



BIBLE STUDY METHODS

by

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Lesson 1 ■ Introduction to Hermeneutics (Part 1)

Section 1: Presuppositions for Interpretation

SECTION OVERVIEW

This is a course in basic introduction to the Bible. We call the interpretation of the Bible “hermeneutics” and so this is a course in introductory hermeneutics. God’s Word, the Bible, came to us in human language and in human culture and human contexts and we understand God’s Word by reading it within that particular culture and context in which it was given. We are going to divide the course up into beginning with introductory issues and the first issue we are going to cover today are some of our presuppositions, the presuppositions we bring to the table to interpret the Bible.

THE BIBLE IS GOD’S WORD

1. The Bible is inspired by God.

- a. Claimed implicitly

- b. Claimed explicitly

2. The Authority of Scripture over ...

- a. Personal experience

- b. Reason

- c. Tradition or dogma

THE INTERPRETER MUST BE BORN AGAIN

2 Corinthians 4:4

1 Corinthians 2:14

Hebrews 4:12

THE INTERPRETER MUST BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

John 16:13

Inspiration

Illumination

Section 2: The Nature of the Bible: Unity and Diversity

SECTION OVERVIEW

As we begin the process of interpreting God's Word the first thing we have to ask is what is the Bible. We can only read and understand the Bible if we understand its nature and so this lecture is entitled The Nature of the Bible and I would subtitle it Unity and Diversity. It seems to me the best way to comprehend, the best way to understand the nature of the Bible is with the terms unity and diversity. Together these two terms really help us to understand what the Bible is and how we ought to approach it.

DIVERSITY OF THE BIBLE

1. Kinds of Diversity

2. Implications of Diversity

- a. We must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.

- b. We must recognize the progress of revelation.

- c. We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

3. Biblical Theology

Definition

Three Steps

UNITY OF THE BIBLE

1. Unity of Theme

Luke 24

Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture.

2. Implications of Unity

The Bible is one story.

A systematic theology becomes a possibility.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What other presuppositions or biases do you have about the Bible? How do our presuppositions effect the way we interpret the Bible? Is it possible to be completely objective in our interpretations? Are there some biases we should try to minimize?
2. Why does it matter that the Bible is the Word of God? What if it were merely a human book. How would that effect how we interpret and apply it? How does the style of the human writers effect our interpretation of a particular passage?
3. How do you allow the Bible to become authoritative over your life? What role does Scripture play in your daily decision-making? What role should it play? What role does it play in your church? How do we keep tradition from trumping Scripture?
4. Can someone who isn't a believer understand any part of Scripture? What role does faith play in interpretation of the Bible? What role does it play in application? What is the difference between understanding and application? How does the Spirit help you in this process of interpreting and applying God's Word?
5. What is the difference in taking a passage literally vs. taking it figuratively? Does it effect how we apply a particular passage? Are there different ways to define the word "literal?" What should be our overall approach to Scripture?
6. What is your general view about how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament? Have you considered one more important than the other, or spent more time reading one over the other? How do we apply Old Testament passages that don't seem to relate to present day? What does it mean to let the biblical writer speak for himself?
7. Take some time to reflect on how the Bible is a unified whole. How have you seen Jesus in the Old Testament? Do you tend to see too much or too little of Jesus in the Old Testament? What didn't the Jews of Jesus' day (particularly those on the road to Emmaus) not get that the OT was all about Jesus? Why do we still have a tough time grasping that today?
8. What difference does it make that the Bible is one story? How does that truth effect the way you interpret a particular passage of Scripture? How are our personal stories today affected by the grand story of Scripture? Does it effect how we live our lives?

RECOMMENDED READING

How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today, by Mark L. Strauss, pp. 1-12, 41-67.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 21-35.

Lesson 2 ■ Introduction to Hermeneutics (Part 2)

LESSON OVERVIEW

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. The goals of exegesis are to determine the meaning of a passage in its original context, and to determine the significance of the passage for today.

