Hermeneutics

By Dr. Dave Mathewson

Denver Theological Seminary

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Lecture 1

Introduction and Definition of Hermeneutics

Welcome to this course on biblical hermeneutics. This is a course based on the one taught at Gordon College, and what I hope to do during this time is introduce you to a number of things. As we'll see, "hermeneutics" can be a term that's very misunderstood and used very broadly and often used to cover a number of things. So what I want to do is first of all we'll look at the issue of what hermeneutics is in this lecture session. What do we mean by "hermeneutics." How does it relate to other terms, such as interpretation, and exegesis, other terms that you have hopefully heard about? We'll also talk a little bit about the different methods of interpretation, different methods of criticism, and how those can be useful in interpretation and understanding the biblical text. We'll talk a little bit about the history of interpretation and the history of hermeneutics. It is important to understand that we never just sit down and start to interpret, but we stand at the end of a long line of others who have wrestled with and thought about the biblical text, and who have attempted to understand it. So it's important to understand where we stand in relationship to others who have gone before us and have interpreted the text. One of the things that I would like you to do as well in this course is learn the names of key figures who are associated with certain hermeneutical movements. So that is the cluster of ideas, hopefully, we can cover in this time.

I want to begin by asking the question: What is hermeneutics and why is it necessary? Why do we need to sit through a series of lectures to learn how to read and interpret the Bible? Why don't we just sit down and read it? And I've, as you have perhaps, heard of countless stories of persons that have said, "I don't need all of this, all I do is just sit down and read the Bible." But we're going to see even that kind of approach reveals a number of assumptions about how we understand and read the biblical text. So I want to start today by asking: What is hermeneutics and why do we need it? Why is it necessary?

First of all, what is hermeneutics? This is, as I've already said, a term that is frequently understood in a variety of ways. In fact, the more you read about it, the more

you find that it can mean a number of things depending on who you're talking to or who you're reading. For some, hermeneutics means "the application of the correct methods of interpretation to the biblical text." This assumes that by applying the right method or the correct technique to the biblical text, one then can determine the correct meaning of it. For some, interpretation is the actual study itself of the biblical text, not just the understanding of the correct methods, but the actual study of the text itself. But usually, the way hermeneutics is used today – although, again, technically this lecture series won't be restricted just to talking about what some think is hermeneutics, that is, the philosophy of how we understand and what we do when we try to understand the meaning of something, but we will talk about different methods, and we'll range a lot more broadly to consider different approaches and different methods of interpretation and to consider how those can be fruitful in interpreting the biblical text – but hermeneutics has usually come to be understood more broadly in biblical studies to mean not just the application of sound principals and techniques of the biblical text, but hermeneutics actually has come to, first of all, be used more broadly than just understanding the Bible, to the broader human disciplines of how we understand at all, whether it is in the sciences or literature or history or in the other disciplines. How is it that we understand? What are we doing when we are trying to understand something else, or some other facet of communication? So the study of hermeneutics has broadened out far beyond biblical studies, as we'll see.

Yet, what is being done with hermeneutics even outside of biblical studies affects the way that we approach and interpret the Bible as well. But, hermeneutics, again, is more than just the proper application of techniques and the correct methods of understanding the Bible. Hermeneutics has come to ask the question: "What does it mean to understand something? How do we understand?" Again, for our purposes we are talking about understanding a biblical text, the New or Old Testament text. But how do we understand—what do we do when we attempt to understand a biblical text? That will be one of the focuses of this series of lectures: to look at issues related to, "What are we

doing when we try to read and understand the biblical text? What are we doing when we interpret? How do we come to understanding?"

The word "hermeneutics," as most textbooks will tell you, is a term that stems from a Greek word that was used of the god Hermes. It comes from the Greek word hermeneuō (ἑρμηνεύω)," which means "to translate, to understand, to explain, to interpret." The term was used of the Greek god Hermes, and when someone would want to understand something, or someone would go to consult Hermes to receive a message from the gods, Hermes kind of acted as an interpreter or a go-between and would communicate and interpret the message from the gods to the person who is inquiring about the information. So, Hermes acted as a mediator, a go-between between the message of the gods and the human being. And so "hermeneutics" can in sense be seen as a "go-between." It's a mediator between the text that we're trying to understand, and meaning of the interpreter. Human understanding then, bridges the gap between the text and us so that we can make sense of things, and again, for our purposes, so that we can make sense of the biblical text. So, basically, hermeneutics has to do with: "How do we understand something? What do we do when we attempt to understand something?"

