

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE: HANDOUTS

Two Hermeneutical Methods Contrasted

2 Tim. 4:13; 1 Cor. 11; Jn. 13:14-15.

2-step method: Text → Today

3-step method: Text → _____ → Today

Story of the Bible

5 components.

God.

Creation. Creation is God's first act of grace.

Fall. In the fallen world, we learn dependence on God in the wilderness.

Re-Creation/Redemptive History. God seeks to redeem, not scrap it all and start over, although he could have done that. Jesus' death and resurrection mean atonement for sin. His resurrection is eschatological.

Eschaton.

Textual Criticism

This discipline is called "lower criticism." You have to know *what* the correct text is before you start trying to understand and interpret it.

Manuscript Evidence. Homer's *Iliad* is probably the most well attested document of classical antiquity (ca. 650 mss). The NT has over 5,000 Greek manuscripts that contain all or part of the NT, and over 15,000 early translations.

Putting all these together, we can be sure of the accuracy of the text we have.

-Copying errors

1. "Unintentional" errors-

a. Copying from one manuscript. Examples?

b. Copying from dictation. Similar sounds. Examples?

2. « Intentional » changes-

a. Forced agreement. Why would someone want to force agreement like this?

Examples?

b. Clarified doctrine. Examples?

-What are text critics looking for?

-Prefer older over newer readings (like 1 Jn. 5:7).

-Prefer the shorter over longer readings (e.g., Mt. 6:13). Why?

-Prefer the more difficult over easier readings (Mk. 1:2- some omitted "Isaiah").

-Prefer quality over quantity of witnesses.

-Accuracy?

-The oldest surviving manuscripts of the OT are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date back to ca. 150 BC. Oldest manuscript of OT before this was ca. AD 850. Dead S. S. proved they were transmitted quite accurately.

-The oldest surviving papyrus of the NT is known as "p52," the John Rylands papyrus, which is a portion of the Gospel of John that dates back to c. AD 100-125. What does this prove?

CANON

-What is a *canon*?

-How do we know if a book belongs in the Bible? **apostolicity**

1. Who is the author? No Judas, etc.

2. How does the doctrine compare with the recognized rule of faith?

3. What has been the history of the work? Who has considered the book authoritative?

-These criteria were not systematically employed; and only debated for about 6 books. By ca. 200, only James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation were debatable, though accepted by most.

INSPIRATION

What does inspiration mean?

How does it work? Different theories of inspiration:

1. Natural- terrific idea.

2. Conceptual-

3. Partial/Limited-

4. Verbal- God kept the writer from error.

5. Mechanical Dictation-

If you look at Scripture, you notice inspiration does not always look the same.

-2 Esdras 14:39-44.

-Ex. 34:6ff.

-2 Pet. 1:21.

-Mt. 10:19-20.

-Jn. 14:26.

-1 Cor. 2:11-13.

-Isa. 5.

-Lk. 1:1-4.

-Pss.

-2 Cor. 11:16-21.

Think of inspiration more functionally than ontologically. 2 Tim. 3:16-17- "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So let me offer a way for thinking about the Bible as both a human and a divine book. There is evidence for this throughout Scripture.

Consider the Bible. Is it a human book? It was written out by humans, it's written in particular languages, to particular people, in a particular style. Is it a divine book? It infallibly points us to Christ and to God the Father, it teaches us the way of salvation.

Does anyone doubt this is a human book? Does anyone doubt that these words originated from the pen of human beings? Can we prove it's a fully human book? But does anyone doubt its divinity? Are there any otherwise fair-minded people that have read the Bible and still doubt its divinity? The Bible's divinity is the scandalous aspect of its nature. *Believers claim that Scripture is one book with two natures, human and divine. "The Bible is a completely human book." True. "...merely human..." False.

Discussion question: What do you do when you think Scripture might be wrong?