REVIEW OF LESSON ONE

HERMENEUTICS

Definition – the science and art of biblical interpretation.

Why do we need it?

THE GOALS OF HERMENEUTICS

Exegesis: To Determine the Meaning of a Passage in Its Original Context

Clarifications

1. The original meaning refers to the author's intended meaning.
2. Meaning is text-centered – the author's intent as discernible from the text and its context.
3. The text is historically positioned.

Bridge Illustration

Contextualization

Why do we need contextualization?

OT Commands

Exodus 29:38

Deuteronomy 21:18

Leviticus 19:19

Exodus 35:2

NT Commands

1 Peter 5:14

1 Corinthians 11:5

1 Timothy 5:23

Charlie Brown Cartoon

The Bible was not written to us, ...

... but it was written for us.

Contextualization vs. Application

AVOIDING SHORTCUTS

Application without Exegesis

Subjectivity

Proof Texting

Exegesis without Contextualization

Not allowing the Bible to transform your life

Confusing eternal principles with cultural applications

Magic answer book or verse-for-the-day syndrome

SUMMARY

REFLECTIONS QUESTIONS

1. Why do we need to interpret the Bible? How would you explain the importance of interpretation to a friend who says they just need to read the Bible?
2. Why is important to determine the author's intended meaning? How can we know that we have interpreted a passage correctly? Should we leave interpretation up to the "professionals" or should everyone do it?
3. Why do we need to contextualize? What are some of the dangers of leaving out the step of contextualization? What are some of the dangers of failing to do exegesis first? Which step are you more likely to leave out? What are some safeguards that you could put in place to avoid skipping a step in the hermeneutical process?
4. Draw out the bridge illustration and explain it to a friend. Be sure to talk about the challenges that you face in doing exegesis and contextualization, and where they both fit in the bridge illustration.

RECOMMENDED READING

How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today, by Mark L. Strauss, pp. 13-40.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 57-92.

Lesson 3 ■ Four Key Principles of Exegesis

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this session we are going to be looking at what we call the canon of scripture, the question of what books should be included as part of the Bible, as part of inspired scripture and why do we have the sixty-six books, thirty-nine books of our Old Testament and twenty-seven books of our New Testament in our Bibles, why these and no others. That is the question of canon.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LESSONS

FOUR PRINCIPLES

1. Determine the Author's Intended Meaning

Double Meaning?

Word Play

Dual Fulfillment of Prophecies

2. The Meaning of a Text is Genre Dependent

3. Context is the Key to Interpretation

Historical Context

General Historical Context

Geographical Context

Historical Political Context

Religious Situation

Mark 12

Specific Historical Context

Literary Context

Words

Sentences

Paragraphs

Book

Broader Context

4. The Text Itself Must Be Given Priority

A spiral from inductive to deductive reasoning

A spiral from text to context

Clarification: What about interpreting the Bible “literally”?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to determine the author’s intended meaning rather than bringing your own meaning to the text? How does this principle help us when we come to controversial passages or topics in Scripture, e.g. the role of women in church leadership or same-sex attraction?
2. Why is determining the genre so important? Think of some modern-day examples of where the genre affects the meaning of something that is written or spoken. Are we more tuned in to the genre today than when we read Scripture?
3. When someone says that what they said was taken out of context, what do they usually mean by that? Scripture was given to us in specific historical and social contexts, how does this affect how we interpret certain passages?
4. Why must the text always be given priority? What are some safeguards you could put in place in the interpretive process to make sure the text determines the meaning of the passage?
5. What do you think about using the word “literal” when discussing the process of interpretation? What are the various ways that you have seen it used? What would be a better term to use?

RECOMMENDED READING

How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God’s Word Today, by Mark L. Strauss, pp. 69-92.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 57-73.

Lesson 4 ■ Exegesis Steps (Part 1)

LESSON OVERVIEW

Dr. Strauss explains the first four (of the ten) steps for English Bible exegesis: 1) identify the genre, 2) get the big picture, 3) develop a thesis statement and 4) outline the progress of thought.

