

Methods of Interpretation- week 1

The statement- “people can make the Bible say whatever they want it to say”- is this true?

The need for interpretation

Understanding the Bible is like gardening...

Goal is to get to the **plain meaning**.

It is easy to bring our own assumptions to the text and misunderstand it.

Can anyone interpret scripture?

Some definitions

Hermeneutics- critical reflection upon processes of interpretation and understanding, especially in regard to biblical texts or texts from other cultures- this is the philosophical technique for interpretation

Exegesis- careful, systematic study of the Bible to discover the original intended meaning- this is the practical application of hermeneutics to a text

Eisegesis- to 'read one's own interpretation into a text'

Thinking of when Paul wrote the book of Philippians as an example. What barriers can you think of that might stop us from understanding his message properly?

As people teach and preach God's word... essentially they say 'God says' ... God wants it taught properly

James 3:1- "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

3 Barriers to correct interpretation

1. Desire to be unique
2. Reading from our own viewpoint
3. Difficult to understand their viewpoint

As Gordon Fee says, “The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the ‘plain meaning of the text,’ the author’s intended meaning.”

Tools helpful

Language

Getting a good translation of the Bible

families of manuscripts

Literal vs. Dynamic

Recommended translations- NIV2011,
Updated NASB

Careful with- Amplified, Message

Avoid- something you can’t read, especially
avoid the New World Translation (heresy)

Commentaries

4 different types of commentaries- Devotional, Cultural, Exegetical, Language- and mixtures of these

Commentary Exercise

Good common sense

An eye for context (say more about that later)

Other tools

Bible Handbook, Bible Dictionary, Concordance, Atlas... Bible Software

Structure of the Bible

Hebrew Bible

Tanakh (or called Masoretic Text)- TaNaKh

Named after 3 sections Torah, Neviim (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings)

24 books- Samuel, Kings, Chronicles (are 1 book each), Ezra-Nehemiah, and minor prophets are all one book

Torah- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Prophets- (Former Prophets) Joshua, Judges, Books of Samuel (I & II), Kings (I & II), (Latter Prophets) Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve Minor Prophets

Writings- (3 poetic books first) Psalms, Proverbs, Job, (Five books know as the Megillot) Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, (3 other books that we all written late) Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (I & II)

LXX/ The Septuagint (ancient Greek Old Testament)

Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.) had seventy-two Jewish scholars begin to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into a Greek version called the Septuagint.

The Roman numeral LXX (seventy being the nearest round number to seventy-two) has become the common symbol for this version of the Old Testament.

Latin

Vulgate was Latin translation of the Bible from the 4th century

Official divide between the western and eastern church in 1053/4

Systematic vs. Biblical Theology

Individual books of the Bible can have a logic and language unique from other books

Context! Context! Context! (and Content)

Historical Context

Historical Criticism- narrowly defined- “the study of any narrative which purports to convey historical information in order to determine what actually happened”

Historical Factors:

Cultural factors

Geographical factors

Political factors

The Reason for writing

Who the audience is

Exercise- read story from The Desert Fathers- what are the cultural differences that cause us to hear this story in a different way than the people of its time?

The Literary Context

Literary Criticism- approaches that regard the Bible as literature and try to understand it as such

Learning to trace the author's train of thought.

How does this fit within the paragraph / chapter/ book, etc.

Verse / paragraph/ chapter breaks are often not helpful for this (example 2 Cor 6 to 7)

Bible genres

Form Criticism- historical- critical analytical method that identifies and compares conventional structural and content features of biblical texts- or it is the study of forms used in communication

OT- dirge, psalm, proverb, instruction, song, prayer

M. Dibelius who studied under Hermann Gunkel- identified 6 kinds of material in the gospels alone- sermon material, paradigms, tales, legends, passion story, and myth

Various forms are found in NT letters- thanksgiving, benediction, doxology, petition, disclosure, greeting

Genre categories can be conceived of as a series of concentric circles, in which fewer texts share a greater number of features as one moves toward the centre: poetry- psalm- lament- of the individual- with confession of guilt (Vanhoozer)

According to Campbell in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the 21st Century*- a literary genre is best understood as “a tag that an interpreter can put on a text after its secrets have been explored... that helps situate a text within a general class so that it can be more easily understood”

Law, History, Narrative, Wisdom, Psalms, Prophecy, Gospel, Epistle, Apocalyptic
(not universally agreed categories... also they are too simplistic... but realizing they are helpful)

Genre/ Book Table challenge- I will read out a verse until a table can identify the genre and book of the Bible

Jonah- is it... a fable, didactic novel, prophetic legend, parable, midrash, allegory, prophetic confession, or a mixture of several genres...

If you wanted to argue for a genre to Jonah what would you point to?

J.A. Baird- book “Genre Analysis as a Method of Historical Criticism”- suggests 5 criteria for a generic type- 1. That it has characteristics that set it apart from other generic types, 2. These characteristics recur with enough frequency to distinguish it others, 3. Form a logically coherent pattern within the set, 4. Persist in writings before and after the time of writing, and 5. Contain a similar style, language, and content

Content

Original language- don't fall into the amplified error

6 Common errors to avoid in interpretation...

1. Allegorizing- giving things spiritual meaning that they do not have
2. Taking things out of context
3. Wrongly combining passages
4. Redefining to make truth less difficult
5. Self-centred interpretation
6. Reading through a doctrinal lens

Next Time... Old Testament Law and Old Testament Narrative... this will cause us to face questions such as when does the Old Testament laws apply to us, and what do we do with stories of Israel brutally conquering a land that wasn't theirs?