But how does this understanding of hermeneutics relate to other disciplines, such as what we call "interpretation,"? A lot of people will use hermeneutics and interpretation almost identically. How does it relate to exegesis? "Exegesis" is a term that will usually be associated with what you do if you take a biblical language course, such as Greek or Hebrew exegesis. How does it relate to those? How does it differ from exegesis? Exegesis is usually understood more as the specific application of sound principals and techniques to draw out the meaning of the text in its original context and in its original meaning. So exegesis is probing a text from its various angles. Texts have literary aspects to them. They also have historical dimensions. Biblical texts have a theological dimension. They have a cultural dimension and a linguistic dimension as well. So that, exegesis is probing the text from various angles, attempting to draw out the meaning as the author probably originally intended, in its historical context. But again, hermeneutics is much broader than that. It gets at the issue of, not just the application of principals, but

how do we understand? What does it mean to understand? What does it mean to interpret a text? What do we do when we understand and apply a text?

Interpretation, then, is also slightly different than hermeneutics in that interpretation refers then to the actual practice of understanding a text. One might consider hermeneutics more as theorizing about how we understand and what we do when we understand a text. Interpretation could be seen more as the actual understanding, the actual interpretation of the text, or the actual application of methods to understand a text.

Three Approaches To Hermeneutics

So, both hermeneutics and interpretation then raise the questions of: How do we understand a text? What do we do when we understand a text? And, What are the correct methods and techniques that are utilized to understand a text? That raises the question—when we the think about hermeneutics and interpretation, we are asking the question of: What role does three different features of communication play? That is, there is the author that produces the text, and there is also the text itself, the product that the authors produce that communicates. Then there is the reader that tries to understand and make sense of the text. So interpretation asks the question about the author, the text, and the reader. Particularly, which one – or perhaps all three – but which one of those plays the primary role when it comes to understanding of the text? Where does meaning lie? What should be our focus when we try to understand a biblical text? Are we asking the question of the author? Are we focusing on the author's intention? This would be one set of approaches to hermeneutics that would be characterized as the "author's intention," an approach known as "authorial intent." So we will focus on going behind the text. Historically, people have wondered: What was the author intending? What did the author intend to communicate by producing this text? So, one feature of hermeneutics is to focus on the author and the author's intention communicating as the primary locus of meaning.

The second feature of hermeneutics, or second place that persons often focus on when it comes to hermeneutics, then, is the text. Or some have called that focusing within the text. So the author would be going behind the text, to ask questions about the author's

intention, what the author is trying to do? But a text-centered hermeneutic would focus on the text itself, the finished product, the empirical evidence that we have in the form of the written text as the primary locus of meaning and interpretation. So often the text—according to this approach, is seen to have a life of its own. So some would even say, irrespective of who the author was and what he intended to communicate, the text now has a life of its own, and so the text is the primary object of our interpretation. So we try to understand the Old or New Testament passage itself and the way the text has been put together.

The third place where interpretation or meaning is thought to lie would be in the reader. That is, readers make sense of text, and some would suggest therefore without a reader to make sense of it and read it, especially if we don't have access to the author, especially biblical authors who are long gone, it is ultimately the reader who must make sense of the text. So we come from different cultures, we come from different backgrounds, we come from different perspectives, we come from different theological bents, and this will all affect the way that we read the text. So some would say the primary meaning resides in the reader and his or her ability to make sense of a biblical text.

As we'll see as we begin to move through, especially the first part or first half of this series of lectures on hermeneutics, we'll focus on those three aspects and notice how many of the methods revolve around those three aspects: methods of interpretation, and hermeneutical philosophies that focus on the author: others that focus on the text; and more recently those that focus primarily on the reader. We'll see even historically that's kind of the order in which hermeneutics and interpretation has developed. But we will ask the question then: When we think about hermeneutics and interpretation, what is the relationship between these three? Does one of them get more importance and prominence than others? Or are they all three equally valid? So again, we're going to look at the theories of interpretation. We'll look at the history of interpretation and how that affects the way we look at the biblical text. We'll look at different methods of interpretation,

different methods of criticism, and how those can help us also interact with the biblical text.

Necessity of Hermeneutics

Why is hermeneutics necessary? Again, we've all heard stories of someone that says, "Well, I don't need hermeneutics; all I need to do is sit down and read the text. Why not just sit down and read the Bible for itself?" But, as we're going to see, that approach actually reveals an assumption about hermeneutics and understanding as far as how we read a text, and what it means to interpret biblical texts. But why is hermeneutics necessary? Hermeneutics functions primarily – and again, when I talk about hermeneutics, often I'm talking about both hermeneutics in its philosophical sense about how we understand, but also hermeneutics in terms of how some understand it as interpretation and the correct techniques and methods of interpreting biblical texts. But why is hermeneutics necessary? Hermeneutics provides a bridge between a text produced at a time and during a time, in a culture, in a language, in a history, in a religious and philosophical and political environment that is very very different than our own, at least most of us. It is very very different than our own. So that at times, we are prone to misunderstand, if we're not aware of the difference between our own perspective and that of the ancient text that we're trying to understand. However, at the same time, I am convinced that there are commonalities that are necessary for understanding. If there were no commonalities at all, we simply could not understand the biblical text. So there's not such a wide gap or distance that it's hopeless to ever think that we can overcome it. But hermeneutics is necessary because, again, we are reading a series of documents produced at a time, in an environment, a culture, a situation that is very very different in some respects and distinct from our own. Hermeneutics helps us to bridge that gap so that we can arrive at an understanding of the biblical text.

