

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR ALL ITS WORTH

A SURVEY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION BASED ON THE BOOK BY GORDON D. FEE & DOUGLAS STUARTⁱ

CLASS GOALS

- Understand why biblical interpretation is necessary
- Explore different types of Bible translations
- Identify key literary genres of the Bible
- Describe key elements of the historical context of each of the major biblical literary genres
- Learn how to approach the literary context of each of the major biblical literary genres
- Encounter both good and bad examples of biblical interpretation in each major literary genre
- Be empowered and inspired to read the Bible for all its worth

CLASS OUTLINE

June 4 – The Need to Interpret, Bible Translations, Old Testament Narrative

June 11 – The Law, Psalms

June 18 – Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospels, Parables

June 25 – Epistles, Revelation, Evaluation and Use of Commentaries

REVIEW

- Scripture will be interpreted by whoever reads it, so we should endeavor to interpret well.
- The best interpretation is the plain meaning of the text.
- The Bible is the word of God given in the words of people in history.
- The Bible cannot mean what it never meant. It has a context.
- There are two main categories of context we can consider:
 - Historical: geographical, topographical, political, author's reason for writing
 - Literary: genre, discourse structure, grammar
- Two aspects of interpretation: exegesis and hermeneutics

Exegesis

Historical particularity

Original context

Original meaning

Application for original audience

Hermeneutics

Eternal relevance

Present-day context

Original meaning (for me)

Application for reader

A. GOSPELS

EACH GOSPEL IS A BOOK ABOUT JESUS, INCLUDING LARGE BLOCKS OF HIS TEACHINGS

What is the original context?

What is the purpose of the author?

Matthew focuses on Jesus being the long-awaited Messiah and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Matthew emphasizes Jesus' teaching and highlights his role as the King and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. He connects Jesus' ministry to Jewish heritage.

Mark is fast paced and focuses on Jesus actions. Mark portrays Jesus as suffering servant and emphasizes his miracles and healings. Mark highlights the urgency and immediacy of Jesus' ministry.

Luke provides a detailed and comprehensive account of Jesus' life. He emphasizes compassion for the marginalized and downtrodden, such as the poor, women, and the outcasts of society. He also places more emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit than the other gospel authors.

John tends to be the Western Christian's favorite because he has theological depth. John focuses on the identity of Jesus and highlights Jesus' more difficult teachings. John focuses on themes of love, light and eternal life, and he does a deep dive on the nature of Jesus' relationship with God the Father.

B. PARABLES

What is the original context?

What is the purpose of the author?

Parables are not allegories. Don't read too much into them. They often have a single point.

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C. PROPHECY

“We should note at the outset that the prophetic books are among the most difficult parts of the Bible to interpret or read with understanding. The reasons for this are related to misunderstandings as to their *function* and *form*.”

What is prophecy? (166-167)

THE NEED FOR OUTSIDE HELP (172-173)

THE FUNCTIONS OF PROPHECY (167-171)

- Covenant enforcement mediation
- Relay God’s word
- The prophets’ message is unoriginal

Last week we asked the question: if God is unchanging, why do the rules change? And we marveled at the beauty of God’s flexibility with us and how he meets us where we’re at and brings his sovereign, unchanging truth and makes it come to life in our context. It is incredible how God shows up and loves us.

How did God show up in a different way with the prophets than he did with the law? Why do you think God did that?

THE FORMS OF PROPHECY (177-180)

- Some types of prophecies:
 - The lawsuit (Isaiah 3:13-26)
 - The woe (Habakkuk 2:6-8)
 - The promise (Amos 9:11-15)
- Some poetic forms:
 - Synonymous parallelism (Isaiah 44:22)
 - Antithetical parallelism (Hosea 7:14)
 - Synthetic parallelism (Obadiah 21)

DUAL EMPHASIS ON ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXY (185-186)

- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Malachi 4:6

D. WISDOM

“Hebrew wisdom is a category of literature that is unfamiliar to most modern Christians. Though a significant portion of the Bible is devoted to wisdom writings, Christians often either misunderstand or misapply this material, losing benefits that God intended for them. When properly understood and used, however, wisdom is a helpful resource for Christian living. When misused, it can provide a basis for selfish, materialistic, short-sighted behavior—just the opposite of what God intended.”

What is wisdom?

MISREADING OF WISDOM LITERATURE

1. Ignore the immediate context (Ecclesiastes 3:2)
2. Misunderstand the style/mode (Proverbs 14:7)
3. Fail to follow the larger line of argument/context (Eliphaz in Job 15:20)

Does anyone have an example of a time when they or someone they knew misread wisdom literature?

HERMENEUTICAL GUIDELINES FOR PROVERBS

1. Proverbs are often parabolic, or figurative, pointing beyond themselves.
2. Proverbs are often intensely practical, not theoretically theological.
3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.
4. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior—just the opposite!
5. Proverbs strongly reflecting ancient culture may need sensible “translation” so as not to lose their meaning.
6. Proverbs are not guarantees from God, but poetic guidelines for good behavior.
7. Proverbs may use highly specific language, exaggeration, or any variety of literary techniques to make their point.
8. Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life, but are not exhaustive in their coverage.
9. Wrongly used, proverbs might justify a crass, materialistic lifestyle. Rightly used proverbs will provide practical advice for daily living.

Do we find direct commands from God in wisdom literature?

Do we find passages in wisdom literature from which we can derive systematic theological teachings?

ⁱ Fee, Gordon D., and Stuart, Douglas. “How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth,” 2nd Edition. Zondervan, 1993.