(So we will cover from Genesis all the way to Esther!)

Commentary type exercise

Based on Galatians 6:2 (NLT) - Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

- 1- ***Bear ye one another's burdens*** (*allēlōn ta barē bastazete*). Keep on bearing (present active imperative of *bastazō*, old word, used of Jesus bearing his Cross in [John 19:17](#). *Baros* means weight as in [Matthew 20:12](#); [2 Cor. 4:17](#). It is when one's load (*phortion*, [Galatians 6:5](#)) is about to press one down. Then give help in carrying it.

Fulfil (*anaplērōsate*). First aorist active imperative of *anaplēroō*, to fill up, old word, and see notes on [§Matthew 23:32](#); [§1 Thes. 2:16](#); [§1 Cor. 14:16](#). Some MSS. have future indicative (*anaplērōsete*).
- 2- **6:2**. The image of bearing another's "burden" or "weight" (the term was also applied metaphorically to griefs) might remind readers of slaves or of impressment (Roman soldiers could require local people to carry something for them). In either case, it is an image of subservience that demands more than convenience. "Bear burdens" in this context must include helping a fellow Christian deal with sins ([Galatians 6:1](#)). Many take "law of Christ" as referring to a saying of Jesus, but in the context of Galatians it more likely refers to his example and the character of Jesus imparted by the Spirit ([Galatians 2:20](#); [Galatians 5:14](#)).
- 3- **6:2** As used in this verse, **troubles and problems** refer to the heavy or oppressive burdens that a believer cannot carry alone. It could be financial burdens; it could be burdens of temptation. We must help **share** the loads that others find too heavy to carry alone. However, we must not regard this load as a burden, but a joy. Like people hiking a trail, we not only shoulder our own backpacks, but we help out with other

people's loads when the trail gets too steep, they get too tired, or their feet get blistered—whenever they need assistance.

To share one another's troubles also obeys **the law of Christ**. How so? As Paul had explained in [5:14](#), "For the whole law can be summed up in a this one command, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Jesus told his disciples on the night before his crucifixion, "I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other" ([John 13:34](#), see also [John 15:12](#)). The **law of Christ** is his "new commandment" summed up when we show love for others. In a sense Paul was saying, "If you insist on carrying burdens, don't carry the burden of the law; instead, in love, carry one another's burdens. Then you not only help one another out and build unity among yourselves, you also fulfill the law of Christ!"

- 4- [6:2](#). A serving Christian lends a helping hand with heavy loads (*barē*, cf. [comments](#) on [v. 5](#)). Though the principle would apply to all burdens the context has special reference to the heavy and oppressive weight of temptation and spiritual failure. While the "spiritual" do the work of restoring, all believers are to become involved by prayer and encouragement. This, wrote Paul, will fulfill (*anaplērōsete*) **the law of Christ**, that is, the principle of love (cf. [5:14](#); [John 13:34](#)).

Culture exercise

John and Paul in this story should not be confused with the John and Paul of the new testament.

They said of John, the disciple of Paul, that he was full of the virtue of obedience. There was a tomb in which lived a dangerous lioness. Paul saw the dung of the lioness lying round and said to John, 'Go and fetch that dung.' John said to him, 'What shall I do, abba, about the lioness?' The hermit said, as a joke, 'If she comes at you, tie her up and bring her here.' So John went there in the evening, and the lioness rushed at him. He obeyed the hermit and ran to catch her, so the lioness turned and fled. John chased her, shouting, 'Wait! My abba told me to tie you up.' He caught her and tied her up. The hermit sat a long time waiting for him, and was getting very anxious because he was late. But at last John came, and brought the lioness with him, tied up. Paul marvelled at the sight. But wanting to humble him (John), he beat him and said, 'You fool, have you brought me that silly dog?' and he immediately untied her, and drove her away.

What surprises you about this story?

What cultural differences stop us from hearing this story in the way it was intended?

Genre Book Quiz

Gospel- **Luke 18:10 (ANIV)** "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Wisdom- **Proverbs 21:19 (ANIV)** - Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

Prophecy- **Ezekiel 33:2-4 (ANIV)** = ² "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, ³ and he sees the sword coming..."

Narrative- **Esther 3:3 (ANIV)** Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"

History- **Daniel 1:1 (ANIV)** - In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Epistle- **1 Peter 1:13 (ANIV)** - Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Law- **Leviticus 13:29-30 (ANIV)** - "If a man or woman has a sore on the head or on the chin, ³⁰ the priest is to examine the sore, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce that person unclean; it is an itch, an infectious disease of the head or chin.

Apocalyptic- **Daniel 8:3 (ANIV)** - I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later.

Psalms- **1 Chronicles 16:7-9 (ANIV)** - That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the LORD: ⁸ Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. ⁹ Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.