

“This dual dimension prevents sterile, cold, dry truth on the one hand and over-excitability and ill-advised fervor on the other. Together the two yield a maturity that is necessary in the Christian life. A cool head and a warm heart. Not a cold heart and a hot head. As one pastor has put it rather crudely, ‘If you have the Bible without the Spirit, it will dry up. If you have the Spirit without the Bible, you will blow up. If you have both, the Bible and the Spirit together you will grow up.’”

“Human nature including reason has been adversely affected by the Fall. Man in the natural state has been unable to recognize and respond to divine truth. When regeneration takes place however, the spectacles of faith vastly improve one’s spiritual eyesight. Even after regeneration however, there is need for continual progressive growth, which we call sanctification. In addition, the Holy Spirit works internally in the life of a believer witnessing to the truth and countering the effects of sin so that the inherent meaning of the Bible can be understood.”

C. Westminster Confession of Faith

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word”

D. James DeYoung and Sarah Hurty, *Beyond the Obvious: The Deeper Meaning of Scripture*

“Since the Holy Spirit, not the human author is the ultimate author of the Scripture, meanings of the text unknown and unintended by the human authors are possible to discover through the continuing direct revelatory work of the Holy Spirit to believers both in their reading of the Bible and apart from the Scripture.”

The “intentioned meanings” in this quote should be of great concern. The Holy Spirit is necessary; but we have to be careful to remember it is the inspired author’s willed meaning that is the goal. The convicting, persuading word of the Spirit fits more in the area of significance.

II. CAN AN UNBELIEVER UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE?

Folly (foolishness) refers to value judgment rather than understanding. God sees the wisdom of this world as folly (see 1 Cor. 3:14). This doesn’t mean that God doesn’t comprehend the wisdom of the world; he simply assesses it as folly. Likewise, when 1 Cor. 2:14 says that an unspiritual man cannot understand; it is referring to his lack of acceptance rather than his mental grasp of the words.

III. SCRIPTURE TEXTS

A. 1 Corinthians 2:14

Folly (foolishness) refers to value judgment rather than understanding. God sees the wisdom of this world as folly (see 1 Cor. 3:14). This doesn't mean that God doesn't comprehend the wisdom of the world; he simply assesses it as folly.

B. 1 Corinthians 1:20

C. 1 Corinthians 3:19

D. Mark 9:32

E. Mark 9:32

IV. CORRECT MENTAL GRASP VS. A VALUE JUDGMENT

In the verse above from Mark, Jesus speaks of the Son of Man being delivered into the hands of men and they would kill him. After three days he would rise. They understood the words but didn't accept the truth of what he said.

V. FACT OF SIN

Believers and unbelievers alike can be prejudiced or closed to a certain teaching because of sin.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

A. General

B. Personal

Personal implications are those that are specific to the individual. E.g. Act 1:8 implications can be different at an individual level. Personal implications and significance result in application. This is an area where the Holy Spirit's guidance comes into play.

VII. DEFINITION OF UNDERSTANDING

If understanding is defined as a correct mental grasp, then understanding of a believer must be qualified in some way- authentic understanding, saving understanding, real understanding, deeper understanding, etc.

VIII. EFFECTS OF SIN

There are times when sin begins to affect a person so much that what is evident and clear, they refuse to see and, in a sense, refuse to understand.

IX. LUTHER TO ERASMUS - TWO KINDS OF CLARITY

“There are two kinds of clarity in Scripture, just there are also two kinds of obscurity: one external and pertaining to the ministry of the Word, the other located in the understanding of the heart. If you speak of internal clarity, no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God.

X. KLEIN, BLOMBERG, AND HUBBARD, INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Some statements in this book tend to seem to be on contradiction concerning understanding. However, they point out a difference in understanding of a believer with a qualifier:

“... through their careful work, both may come to the same understanding of a text’s meaning. But due to their different faith commitments, one believer can perceive the text’s true significance and be willing to obey the truth conveyed.”

XI. ILLUSTRATION - INTERPRETING "MAMMON" IN MATTHEW 6:24

It is possible to have the technical definition of mammon and not grasp the significance of this passage. It is also possible not to know the definition of mammon and yet read this passage and begin to reflect on things that would prevent you from fully serving God. The former represents a mental grasp; while the latter indicates a personal implication and conviction of significance that is part of the role of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that non-believers can come to understand the bible? Why or why not?

2. Define illumination. In your own study of the bible, have you been content to simply gain understanding, or have you made it a habit to pray for illumination? Why do we often settle for understanding?

- 3. How did this lecture challenge your understanding of the purpose of bible study?
- 4. How did this lecture effect the way you might go about interacting with and praying for non-believers?

11

The Miraculous in Scripture

I. THREE APPROACHES

A. The Supernatural Approach (Traditional)

1. The events really took place.

2. The events happened as recorded.

3. The text proclaims a divine event.

4. Since God performed this event, search for a natural cause is irrelevant.

God is not limited by our ability to understand or explain an event.

5. A closed cause-effect continuum is denied. Openness in history is maintained.

There is a cause for the event that lies outside of creation.

6. The intention of the text (author's meaning) is maintained.

The author intends to say that a miraculous event has taken place.

B. The Rationalist Approach

1. The events could not have taken place.

This approach begins with the presupposition that miracles do not happen.

2. The events happened differently than recorded.

3. The text contains a natural event behind it.

A real event has occurred but it cannot be a supernatural event.

4. The natural cause of this event can and should be learned.

**5. A closed cause-effect continuum affirmed.
Openness in history is denied.**

**6. The intention of the text (authorial meaning)
is not maintained. The meaning of the
author is not accepted.**

C. The Mythical Approach

1. The events could not have taken place.

This is similar to the rationalist approach in its presupposition that miracles do not happen.

2. The text proclaims a divine event.

The text is talking about a supernatural event, similar to the traditional approach.

3. The search for natural cause is irrelevant.

4. There is neither a divine nor natural cause, since the text proclaims a myth.

This aspect is unique among the three approaches.

5. A closed cause-effect continuum affirmed. Openness in history denied.

6. The “deeper” intention of the text (authorial meaning) is maintained.

This approach seeks to understand the sub-conscious meaning of the author which gave birth to the myth in his soul.

II. PRESUPPOSITIONS

A. Eugene B. Borowitz

Borowitz (of a liberal persuasion) wrote about contemporary Christologies in terms of liberal versus conservative approaches. He recognized that the fundamental divide between the two camps was a differing epistemology rather than simply a difference in how Scripture is interpreted. The real difference has to do with the source of knowledge/truth. Conservatives hold that religion is God given. Truth comes from heaven, divinely revealed. Liberals hold that truth comes from the human experience, human wisdom, etc.

An honest discussion is more likely between a conservative Christian and an Orthodox Jew; rather than a conservative Christian and a liberal Christian.

B. Rudolph Bultmann

Bultmann argues that it is possible to approach exegesis without presuppositions if you are referring to presuming the outcome. However, it is not possible to start exegesis free of presuppositions.

He would agree with Reformers in a historical/grammatical method of interpretation. However, he diverges with his presupposition that history is a closed continuum of cause and effect events that preclude any interruption of history by a divine, miraculous event.

This is the basic presupposition of all liberal approaches. If you are open to the supernatural, you are in one camp. If you are closed to the supernatural, you are in another camp. This presents a radical fork that will lead to divergent conclusions.

QUESTIONS

1. Which approach to miracles in scripture do you find most convincing (Supernatural, rational, or mythical)? Why?
2. Why do presuppositions matter in conversation? Why is it particularly necessary to identify presuppositions with those who differ that you?
3. What are some presuppositions that you approach scripture with? Can you identify any unhelpful/unhealthy presuppositions?