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE GENRE (LITERARY FORM)

STEP 2: GET THE BIG PICTURE: ESTABLISH THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Historical Context

Epistle

Gospel

Prophetic Literature

Literary Context

1. Break the book down into each of its main paragraphs.
2. Group those related paragraphs into sections.
3. Group the sections into even larger sections.
4. Develop an outline for the passage.

STEP 3: DEVELOP A THESIS STATEMENT

The Problems of Too Little and Too Much

Big Idea: The Subject and the Complement

Practice: Psalm 23

Hints for Finding the Big Idea:

1. What one theme gives this passage unity?
2. Look for a theme that occurs repeatedly, especially at the beginning and the end.
3. Outline the passage.
4. Test out the theme. Does every verse relate?
5. Turn your subject into a question and the complement should answer this question.

Practice: Philippians 1:12-18

STEP 4: OUTLINE THE PROGRESS OF THOUGHT IN THE PASSAGE

An Outline Should ...

1) Relate Directly to Your Thesis Statement

2) Clearly and Accurately Explain the Progress of the Argument

Two Main Kinds of Outlines

1. Parallel Outline

2. Progressive Outline

Practice: Romans 12:1-2

Practice: Mark 2:13-17

REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND PRACTICE

1. Why is it important to know the literary form of a passage? What are the differences in the way parables and historical narrative communicate truth? How does that change what you are looking for in a particular passage? Is one more “truthful” than another?
2. How are both inductive and deductive approaches to reading and study helpful? How do they complement one another? Try reading through a short book of the Bible (e.g. Philemon, Jude, or Ruth) and outlining the main idea and flow of thought for the book.
3. Have you seen examples of a pastor preaching too little or too much of a text? What are some of the dangers if we preach/teach too much or too little? What are some safeguards for make sure we preach/teach the text?

4. Practice developing a big idea and an outline for each of the following passages: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.
5. Try to develop a big idea and outline for the book of Jude.

RECOMMENDED READING

Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages, by Haddon W. Robinson, pp. 31-50.

Lesson 5 ■ Ten Steps for Exegesis (Part 2)

LESSON OVERVIEW

The final six steps in exegesis process are consulting secondary sources, analyzing syntactical relationships, analyzing key terms and themes, resolving interpretive issues and problems, evaluating your results from the perspective of wider contextual and theological issues and summarizing your results.

REVIEW OF THE FIRST FOUR STEPS

1. Identify the Genre

2. Get the Big Picture

3. Develop a Thesis Statement

4. Outline the Passage

STEP 5: CONSULT SECONDARY SOURCES (A GOOD COMMENTARY)

Expository Commentaries

Commentaries and Their Proper Use

Different Types of Commentaries

Commentary Series

Evaluating and Choosing Commentaries

Tips for Using Commentaries

STEP 6: ANALYZE SYNTACTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

STEP 7: ANALYZE KEY TERMS AND THEMES

STEP 8: RESOLVE INTERPRETIVE ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Types of Issues

Textual Problems

Genre Identification Questions

Meaning of Words

Syntactical Questions

Historical Reference

Apparent Contradictions

Principles for Resolving Problems

1. Correctly identify the literary genre.
2. Carefully examine the context.
3. Consult outside sources.
4. Keep an open mind.
5. Pray about the passage.

STEP 9: EVALUATE YOUR RESULTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WIDER CONTEXTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Context of the Book

Context of the Author's Writings

Context of Broader Biblical Teaching

STEP 10: SUMMARIZE YOUR RESULTS

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the ultimate goal of Bible Study? How can you make sure Bible Study doesn't become purely an academic exercise where your only goal is to know more? How does studying with others help in this process?
2. Who are the leaders or mentors in your life whose opinions you trust? Do you have a person whom you regularly consult on the meaning of Bible passages? What is the proper role of commentaries in the Bible study process? How is a commentary like a trusted friend or mentor? How is it different?
3. Reflect on your own theological or interpretive biases. What is the best way to identify your own biases? What are some ways to make sure you are open to views other than your own? Are there limits to "listening to the other side?"
4. What is the role of prayer in Bible study? Spend some time in prayer about the passage you are currently studying. What are some ways to make prayer a regular part of your study time?
5. Choose one of the following passages and begin to work through the ten steps of exegesis: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.