Eight Steps to Developing Exegetical Messages

1. Prayerfully conduct a careful **Initial Reading**.
 - a. Read through the entire book of Scripture (or at least the few chapters surrounding your passage) in at least two reliable translations (e.g., RSV, NIV, NASB, NRSV, REB, NJB, ESV, CEB, KJV, NKJV). Use the footnotes of these translations to identify significant textual or translation variants in your passage.
 - b. Note the primary themes of the book and its genre, e.g.:
 - i. Narrative
 - ii. Law
 - iii. Poetry
 - iv. Proverb
 - v. Prophecy
 - vi. Epistle
 - c. Define the pericope (passage) from which you will develop a message and note its “fit” in its immediate context and in the flow of the book.
 - d. Identify the specific genre of the passage.
 - e. Begin compiling three lists to be updated and revised in the course of your investigation:
 - i. a list of everything in the text you and your audience need to know more about in order to comprehend the passage.
 - ii. a list of discoveries you make in your study that have promise of being mentioned in your sermon or class.
 - iii. a list of possible “theme statements” summarizing the message(s) the text conveys, around which you might organize your sermon or class.
2. Examine the **Historical Context** of the passage.
 - a. Author/audience
 - b. Situation, significant events
 - c. Geography
 - d. Culture
3. Investigate the **Language and Structure** of the passage.
 - a. Select three or four words to investigate in detail, in the original language to the extent possible and especially as used in the book and author under investigation.
 - b. Grammar (e.g., pronouns and antecedents, verb tenses)
 - c. Figures (metaphor, parable, hyperbole, apocalyptic, typology)
 - d. Sketch the rhetorical flow of the passage, identifying the narrative or argumentative “turning points” in the text.
4. Compose a preliminary **Paraphrase** of the passage, incorporating what you have learned thus far, and prioritize your list of possible theme statements in light of this paraphrase.

5. Consider the **Canonical Context** of the passage. Apply the “Rule of Scripture” and consider how other Scriptures might clarify or sharpen the significance of your text.
 - a. Parallel passages and similar content
 - b. Themes throughout Scripture

6. Explore the **Theological Implications** of the passage. Consider how the teaching of your passage relates to the great Christian theological traditions, to the theological tradition in which you stand, and to the “Rule of Faith.”
 - a. Teaching about God and his relationship with his people
 - b. Theological principles

7. Consider your audience and make appropriate **Application(s)**.
 - a. What to believe (and which current beliefs / assumptions stand in contrast)
 - b. What to do (and what habitual actions / dispositions this will change)
 - c. What to hope for (and which underlying fears, hesitations, or competing godless hopes this hope will dislodge)

8. Prayerfully **outline and compose** a sermon or lesson.
 - a. Choose and refine one of the Theme Statements you have formulated (1.e.iii above) as the main point from the text around which you will construct a message for the church.
 - b. Incorporate as appropriate points from your “information needed” and “message possibilities” lists (1.e.i–ii above)

Thoughts on Historical Writings in the Bible by James Bury

The historical books and narratives in Scripture describe past events, but they do so in ways that may challenge certain assumptions about how history is written. Historical writings are not simply descriptions of events. They provide both more and less than reports of what was actually said and done. In an important way, historical writings are to historical events as maps are to a territory. Maps typically include information not found in the terrain (e.g., longitude and latitude) and exclude much of what is found there (e.g., plants and animals). In the same manner, historians may include details about an event that those present may not have seen, while excluding some of what participants witnessed. In other words, an account of the past is not merely what a video of the events might capture. This holds true whether that account comes from contemporary or biblical historians. In view of this, the following assumptions are proposed for consideration:

1. Historical accounts are shaped by the concerns and purposes of the writer. Contemporary scholars may place more emphasis than ancient authors on a thorough and complete account, but most historians—past or present—are interested in more than a chronicle of events. They want to explain why things happened as they did (often in light of personal, social, or political factors) and what can be learned from it all. Biblical writers are likewise interested in more than preserving history. They want to highlight its theological dimension and show what it reveals about God’s perspective and purpose.
2. Those telling the stories of the past are allowed to have personal commitments and loyalties. Authors are not required to claim a detached or neutral stance in order for the account to be considered trustworthy. The fact that biblical authors believe God is at work in the events they describe does not invalidate their accounts. Theological convictions and historical concerns are not mutually exclusive.
3. Historical writings should be interpreted and measured by the principles and methods of their own time and place. Contemporary writers seek to draw on and document as many sources as possible, but ancient writers had their own standards and practices. Biblical authors sought to provide reliable accounts (cf. Luke 1:1-4), but they did so in line with the historiography of their day. To be more specific about practices of ancient historians:
 - a. The necessary exclusion of any historical writing always results in selective and abridged accounts. A reliable record of the past does not need to be comprehensive in scope or perspective.
 - b. In conveying what was said or done, authors may summarize and synthesize the stories they tell. They may paraphrase, interpret, and adapt their account to their audiences (cf. idiomatic equivalency in translation). Historical reporting does not require *verbatim* quotations or “HD” depictions.
 - c. Historical accuracy allows for varying degrees of precision; veracity should not be equated with specificity.
 - d. Authors can employ various methods of organization; they do not always follow chronological order.