12

G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*

I. CHAPTER 1 - TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE

A. Referential

1. Informative language

To talk about people, things and ideas

2. Cognitive language

Expression of thought

B. Commissive

1. Performative and causative language

To do things and to get things done

2. Expressive and evocative language

To display or elicit attitudes and feelings

II. CHAPTER 2 - TYPES OF MEANING

In chapter 2, Caird talks about various ways of expressing meaning:

A. Referent = Subject matter

Meaning with respect to the referent is in regards to the "stuff", or subject matter.

B. Value = Significance

Meaning with respect to value has to do with what this class has defined as significance.

C. Entailment = Implication

Going beyond the immediate meaning, one might ask, "What does this entail?" In this class we have used another word for this: implication.

D. Sense = Meaning

This is the simple meaning of a communication.

E. Intention = Meaning (if author is competent)

Meaning with regard to intention is the same as the author's (willed) meaning, assuming the author is competent.

F. Public meaning = norms of language

G. User's meanings = norms of utterance

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the difference between understanding why an author says something and understanding what the author says. Why is this an important differentiation?

13

Proverbs

I. DEFINITION:

A short, pithy saying that expresses a general truth - exceptions are allowed.

II. EXAMPLES

A. Proverbs 3:9-10

This is generally true but you can find examples of godly people who haven't fared that well and ungodly people who seem to make out quite nicely.

B. Proverbs 10:3-4

In general, if you work hard you will be rewarded and if you are lazy, you will suffer the consequences. However, this doesn't hold true 100% of the time.

C. Proverbs 13:21

In general, lifestyles will affect what happens to people, but again, there are exceptions.

D. Proverbs 15:1

This is good advice that will generally have good results; but not every time.

E. Proverbs 22:6

This verse has created guilt among parents who misinterpret this as an absolute statement meaning that choices made by children as they mature, are entirely the responsibility of the parents.

F. Proverbs 22:16

Some people seem to do well by oppressing the poor, at least in the short term. However, this is generally a true statement.

G. Matthew 6:21

Jesus, Himself, taught using proverbs, as with this example.

H. Matthew 26:52

This is another illustration of Jesus making use of a proverb.

I. Luke 16:10

J. 1 Corinthians 15:33

Most parents would instinctively agree with this general truth from Paul.

III. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIBLICAL PROVERBS AND OTHER PROVERBS

Biblical proverbs are wise observations of life that have been filtered through the truth of Scripture; the wisdom is therefore more reliable.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF JOB

The following verses are examples of Job's friends quoting proverbs to Job. The problem is they universalize the general truth-like nature of a proverb. Job is the exception but his friends failed to recognize it. They failed to realize that proverbs teach general truths but they cannot be applied universally.

A. Job 4:7-9

B. Job 5:15

C. Job 8:3-4, 5-7

QUESTIONS

1. How did this lecture better your understanding of how to interpret proverbs?

2. What's the danger of misunderstanding a proverb?

3. What's the key to properly understanding a proverb?

14

The Genre and Language of Prophecy

I. JUDGMENT PROPHECY

A. Rule

Judgment prophecy assumes, even if not stated, that if the people repent judgment will not come.

B. Examples

1. Jonah 3:1-4, 10

This example of an unfulfilled prophecy does not make Jonah a false prophet. If the prophecy is one of judgment, and repentance takes place, the judgment is averted.

“Readers of the book of Jonah have commonly been preoccupied with problems of marine biology to pay attention to the much more important theological difficulty that Jonah is ordered to prophesy something that does not happen.” C. B. Caird

2. Jeremiah 18:7-10

This states explicitly that in the event of repentance, a judgment prophecy will go unfulfilled. Note: This is not a statement that denies God’s foreknowledge or omniscience.

3. Micah 3:12 (cf. Jeremiah 26:16-19)

The destruction Micah prophesies does not happen because the people repent.

4. 1 Kings 21:27-29

C. Quote from C. B. Caird, pp. 56-57

II. THE LANGUAGE OF PROPHECY - COSMIC TERMINOLOGY

A. Rule

Prophets tend to speak in figurative language, using cosmic terminology.

B. Examples

All of these examples serve to remind us that much of the language of the prophets is the language of poetry. As such, it should be interpreted symbolically and not literally. The cosmic language is a poetic way of describing the actions of the God who controls the universe.

1. Isaiah 13:9-11

The language sounds like the end of history however, this chapter in Isaiah begins as an oracle against Babylon, an existing empire in the prophet's day. In the norms of language, Isaiah's readers would have understood this reference to the kingdom up north.

2. Jeremiah 4:23-28

Again, this is an example of cosmic language used by a prophet that appears to talk about end times; yet the prophecy was delivered to Judah concerning the destruction of Jerusalem which would be experienced by the people of that day.

3. Isaiah 24:23

4. Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15

This is more cosmic language that seems to be describing the end times but from Peter we learn that this is a prophecy about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 2: 16-21)

5. Jeremiah 15:9

This poetic language personifies Jerusalem.

6. Amos 8:9

7. Ezekiel 32:7-8

8. Habakkuk 3:11

QUESTIONS

1. What are the two rules of prophecy that were discussed in this lecture?

15

Further Examples of Prophecy

I. ISAIAH

A. Isaiah 11:1-9

B. Isaiah 35:1-2, 8-10

C. Isaiah 65:25

All of these descriptions of paradise are found in Isaiah but do they conflict with each other? Will lions be there or not? They are all describing a place of bliss and tranquility using poetic language. The language is meant to stir the imagination and not describe literal circumstances, therefore there is no contradiction.

II. REVELATION

A. Cosmic language - God acting in history

In Rev. 21:1 there is language about a new heaven and earth; and the old passing away. This is a picture of God acting in history just as he acted in the original creation. The cosmic language calls the attention to God.

B. Impressionistic painting

In Rev. 21:9 ff., there is poetic language describing the New Jerusalem. The great walls are 144 cubits but the 12 gates are wide open. This makes no literal sense but in the figurative sense, both of these point to security and the absence of an outside threat. Paving the streets with gold would be foolish due its soft properties, but this is a perfectly effective way of describing the preciousness of heaven. The emotive language invites us to step back consider our impression rather than overanalyze the details; much as one would step back and engage an impressionistic painting.

III. ACTS 2

Here, Peter explains the events at Pentecost by saying "this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel. The verses above were included by Peter, demonstrating that the cosmic language used by Joel was meant to describe the democratization of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost rather than an "end of time" event.

IV. LUKE

A. Luke 3:4-6

John the Baptist is referring to the present mission of Jesus but there were no actual geographic changes taking place. This is a picturesque way of saying "make his path easy".

B. Luke 14:11

C. Luke 18:14

This is another way of saying that the norms of the world will be turned upside down when it comes to the principles of God's kingdom.

D. Luke 4:18ff (18-19)

This is a speech by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. There were no literal prisoners who were released from jail as a result of his ministry. This refers to being released from the oppression of sin and its consequences; through forgiveness.

V. MATTHEW 2 AND HOSEA - IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPHECY

A. Hosea 11:1-2

This is a fairly clear reference to the Exodus under Moses. However, Matthew uses this passage from Hosea in reference to Joseph and Mary taking Jesus to Egypt in order to escape Herod

B. Matthew 2:14-15

Matthew saw in Hosea a “pattern of meaning” which had implications for Jesus being taken to Egypt. God promised his people a land, Canaan. If this was true for the wayward nation of Israel, how much more would the promise apply to his only begotten Son? Matthew was saying that God used a foreign nation as temporary sanctuary but he would never leave his people indefinitely in that position.