RECOMMENDED READING

Old Testament Commentary Survey, 5th. Ed., by Tremper Longman III.

New Testament Commentary Survey, 7th. Ed., by D. A. Carson.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 275-290.

Lesson 6 ■ Word Studies

LESSON OVERVIEW

Word studies are helpful tools you can use to help you better understand the Bible. It is important to make sure your conclusions are accurate and that you use your conclusions in an appropriate way.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND THE ORIGINAL TEXT

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL WORD STUDIES

A. Words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing “meaning.”

B. Context determines which particular “referent” or “sense” within this semantic range the author intended.

C. Words normally have only one “sense” in any particular literary context.

D. The meaning of words often changes over time.

E. Etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning.

F. Two Steps for Word Studies

1. Determine what the word can mean.
2. Examine the context to determine which of its possible senses the word means.

AVOIDING WORD STUDY FALLACIES

A. The “root meaning” fallacy

B. The “etymology” fallacy

C. The “anachronistic meaning” fallacy

PRINCIPLES TO AVOID WORD STUDY FALLACIES

A. Meaning is determined by context, not word roots.

B. Study sentences, not Greek words.

C. Read for the big idea, not for the hidden meaning.

D. Compare various English versions.

E. Check the better commentaries.

THE BEST TOOLS FOR WORD STUDIES

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What has been your response when a pastor or teacher refers to the original languages during a sermon or lesson? Reflect on the positive and negative aspects of referring to Greek and Hebrew. Do the benefits outweigh the dangers? Is it more about the heart motivation of the preacher/teacher?
2. What is the value of doing word studies? Can too much emphasis be placed on the meaning of words? How do you strike a proper balance in your studies?
3. What are some word study errors that you have personally heard? What does it do to the authority of the teaching when someone improperly attributes the meaning of a particular word to its “root meaning” or “etymology”? Write down some safeguards for avoiding the three fallacies mentioned in this lesson.
4. Choose a significant word from one of the following passages and do a word study using the techniques and tools that Dr. Strauss mentioned in this lesson: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.

RECOMMENDED READING

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, by William D. Mounce, Editor.

Exegetical Fallacies, 2nd. Ed., by D.A. Carson.

Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics, by Moisés Silva.

Lesson 7 ■ Application

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, Dr. Strauss discusses two extremes to avoid when applying Scripture. He also gives us five principles to guide our contextualization of a particular passage.

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID

1. Imitating Biblical Culture Exactly

2. Letting the Culture Govern the Message

d. Is the command connected to cultural practices current in the first century but not present today?

e. What cultural options were open to the writer?

f. What is the ultimate purpose of this command in its cultural context?

5. Individual statements must be placed in the broader context of Scripture.

a. Is all of biblical teaching uniform or does it reflect differences of perspective?

b. Is this part of core biblical teaching or is it peripheral?

SUMMARY

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Of the two extremes to avoid in application, too much in biblical culture or too much in our own culture, is one more dangerous than the other? Reflect on the various dangers inherent in each extreme and how you might avoid them in your application.
2. What is your view on the authority or role of the Old Testament law and its obligations for the believer? How have Dr. Strauss' principles for application helped you in your thinking of the place of the law in today's culture?
3. What do you think is harder, understanding Scripture or applying it to your life? How are the two related? How would you explain to a friend the importance of applying all of Scripture, even the lesser-known portions?
4. Choose one or more of the following passages and come up with two or three applications for each: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.

RECOMMENDED READING

How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today, by Mark L. Strauss, pp. 207-252.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Fourth Edition, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, pp. 74-92.