Some people raise the question of a *sensus plenior*—the existence of a deeper meaning of which an OT prophet was unaware but is later known and interpreted by a NT writer. This is possible for a NT writer (who was inspired) but this inspiration isn’t transferred to the reader. In addition, if a primary meaning is indicated by the author, there is no real reason to search for a deeper meaning.

VI. WHY THIS KIND OF LANGUAGE?

Why speak of the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood? This imagery could possibly be used to describe a city being destroyed during a time of war. In this case, it would be a useful way to figuratively describe judgment.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Stein mean by “interpreting literally”? Does this differ from your understanding coming into this lecture?
2. Do you struggle to interpret poetic language? How has today’s exacting language affected your ability to interact with the poetic language of prophecy?
3. Define *sensus plenior*. Do you agree with Stein’s assessment of seeking *sensus plenior* in a text? Why or why not?

16

Prophecy and the Beginning Discussion of Mark

I. DISCUSSION OF MARK 13

Mark 13 begins with Jesus describing a coming destruction of the temple where the stones would be thrown down. He is asked by his disciples, “when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”

A. Mark 13:7-12

Normally when you hear a reference to wars and rumors of war it is considered in conjunction with the Lord’s return. Here, it seems that the opposite message is given: “don’t be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet”

B. Mark 13: 14-23

The “abomination of desolation” is referred to in the OT in the book of Daniel where it is probably describing an event in 167 B.C when the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple. Jesus seems to be saying, when you see something like this happening again, beware. He is describing the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 A.D. The instructions to flee with haste (don’t turn back for a cloak) is figurative language. In reality, the Romans typically practiced a very slow methodical siege. None of this seem to describe the end times or the 2nd Coming.

Many have read the description of the tribulation that followed (has not been from the beginning of creation...) as a reference to the end times. However, if this is understood as commissive (expressive/ evocative) language, then it would easily be understood as a description of the horrific conditions that existed during the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

C. Mark 13:24-27

Now these verses present some difficulties. Does “in those days” refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or to the end times? “In those days” is a technical term for the end times, therefore this sounds like a description of the 2nd Coming. However, the cosmic language that follows sounds much like the impressionistic language used in the OT to describe actual historic events.

D. Mark 13:28-31

These verses seem to be referring to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. but in the following verses below (13:32-37), Mark is describing the 2nd Coming. Had verses 24-27 been placed after verse 31, it would be easier to see those as part of the 2nd Coming description as well.

E. Mark 13:32-37

F. Summary comments:

It is unlikely that the language used in the NT to describe the 2nd Coming is meant to be understood as scientific, literal descriptions of what will take place. Just as in the OT, the event will literally come true but the language used by the author to describe it is figurative in nature. In this poetic type language, the literal meaning of the author is not the same as the literal meaning of the words.

QUESTIONS

1. Has studying the figurative nature of prophecy alleviated some of the challenge of interpreting prophecy? Why or why not?

2. What remaining questions do you have regarding prophecy?

17

Prose and Poetry, and Examples from the Old Testament

I. PROSE VS. POETRY

Prose and poetry are different. In poetry, words can be limited by rhythm or rhyme and therefore “poetic license” is employed which allows the writer to use words that may not be as precise or exact; as in the case of prose. In modern translations, translators help us identify the poetry by utilizing broken type. In the Bible, there are two instances where both forms are placed side by side, to describe the same events. This occurs in Judges and in Exodus.

II. EXAMPLES

A. Judges 4 &5

1. In chapter 4 of Judges we are given a prose account of Deborah and Barak leading Israel in battle against Sisera.

2. Compare it to some excerpts from chapter 5 which record the battle in poetic form:

The stars didn't literally fight; this wasn't some sort of meteor shower. This is a way of saying that God fought from his place in heaven.

B. Exodus 14 &15

1. Exodus 14 records the crossing of the Red Sea in prose:

2. Now compare this to some of the poetic language in chapter 15 used to describe the same event:

C. Colossians 1

Even though most translations do not break these lines to indicate poetry, this is most likely a pre-Pauline Christological hymn that he recites in his letter. Understanding the poetic rhythm of the original language helps explain words that would otherwise seem to be in conflict with Scripture's teaching against universalism.

D. 1 Corinthians 15

E. 1 Cor. 15:22

In this verse we see another example of Paul using a balanced rhythm to say something that is not intended as a statement supporting universalism.

F. Romans 5

In Romans 5:15, 17, 18, & 19; Paul utilizes a balanced rhythm yet again. The point is to recognize these, and not let your theology be defined by instances where the words are controlled rhythm. There are plenty of places where rhythm is not utilized from which we can determine that Paul was clearly not teaching universalism.

G. Psalm 18

Psalm 18 is a good example of poetry found used by psalmists. Here, David is singing for Joy because God heard his plea for help when facing enemies.

Psalm 18:13-14

H. 2 Samuel 1

This is from a lament by David for Saul and Jonathan. A eulogy is a perfectly good place to use poetic language to honor someone.

QUESTIONS

1. Define poetic license. How does understanding poetic license help with interpreting poetic passages?

2. How can you identify poetry in your bible?

3. Given then non-literal nature of poetry, how might you go about discovering implications of a poetic text?

18

Types of Poetry in the Bible

I. TYPES OF POETRY IN THE BIBLE

A. Synonymous Parallelism

1. Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, seek, and knock are essentially all expressing the same thought. Synonymous parallelism in poetry repeats the same thought in a variety of ways using a rhythmic pattern.

2. Luke 6:27-28

Another example: the idea of loving your enemies is described by a repetition of actions that portray its meaning.

3. The Lord's Prayer

"Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." This is followed by "On earth as it is in heaven" which goes with all three of the expressions. Knowing one of these helps us to understand the others.

B. Antithetic Parallelism

The opposite of a synonymous parallelism is an antithetic parallelism in which the opposite thought is repeated.

1. Matthew 7:17-18

2. Luke 16:10

3. Proverbs

There is not a sharp distinction between poetry and proverbs. Many sayings (including some entire chapters) found in Proverbs are in the form of antithetic parallelisms.

E.g. The wise son is a joy to his father | But the foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.

C. Step/Climactic Parallelism

In a step parallelism, the 1st and 2nd lines are neither synonymous or opposite; rather the 1st line is advanced by the 2nd line.

1. Matthew 10:40

2. Matthew 5:17

D. Chiasmic Parallelism

These are parallel rhythms in which you find a pattern of parts that follow an ascending then descending order. (E.g. A, B-B, A)

1. Matthew 23:12

2. Mark 8:35

II. WHY USE POETIC LANGUAGE?

Counted together, there are over 200 examples of synonymous and antithetic parallelisms in the Gospels. This rhythmic-type language lends itself to memorization which was especially important in a non-literal society which existed in the 1st century. This is evident in the way a rhythm is helpful in remembering the words to a song.

QUESTIONS

1. Define: Synonymous parallelism; Antithetical parallelism; Climatic/step parallelism; Chiasmic parallelism

2. How does understanding each of the four types of parallelism above aid in the interpretation of scripture?

3. What have you learned in the past two lectures that has been particularly helpful in your study of poetry in scripture? Where have you struggled with poetry in the past?

19

Idioms

I. THE GENRE OF IDIOMS

Idioms are a form of expression that if taken literally, in the context, would make little or no sense.

A. Examples

1. "God bless you."

In response to a sneeze

2. "Break a leg."

A saying when someone starts a new theatre play

3. "How are you?"

Actually, a simple greeting rather than a question

B. Biblical Examples

1. "No one was left."

Exaggerated terminology (Joshua 8:17, Judges 4:16, 2 Kings 10:21)

2. "Shutteth up his bowels."

It's an idiom that means "have no pity" (1 John 3:17)

3. "Sands of the seashore."

(Genesis 22:17ff, Genesis 41:43, Joshua 11:4,
Judges 7:12)

4. "Faith to move mountains"

(Matthew 17:20, 1 Corinthians 13:2)

C. How to detect idioms

1. Found frequently

2. Cannot be interpreted literally in context

D. Specific example - "Love and Hate"

The love-hate language is found frequently in Scripture.

1. Malachi 1:2-3, Romans 9:13

2. Explanation from Genesis 29:31

Gen. 29:31 states that Leah was hated but when compared to the preceding verse, the true meaning of this becomes clear. Jacob's affection for Rachel was greater than his affection for Leah.

3. Deuteronomy 21:15-17

The above verses are quoted from the ESV. The word "unloved" is translated as "disliked" in the RSV. In the original Hebrew, the literal word used is "hated". Thus this is another example of the love/hate idiomatic imagery found both in the OT and the NT.

4. Luke 14:26

What is evident through these examples is the fact that hate (in the love/hate idiom really means to love less. It's a relative expression rather than a literal expression of two extremes.

5. Proverbs 13:24

E. Meaning is determined by the author

The use of idioms is a good illustration of the fact that the meaning of words is determined by the author. The text can't, in and of itself, bear meaning because it is simply a collection of words which, if taken literally, could say something quite different from the intended meaning of the author.

F. Learning a new language

All languages have idiomatic expressions. It's important to learn those in order to avoid some potentially embarrassing situations. The Bible makes frequent use of idioms and it is important to recognize those in order to make a valid interpretation.

QUESTIONS

1. Define idiom. What makes idiom's particularly challenging to interpret?

20

The Genre of Exaggeration - Part 1

I. RECOGNIZING EXAGGERATION IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS (PART 1)

In his teaching, Jesus used overstatement which is simply exaggeration for effect; and hyperbole. Hyperbole is literally impossible while overstatement is literally possible but not intended to be interpreted in a literal fashion.

Exaggeration can have a negative connotation, i.e. someone stretching the truth. However, this is a perfectly acceptable and legitimate genre as long as both parties are aware that it is exaggeration. This was the case for Jesus' teaching in the NT.

A. Hyperbolic

Hyperbole is exaggeration that is so great it is literally impossible:

Example: Matthew 23:24

B. Conflicts with what Jesus says elsewhere

Another way to detect exaggerated language by Jesus is to note if it obviously conflicts with his teaching elsewhere.

Example: Luke 14:26; We know that this is not intended to be interpreted literally because he teaches elsewhere to honor your father and your mother.

C. Conflicts with Jesus' behavior and actions elsewhere

Matthew 6:6; This is an exaggerated message meant to discourage showy prayers for the purpose of calling attention to yourself. Obviously, this isn't saying you have to pray in secret. E.g. the Lord's Prayer is meant to be a corporate prayer.

In Matt. 5:33-34, Jesus seems to be teaching against taking any type of oath. However we see him placing himself under oath at his trial before the High Priest (Matt. 26:62). This was in obedience to what is stated in the Law, in Lev. 5:1 ff., which states that you must answer in placed under oath. Jesus was using exaggerated speech to teach about having the sort of character that makes an oath unnecessary.

D. Conflicts with teachings of the Old Testament

The instructions to hate your father and mother are clearly in conflict with the 5th Commandment which tell us to honor your father and your mother.

E. Conflicts with teachings of the New Testament

Notice the universal language in Matthew 5:42 concerning giving to a beggar in comparison to the instruction in 2 Thessalonians 3:10:

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can exaggerated language carry a bad connotation? What circumstances need to exist in order for exaggeration to be a legitimate form of communication? Why should we exercise care in discovering overstatement in the teachings found in Scripture?

2. How does one distinguish between overstatement and hyperbole?

3. List the four ways we can identify exaggeration in scripture.

4. Does the idea of exaggeration in scripture bother you? Why or why not?

21

The Genre of Exaggeration - Part 2

I. RECOGNIZING EXAGGERATION IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS (CONTINUED)

A. Interpreted by the evangelist in a non-literal way

Example: Matthew 10:34; Taken literally, this sounds like Jesus was advocating a political revolution involving war. However, Matthew explains in the following verses that he was talking about the potentially divisive nature of aligning with Jesus, even within a family.

B. Not always literally fulfilled in practice

In Mark 13, Jesus prophesied to his disciples concerning the fall of Jerusalem in which he says not one stone of the temple wall will be left upon another. The temple was definitely destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., but there are portions of the wall that remained intact down to the foundation rock, even until today.

Matt. 7:7-8; This can't be literally true with no exceptions. Rather than trying to qualify the exceptions, Jesus wanted to teach the importance of prayer.

C. Literal fulfillment would not achieve the desired goal

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; this would not solve the problem of lusting with your left eye; Jesus is using overstatement to express the serious nature of sin.

D. The statement uses a particular literal form prone to exaggeration

Proverbs, prophecy and poetry are all literary forms that make common use of exaggeration, often through metaphoric language.

E. The statement uses idiomatic language that no longer bears its literal meaning

E.g. the gnashing of teeth expresses horror more than what is literally going on inside the mouth.

F. The statement uses all-inclusive and universal language

Examples: Luke 6:30; Matthew 9:23

3. Interact with one of the passages Stein references in this lecture - apply what you have learned about exaggeration in properly interpreting one of these passages.

22

Introduction to Parables

I. DEFINITION

Parables are brief or extended comparisons.

II. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-35

A. Marcion – 140 A.D.

Made first reference to this parable. Marcion was a Gnostic who refuted the incarnation. He allegorized Jesus as the Good Samaritan and concluded this was Jesus' first appearance in history.

B. Clement of Alexandria – 180 A.D. (early Church era)

Clement continued the practice of allegorizing this parable, pressing each detail for meaning.

C. Origen (early Church era)

Origen reasoned that humans had a tri-part nature (body, soul, and spirit) from 1 Thess. 5:23. He made the leap of saying therefore Scripture had a tri-part nature- a literal meaning, a moral meaning, and spiritual meaning. Origen continued the practice of allegorizing parables but introduced this layered approach to interpretation.

D. St. Augustine (early Church era)

Augustine probably has the most famous allegorized interpretation of the Good Samaritan.

1. Two basic reasons why allegory tended to be the dominate method of interpreting sacred literature:

Jesus offered an allegorical interpretation with his parable of the soils.

It was a common way of handling sacred writings that were difficult to interpret in a literal way.

E. John Cassian (Middle Ages)

Cassian added a 4th level of meaning (a heavenly meaning).

F. Thomas Aquinas

One of the great theologians of the Middle Ages, continued with the allegory interpretation and with the four levels of Cassian, (literal, moral, spiritual, & heavenly)

G. Martin Luther (Reformation Period)

Many of the chains of allegorical interpretation in the rest of Scripture began to be broken during the reformation. However, Luther continued to apply it to parables. The Reformers did not recognize papal authority or the tradition of the Early Church Fathers. It is not surprising that Luther disagreed strongly with some of their former interpretations.

H. John Calvin

John Calvin is the first known theologian in all of church history to say that this parable is not a story about Jesus.

“None of this strikes me as plausible. We should have more reverence for Scripture than to allow ourselves to transfigure its sense so freely. Anyone may see that these speculations have been cooked up by meddlers quite divorced from the mind of Christ.”
John Calvin

I. R.C. Trench – 19th Century

Trench published a book, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, in which he offers a literal, then deeper spiritual meaning of the parables. He makes strong use of allegory in his interpretive method.

J. Adolf Jülicher – 1888

Jülicher published a book, *Parable Talks of Jesus*, in which he pointed out the difference =between an allegory and a parable. An allegory gives meaning to details and the author invites you to discover those meanings. A classic literary example of this was *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Parables, on the other hand, tend to be comparisons of one basic point. If details are present in a parable, they are there simply there to make the story interesting or memorable.

III. PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING PARABLES

A. Parables generally teach one main point.

There are exceptions, but essentially a parable is a comparison that is teaching one primary lesson. Avoid trying to read into the text (eisogesis) by pressing the details of the story. Read out of the text (exegesis) by looking for the main point.

B. Seek to understand the parable as the 1st century audience.

C. H. Dodd stressed this simple, yet sometimes overlooked, point in his book *Parables of the Kingdom*. Avoid jumping to implication and significance before first considering how the original audience would have understood the message. (There and then before here and now.) Another way to state this principle is to simply ask, "What did Jesus mean by this parable?"

C. Consider what the Gospel writers were trying to teach from the parable.

Redaction Criticism led to the realization of special emphases that were made by the individual inspired Evangelists.

D. Ask how it applies to us; to our current situation.

Ask the question. "What does God want me to do in regard to this parable?"

IV. APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES TO THE GOOD SAMARITAN

A. Principle #1

Based on the preceding verse (Luke 10:29) and the verse that follows the parable (Luke 10:36); it is apparent that the parable is about who is a neighbor. In essence, Jesus twists the question at the end by asking (from the story) "Who proved to be a neighbor?" This is the main point- what does it mean to be a good neighbor? Note that the lawyer's question was, "Who is my neighbor, i.e. who should be the recipient of my love?" Jesus answers the more prudent question, "What does it mean to be a loving neighbor?"

B. Principle #2

Understanding the long established hatred between Jews and Samaritans that existed in Jesus' day greatly enhances the force of this parable. This would not have been received as a warm and fuzzy story of compassion, especially by the religious leaders of the day. This was a damning indictment of social, racial, and religious superiority.

C. Principle #3

In trying to understand the particular emphases of Luke, it is helpful to note (both in his Gospel and in Acts) that he has particular concern for outcasts, women, publicans, and sinners. Of all the Gospel writers, Luke is the only one who includes this parable. Also, he is the only one who includes a story of Jesus meeting and healing a Samaritan.

D. Principle #4

The question here has to do with our own circumstances and opportunities to as being a loving neighbor to those we encounter.

23

Interpretation of Parables

I. DISCUSSION OF VARIOUS PARABLES

A. Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

This very brief parable is an example of a similitude. The simple point here is to teach that God's Kingdom is the greatest treasure one can have. This is placed beside the Parable of Fine Pearls which has the same point. There is no need to press the details further by trying to analyze the character of the man, etc.

B. Parable of Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

This is an interesting and therefore memorable parable. The point is not to make a statement on what percentage of virgins will make it to heaven; or to instruct Christians of the need to share the Gospel (even though this is true). The simple point being made is for Christians to be ready (prepared) because we don't know the hour or the day when we will meet the Lord.

C. Parable of the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1-8)

Trying to press the details of this parable can lead to all sorts of distorted interpretations. However, the simple point to see is that the man was facing judgment and he prepared himself accordingly. He was not commended for his integrity; he was commended for his shrewdness. Are we at least as smart as this scoundrel? Are we prepared for judgment?

D. Parable of the Lost Sheep (Compare Luke 15:3-7 to Matthew 18:12-14)

Notice in Luke the sheep is described as lost while in Matthew it is described as going astray. Matthew uses a verb that means “straying”. In the end, Luke refers to repentance whereas Matthew refers to “these little ones” which is a term Matthew uses earlier in the chapter to refer to young Christians. Probably, Luke’s version is closer to the actual parable as told by Jesus. This was in response to Jesus being asked why he ate with sinners. His answer is concerned with salvation for the “lost”.

Matthew appears to have taken the “pattern of meaning” and applied it to a situation in which he is writing to a church which has members who have drifted away from the body. Matthew is taking the original parable and showing the implication. Matthew was inspired therefore his version of the parable is still God’s Word even though it is probably not the precise words of Jesus.

E. Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

Both Irenaeus and Origen attempted to make an allegorical interpretation in which various groups throughout redemptive history were represented by the workers hired at different hours.

Others have cited God's sovereignty as the main point. However, the master of the house wasn't free in regards to the first hour workers. He was required to pay them what was promised. Others say the point is justification by faith since the 11th hour workers got paid. However, the 1st hour workers did work for their pay.

The point of the parable is to teach against having a begrudging attitude towards God's grace and generosity. The original story was directed at the attitude of the Pharisees and Scribes but it certainly makes a relevant point in the hearts of modern believers.

1. Sub-rules for interpreting parables:

a) Determine the main characters

When there are several characters in a parable, there are usually two main characters. This would be 1st hour and 11th hour since they are the only ones mentioned in the payment.

b) Rule of End Stress

What comes at the end is the most important.

c) What gets the most press

The end of the parable is confrontational dialog between the 1st hour workers and the master that includes several verses.

F. The Prodigal Son

The main characters appear to be the father and the oldest son, based on how the story ends and the amount of dialog between them in the end. Luke offers some additional insight by describing the situation in which the story was told (Luke 15:1-2)

The scribes and Pharisees had the attitude of the older son. This appears to be the same point made as in the Parable of the Laborers found in Matthew 20.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been challenged by the character of an individual in a parable? How does Dr. Stein suggest we interpret the character of the individuals presented in a parable? How does pressing the details of a parable lead to confusion and misinterpretation?
2. What is the Rule of End Stress? How does this help us interpret difficult parables?
3. How does evaluating direct discourse help us in interpreting parables?

24

Allegory and Historical Narrative

I. PARABLES (PART 3)

A. Detecting allegory in a parable

1. Would Jesus and His audience have attributed meaning to the details?

2. Would the Evangelist's audience have understood the details as allegorical?

B. Examples of allegorical parables

1. The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-12)

In comparing this to Isaiah 5: 1-7, it is fairly obvious that Jesus is playing off the OT passage from Isaiah. Jesus' audience would have been well versed in the OT and understood that this was a parable about the nation of Israel (represented by the vineyard). It would also be apparent to them that the servants, sent by the owner, represented OT Prophets. Clearly, there is a distinction between the son and the servants, therefore a Christological implication would have been drawn by Jesus' audience.

The parallel accounts of this parable in Matthew and Luke have an interesting twist. In both of these accounts, the son is first thrown out of vineyard before he was killed. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem. They were reinforcing the Christological connection and thus demonstrated that they understood this parable allegorically.

This is a clear instance of an allegory. Both Jesus' audience and the Evangelists audience would have seen the symbolism of the details.

2. Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24)

Luke is fairly specific, there are two sending outs: one to the immediate area and one further out. Luke would have expected Theophilus to understand the parable allegorically. The Kingdom of God is frequently likened to a great banquet. It was not only the outcasts of Israel who were invited, but the outcasts of the Gentile world (the 2nd sending out). Theophilus would have understood this connection.

In the parable, those that you would have expected to be front and center at the dinner did not come. Jesus' audience would have caught on that he was talking about the scribes and Pharisees.

C. Final Interpretive Discussions on Parables

1. The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)

The almost monotonous repetition of doing acts of love is probably an example of synonymous parallelism; but the key question to answer in understanding the meaning is, "who are 'my brothers', in the parable?"

The Greek word, adelphos, is translated brothers or brethren. This can sometimes refer to physical brothers (which is not plausible in the context of the parable) or it is used metaphorically to refer to Jesus' disciples. (See Matt. 23: 8; Matt. 28:10; Matt. 10:40)

The meaning of this parable would have been understood to be about how you should treat God's messengers; not a general call for social justice. I.e. the way you receive God's people indicates whether or not you are one yourself.

2. The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

People have questioned whether this is a parable or a true story because of the fact that Lazarus is called by name. However, the introduction is very similar to many other parables recorded by Luke. (See Luke 10:30; Luke 14:16; Luke 15:11, Luke 16:1; Luke 19:2) They are all introduced in the same manner: a certain (unnamed) man...). This indicates this should be treated as a parable and not a true story.

II. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

A. Meaningfulness in Biblical narrative

Question- Did this really take place?

Until the 1700's, questioning the difference between the account and what really happened; was never asked. Until then, interpreters all assumed that these were historical accounts. Even those using allegorical interpretation believe the events were literally true.

In 1974, Hans Frei published the book *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* which addressed the distinctions between literal meaning, religious meaning, and significance (meaningfulness); of narrative text.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Stein, how do we know when to interpret a parable allegorically?

25

Clues to Interpreting Historical Narrative

I. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

From the early church and up through most of the 17th century, the facticity of Biblical narrative was not an issue. The enlightenment brought rationalism in which people began to doubt the miracles included in the historical narratives of the bible. The result was a polarization of two extremes: supernaturalists and non-supernaturalists.

II. INTERPRETIVE METHODS

A. Supernaturalists

This group accepted the miracles as historical events and therefore saw the literal meaning and the historical content of the text as being unified.

B. Non-supernaturalists (naturalists)

This group did not accept the miracles as fact but sought other ways of determining meaningfulness (significance) in the narratives. In their attempts to find meaning, three groups emerged:

1. Rationalists

Interpretation should be limited to the reader's understanding of what the author's conscious intended meaning. However, the rationalists introduced an historical assessment aspect to interpretation. There was a tendency to look for meaning in what actually happened rather than finding meaning with what the author was teaching. This presented a problem because when many of the events were "demiraculized", there was nothing left of significance.

2. Accommodationists

In this view, the Biblical authors knew that the miracles didn't really take place. They wrote to people who believed in miracles so they used fabricated miracles in order to teach Christian values /principles. This view preserved the intellectual capacity of the writer but not the integrity of the writer. This approach is hard to accept because you have essentially dishonest writers teaching moral Christian values.

3. Mythical approach

The mythical approach preserved the integrity of the authors but brought into question their intellect. In this view, the authors believed the miracles but didn't consciously understand what they were really trying to communicate. It's left up to the reader to find the subconscious meaning of the narrative. Trying to find some hypothetical subconscious meaning presents obvious problems but the main problem with this approach is in genre. Biblical narratives are not written in mythical literary form. Real events are described with real persons, in real places, and at real times.

III. CLUES TO INTERPRETING HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The purpose of biblical narrative is not merely to tell what took place in the past. Rather, it is to relate these past events to biblical faith. Thus, the meaning of such texts involves not simply “what happened” but rather the interpretation of what happened. Unlike legal materials or letters, however, the meaning of a narrative is taught implicitly rather than explicitly. Robert Stein

A. Context

The “hermeneutical circle”- The reader seeks to understand the particular narrative in light of the whole book. In turn, understanding the particular aids in understanding the whole.

The author assumes that his reader will be familiar with his whole book and will interpret a particular story in light of that. This is similar to the way one would use a single piece of a puzzle based on where it fits in the whole.

B. Authorial Comments

Many times, the author will add a comment that will give the reader a clue about how to interpret the text.

1. Examples

1 Kings 15:5

1 Kings 22:43

C. Repetition

Another way the author shares his meaning with the reader is by repetition of key themes. Highlighting the authorial comments is a good way to identify these repeated themes.

1. In the Book of Judges, there are two repeated themes:

Israel's cyclical experience of rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration.

The absence of leadership (See 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25)

D. Authoritative Speakers

When the author attributes words directly to God or Jesus, the reader knows that the author wants him, or her, to accept what is being said as true. This is also the case for words attributed to faithful servants of God; such as patriarchs, prophets, and apostles.

E. Direct discourse

Dialogues between God and his servants, or between Jesus and his disciples; can indicate the narrator's intent to focus the reader on a certain subject or principle.

26

Understanding the Letters in the New Testament: Part 1

I. HOW WORDS ARE USED

A. Finding the important words

How does a reader/student know which words are important to study?

1. Frequency

If a term occurs several times in a passage, it is a good indication that the meaning of the word is important to the meaning of the passage. E.g. the verb translated “to reckon” is found 11 times in Romans chapter 4. That is an important word to understand when interpreting Paul’s message in this chapter.

2. The role of a word in the sentence

Sometimes a particular word plays an essential part of a sentence. “By grace you were saved by faith...” Paul’s particular meaning of grace is important know in understanding the sentence.

3. Author definition

Important words are sometimes noted for the reader when the author provides a definition. E.g. Paul refers to the Gospel in 1 Cor. 15:1; then proceeds to define it in verses 15:3ff.

B. Etymology Issues

Etymology refers to the study of words through their root meaning. Generally speaking, root meanings are of little value in biblical interpretation. When looking at a diachronic meaning of a word (over a long period of time) we find words can take on dramatically different meanings. In the 1600's (time of King James translation) the word "let" actually meant to hinder. Today it means to give permission.

C. Moving from norms of language to norms of utterance

Norms of language involves the range of meaning of a term. For this, a dictionary is a valuable tool. However, letters contain finely worded arguments, therefore it is important to seek the specific meaning of a word, as the author intended in a particular text (the norms of utterance). The following are some tools for determining word meanings. Moving from less specific to more specific:

1. Greek classical literature

There is a massive amount of classical Greek literature that enables us to determine the meaning of Greek words. However, the classical writers did not have the same mind and purpose as the New Testament writers.

2. The Early Church Fathers

The Early Church Fathers, writing in the 2nd and 3rd century would think more like the Biblical authors and therefore be a better source for determining the meaning of Greek words used in Scripture.

3. Translators of the Hebrew Old Testament

The Septuagint (LXX) was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament completed 2-300 B.C. These translators would have had a mind and vocabulary even closer to the NT writers than the Early Church Fathers.

4. Letters written by the same author

The best way to determine how a writer is using a particular word is to look at how he uses that word elsewhere.

E.g. Paul speaks of “working out your salvation” in Phil. 2:12. By looking at his use of the same Greek word for work (*katargazomai*), used in Rom. 15:18 & 2 Cor. 12:12; it becomes clear that this word does not imply earning or meriting salvation as it is used in Philipians.

5. Use of the word in the same letter or passage

Often times, it is not necessary to go to a different letter. The author will use the word more than once in the same letter in a way that is helpful in arriving at his intended meaning. By comparing Paul’s use of “folly” in 1 Cor. 3:19 to his use of the same word in 1 Cor. 2:14; we can see that he uses it a value judgment rather than a way of describing incomprehension.

6. Comparing how words are used by different authors

Both faith and works are used differently by Paul and James. Investigating the range of meaning and then each author's specific meaning, help to demonstrate they do not hold contradictory positions.

a) Faith

James speaks about a faith that has no works and is of no value. (James 2:14ff). He mentions one believes in God but points out even the demons believe. Paul, on the other hand, is clearly using a different meaning of faith when he says "by grace you have been saved through faith".

b) Works

James describes works as clothing people, feeding the hungry; i.e. acts of love. Paul uses "works" to refer to obeying the law through circumcision or keeping the Sabbath. Both of these meanings fall within the range of meaning but are very different in their specific use

27

Understanding the Letters in the New Testament: Part 2

I. HOW SENTENCES ARE UNDERSTOOD

The key tool for understanding statements is grammar, which involves syntax structures. This varies between languages. In English, the position of the words in a sentence determines the meaning of the sentence. In Greek, the order of the words are irrelevant; rather it's the ending of the words that determines meaning.

In the absence of knowing Greek, a reader is one step removed from the original language and thus relies on the English translator. While there are obvious advantages in having access to the original language, it is noted that most English translations are very reliable in their ability to accurately express what the biblical authors intended.

A. Understanding Propositions

1. Clausal relationships

Paying attention to how words and clauses within a sentence relate to each other is extremely important in understanding the meaning of the sentence. From Dr. Stein's book, the following are examples of how clauses can relate:

a) Cause

(A) is because of (B); i.e. (B) is the cause of (A)

b) Result

(B) is the result of (A)

c) Purpose

(B) is the purpose of (A)

d) Condition

(A) is the condition of (B)

e) Concession

Despite (A), (B) took place

f) Means

(A) is the means by which (B) is accomplished

g) Manner

(A) is done in the manner of (B)

2. Distinguishing between means and cause

Recognizing the difference between means and cause can be important in correctly interpreting certain propositions. Examine the following verse:

a) Ephesians 2:8-9

Grace is the instrumental cause of salvation. We are not saved because we have faith. We are saved because Jesus died for our sins and defeated death by his resurrection. This act of grace by God is the cause of salvation.

Faith is the means by which grace is appropriated. An analogy to this would be a life-saving medicine given through a hypodermic needle. The needle doesn't save the life; it is the means by which the medicine is delivered.

B. Following an Argument - Romans 13:1-7

1. Let every person be subject...

This is a general exhortation.

2. For there is no authority except from God...

Notice the "for"-the cause. This is theological grounds for the exhortation.

3. Whoever resists the authorities ... will incur judgment

This is the result, the consequence of the theological grounds.

4. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

This begins a new argument noted by another "for". What follows is a positive example.

5. Do what is good, and you will receive his approval

A positive example for the argument.

6. If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

This is a negative example for the argument

7. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed

The argument is completed. It began with a general exhortation and ends with a concluding exhortation.

Once this argument is understood, one must ask if it should be universally applied. If a Christian is under an evil government, this would not appear to fit Paul's description of "God's servant for your good". However, it should be noted that in writing this letter, Paul must have had the Roman government in mind. Therefore, one could conclude that the government would not have to be ideal or perfect to qualify in this passage.

C. The Form of an Ancient Letter

1. Greeting or salutation

A secular greeting or salutation would include the writer's name and the recipient(s) name. If it was a Jewish letter the greeting would include shalom which is typically translated as peace in English. Christians added grace so that most of the NT letters contain both of these- "Grace to you and peace..."

2. Thanksgiving or prayer

E.g. "I thank God for you in Jesus Christ"; etc.

3. The body of the letter

The length of the body can be brief or very lengthy as with Paul's letter to the Romans.

4. Conclusion

There is no standard kind of conclusion. Sometimes the conclusion is a simple wish for peace. In other letters it might consist of a concluding autograph or a benediction.

5. Insights from consideration of form

Greetings can become lengthy and pregnant with introduction material in some Paul's letters. (E.g. Romans) The longer introductions are typical when he is writing to a church he has not founded.

All of Paul's letters included a word of thanksgiving/praise, even his letter of admonishment to the church in Corinth. The only exception is his letter to the Galatians. He moves straight to the body of the letter which begins with a strong rebuke. The lack of thanksgiving/prayer reveals much about Paul's view of the situation there.

QUESTIONS

1. Key tools for understanding the meaning of a word include a dictionary and a concordance. What is the key tool for understanding the meaning of propositions/sentences?

28

The Genre of Covenant

I. TWO TYPES OF COVENANTS

A. Parity Covenant

This is a covenant made between equals.

B. Suzerain Covenant

Studies in A.N.E. (Ancient Near Eastern) literature, have revealed a form of treaty or covenant that strongly resembles the form of covenant found in the OT. Unlike a parity covenant, the Suzerain Covenant was a one way treaty from the king or noble to the people. These were typically accepted by the people due to the generally gracious nature of the covenant.

II. ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (GENESIS 19:1-9)

This is the beginning of the covenant God made with Abraham and his offspring. Notice that Abraham and God are not negotiating the terms. It is one-sided in that regard but it is gracious in nature.

III. COVENANT LANGUAGE IN SCRIPTURE

A. Exodus

God hears the groaning of Israel under the bondage of slavery in Egypt. God remembers his former covenant with Abraham

B. Mark 14

Jesus took the cup at the Last Supper and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many".

C. Acts 3

Peter, preaching at Pentecost in Acts 3:22ff, recalled the Abrahamic Covenant by quoting from the OT. "You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham..."

D. Corinthians

In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul speaks about the Lord's Supper and refers to the cup as the New Covenant.

IV. PARTS OF A COVENANT

A. Mosaic Covenant at Mt Sinai (Exodus 20:2ff)

1. The Preamble

"I am the Lord your God"; In the preamble, the covenant maker identifies himself.

2. The Prologue

"who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"; The prologue gives an historical account of how the covenant maker has acted graciously toward the people.

3. The Stipulations

The stipulations consists of a list of requirements in order for a person to remain in the covenant relationship In this case the stipulations are the Ten Commandments found in verses 3 through 17. Important note: These are not to cause one to enter the covenant. The covenant has already been entered into graciously by the covenant maker. These stipulations spell out what the recipient must do to remain faithful in it.

4. Provision for Continual Reading

Exodus 24:7

5. Witnesses

There is usually a reference to the various witnesses present and sometimes a stone or memorial erected.

B. Covenant with Joshua (Joshua 24:1ff)

1. Preamble

Joshua 24:1-2a

2. Historical Prologue (extensive in this case)

Joshua 24:2b-13

3. Stipulations

Joshua 24:14-21

4. Provision for Continuous Reading

Joshua 24:26-27

5. Witnesses

Joshua 24:22-23

C. Types of law in the OT

The laws of the OT are essentially stipulations. As such, it is a mistake to view them as some sort of means of entering the covenant. Therefore legalism; the idea of keeping the law to the extent it warrants God's graciousness, is not a possibility.

1. Civil laws

These had to do with civil issues of governance for the nation of Israel.

Example: Deuteronomy 22:1ff

2. Cultic laws

Sacrificial law and dietary laws; E.g. Leviticus 2-6.

3. Moral laws

E.g. the Ten Commandments

The moral laws are still applicable as they are a reflection of God's character which does not change.

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Psalms

I. STRUCTURE

The book of Psalms, the largest book of the bible, actually consists of five books. Each of these books ends with a doxology.

A. Book 1- Psalms 1-41

Reference doxology in Psalm 41:13

B. Book 2- Psalms 42-72

Reference doxology in Psalm 72:19-20

C. Book 3- Psalms 73- 89

Reference doxology in Psalm 89:52

D. Book 4- Psalms 90-106

Reference doxology in Psalm 106:48

E. Book 5- Psalms 107- 150

Reference doxology in Psalm 150:6 (Note: the entire Psalm is a doxology.)

II. AUTHORSHIP

73 Psalms are attributed to David; 12 to Asaph; and 11 to the sons of Korah. Much of the arrangements of these books, and the editing work was done by unknown editorialists. This understand this work as being divinely authorized. How the Psalms are arranged helps in their interpretation.

III. CATEGORIES OF PSALMS

A. Psalms of Zion

Zion speaks of the city of God. When you speak of the glory of Zion, you are speaking of the glory of God.

Examples include Psalm 46, 76, 84, 87, & 122.

B. Royal Psalms

These are psalms about the king of Israel, God's anointed ruler over his people. Typically, what is true for this king is even truer for the ultimate King of kings, Jesus. Therefore there are Messianic implications in these Royal Psalms that the NT writers recognized.

Examples include: Psalm 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 132, & 144.

C. Hymns

Examples include: Psalm 19, 24, 29, 47, 95-100, & 104.

D. Wisdom Psalms

Psalm 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, & 133

E. Penitential Psalms

These Psalms express penitence for sin and a plea for forgiveness.

Examples include: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, & 130.

F. Imprecatory Psalms

These are petitions to God for judgment on enemies. The language can be difficult but we are mostly sheltered from the kind of brutality to which ancient people were exposed. It is important to remember that the Psalmist is not asking for personal vengeance; rather they are calling for God to execute his justice.

Examples include Psalm 35, 58, 69, 83, 109, & 137.

G. Praise Psalms

Some of these are individual in nature (Psalm 8, 18, 30, 32-34, 40, 66, 75, 81, 92, 103, 104, 106, 108, 111-113, 116, 118, 135, & 138, 145-150.)

Other praise Psalms are clearly corporate in nature (Psalm 65, 67, 107, 114, 117, 124, & 136)

H. Lament Psalms

Almost a third of all the Psalms are laments. These are not often taught in church services but it is a mistake to avoid them. Suffering is part of life and they are extremely beneficial in this regard.

A few examples of the many laments are: Psalm 13, 71, & 142.

1. Laments have a typical form consisting of 5 parts:

a) Address to God

b) Complaint

The description of the problem or source of misery)

c) Prayer for help or deliverance

d) Confession of confidence

Affirmation that God will deliver

e) Praise

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The Books That Make Up the Bible

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Scripture in Jesus' day

In Jesus' day, the Old Testament was already fairly well established. It consisted of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Prophets were subdivided into former and latter Prophets (containing the Major and Minor Prophets). For the Jews in Jesus day, the 12 Minor Prophets were considered as one single book.

B. Scripture in the early church

At Pentecost, the Bible of the church was the Old Testament. They also had the Jesus Traditions. These were the deeds and words of Jesus that were circulated with great care during the period between the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the writing of the Gospels and other books of the NT.

II. THE RISE OF CANON CONSIDERATION

A. The heresy of Marcion

Marcion was a Gnostic, a Christian heretic, who denied the OT and all the Gospels except Luke. He ended up claiming a Bible that consisted of Luke and 10 letters of Paul. This was rejected by Christians but it began the discussion about what books should be considered as Scripture.

B. Codex invention

Codex was a new form of writing material that replaced the scroll. Scrolls were typically limited to about 20 feet or less. With the advent of codex, multiple books could be assembled together. This caused the church to continue to wrestle with the problem of which books would be included in the assembled codex.

C. Persecution

Opponents of the church sought to destroy the sacred writings during periods of persecution. This situation forced Christians to decide which books they were willing to die for.

III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

A. New Testament references

There are numerous references in the New Testament that indicate the passing on of the Jesus traditions and the acknowledgment of authoritative Scripture beyond the Old Testament. These represent the beginning germ form of a canon of Scripture.

1. Colossians 4:14-16

This indicates that during the life and ministry of Paul, his letters were being exchanged and collected among the various churches.

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:27

“To all the brethren” indicates this letter was to be distributed beyond the church in Thessalonica.

3. 2 Peter 3:16

This acknowledges a collection of Paul's letters and, more important, it refers to them as Scripture.

4. 1 Timothy 5:18

This is a reference to Deuteronomy 25. However, it is interesting to note that the last comment about a laborer deserving his wages, is not found in the Deuteronomy. It is found in Matt. 10:10 and Luke 10:14. This is evidence that Paul was either quoting the written Gospel of Luke or, both were quoting from an oral tradition. Either way, it is recognized as authoritative.

5. Acts 20:35

There is no quotation like this in any of the 4 Gospels. This is more evidence of the existence of an authoritative oral tradition.

B. Early church writings

1. 1st Clement

Written in A.D. 96, Clement of Rome referred to Romans, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, and probably Luke and Acts; as part of the scrolls they held as Scripture.

2. Didache

This early document of the church, written between A.D.75 and 125, has several possible references to the various Gospels.

3. Writings of Papius

Papius wrote 6 volumes which were commentaries on the Gospels, suggesting they were recognized as part of the canon of Scripture.

4. Epistle of Barnabas

This was written between A.D. 70 to 150 and quotes Matt. 22:14 as Scripture.

5. Diatesseron

The title of this work, written around A.D.170, means “through the four”; referring to the 4 Gospels. This was an early Gospel harmony which indicated that by 170, the church recognized the four Gospels as Scripture.

6. Muratorian canon

Muratorini was a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church who, in 1740, discovered the diary of an 8th century monk which contained a fragment listing the books of the New Testament that were recognized as Scripture. The fragment itself dates to the 7th century but there are indications within the text that it was copied from a Greek original dating back as early as A.D. 170. This has become known as the Muratorian canon. This appears to show that the church had a basic New Testament, dating back to the 2nd century that contained the following books:

The 4 Gospels, Acts, the Letters of Paul, Jude to Johannine Revelation, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Apocalypse of Peter.

7. Writings of Ireneus

Ireneus, one of the early church fathers, wrote describing the situation of canon in A.D. 200. He categorized Scripture into two groups:

a) Homologoumena

Those books universally confessed

b) Antilegomena

Those books who were confessed by most but disputed by some.

Among the books he identified as antilegomena were: James, Jude, 2 John, 3 John, 2nd Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation. By including these books, you have a New Testament that is very close to what Protestants have today.

IV. CLARIFICATION OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

A. Eusebius

Eusebius was a great church historian who summarized the writings of the New Testament and who characterized the antilegomena books as being accepted by the majority. This demonstrated that, by Eusebius' day, the 27 books of our New Testament were accepted by the majority.

B. Recognition of our 27 NT books

Further recognition of the 27 NT books as canonical was made by: Jerome in A.D. 400; Augustine; the Church Council of Hippo

C. The Protestant- Roman Catholic debate

The basic theological debate concerning canonicity was based on the question:

Is the NT an authorized collection of books or a collection of authoritative books? I.e. could the church pass authority to the collection or does the church simply have the ability to recognize books which are authoritative. The Protestants held the latter view.

V. FACTORS IN RECOGNIZING AUTHORITATIVE BOOKS

A. Apostolic authorship

Was the book written by an apostle or one closely associated with an apostle? E.g. Mark's association with Peter and Luke's association with Paul?

B. Continuous usage

Was the book used from the early years of the church or was it a “Johnny-come-lately”?

C. Unity and agreement

Did the book contain conflicts with other books of the canon?

D. Superintendence of the Holy Spirit

In the providence of God, He not only guided writers to record the Scriptures through inspiration; He also guided the preservation and recognition of those inspired books.

VI. THE ARRANGEMENT OF NT BOOKS

The NT books are arranged in logical order rather than chronological order. The four Gospels were grouped together, followed by Acts. Paul's letters were arranged by size. Hebrews was associated with Paul and was located at the end of his letters. This was followed by the catholic (universal epistles). Revelation takes us to the end of history and is, therefore, placed at the end of the Bible.

VII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

A. Inerrancy

Although manuscript copies are extremely accurate, it is preferable to talk about inerrancy in the context of the original autographs.

B. Inspiration

The writers recognized that what they were writing was inspired and therefore authoritative. (References: 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Cor. 7:17)