There are a number of gaps that hermeneutic helps to bridge, because there are a number of ways that the biblical text is distant from us. For example, there is a temporal distance. In interpreting the Bible, we are dealing with texts that we are produced, nearly two thousand years and earlier than our own existence. So, it's imperative then that we

are able to recognize that distance and to be able to bridge that gap as well. I like to illustrate that with a story. I remember one time when I lived in Montana, and I was going to college and trying to do any summer jobs I could to help earn tuition dollars. I remember I helped one rancher tear down a log cabin. The log cabin had been built in the early nineteen hundreds – nineteen twenties or thirties or something like that – and it had been outdated. But some of the logs were still in very good shape, so the rancher hoped to dismantle the cabin carefully and save most of the logs to build his own house, because a lot of them were still in very good shape, and that would obviously save him quite a bit of money. So he called me up and asked if I would help him take this cabin apart and help him salvage these logs. So I met him and we began our work on this cabin, and I noticed as we began to remove the logs that in-between the logs were some newspapers, which were often used to stuff the holes to keep out the cold Montana winter winds. I started looking at these newspapers and reading – I was drawn to the political cartoons – and I began to look at them and realized I had no idea what I was reading, and could not make any sense of them. A lot of it was simply because I was reading literature from a very different time period. Although it was only seventy-five or eighty years ago from the time I was reading it, I still had trouble understanding, and some of it was a complete mystery to me, simply because it was produced at a time period of which I was not aware of what was going on then. How much more is this true with texts produced over two millennia ago and earlier? So the study of hermeneutics and interpretation helps us to bridge this temporal distance, especially when the authors and the readers are not here to consult. So there's a temporal distance that stands between us, as the interpreters, and the biblical text. Hermeneutics is a way to bridge that gap.

Varying Views

There's a second distance, and some of these are related; these are not distinct categories; there's probably a little bit of overlap between them. But another difference between us as interpreters and the biblical text is a cultural difference. In the biblical world—whether the ancient near-eastern world or the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament reveals a world that has a very different culture and very different cultural

values often than the world we live in. Sometimes I find that interpreters and readers from third world countries have an easier time reading of biblical texts because they come from a culture that is much closer to the biblical text and the biblical culture than the North American, individualistic, technologically advanced culture that I live in. But still, there are often cultural values and differences that at times have to be overcome in trying to understand the biblical text, at least as the author attempted to communicate. Again, we live in a very individualistic and technological age, at least in North America, where upward mobility and the fact that I get a pay check every two weeks sometimes functions to distance me from the culture that produced the biblical text.

To give you a couple of examples—some of these we may return to later on in the class and actually deal with them, others, I just mention to demonstrate the struggle in trying to understand the text. The other disclaimer I have to make is that I am a New Testament professor by vocation and interest, so my examples will be weighted towards the New Testament, but I will try to bring in as many Old Testament examples as I can and which I am comfortable with to also demonstrate the different principals that we'll be working on. Here is a New Testament example: in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul addresses the issue of men and women and their relationship together within the context of the church as it gathers for worship. His instruction is primarily to women and how they are able to prophesy, and he begins to discuss the fact that he permits them to prophecy, as long as their head is properly covered. My purpose at this point is not to deal with that text at length or to solve the problem, but just to demonstrate that – what is the significance of that head covering in that text? Does it have any resemblance to head coverings that we are familiar with today, whether it's in a Muslim culture or some other expression? Is Paul referring to head covering or to hair, is another debate in that text. What does it mean? What kind of background or cultural information is Paul drawing on that we need to be aware of if we're giving to understand Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. So, 1 Corinthians 11, I think, is one example of, where we will be in danger of misunderstanding that text, at least as Paul was attempting to communicate, without some

kind of a knowledge of the cultural background that informed Paul's instructions relating to head coverings.

Another example: Revelation chapter 13. In Revelation chapter 13 John portrays the Roman Empire of his day as a hideous beast, and one of the questions is, Why is John so – not only in chapter 13, but throughout the book of Revelation – rather negative towards the government? Why is John's portrayal of the Roman Empire in the book of Revelation rather bleak and dark, to the effect that he portrays it as this beast that is meant to do harm? Well, again, without solving that right now, part of the answer is certainly that, in the first century in the Roman Empire, you simply could not disentangle issues of politics and religion. And so, for someone to be involved in and belong to and live out life and even make a living in the context of the Roman Empire brought a number of challenges because often that it would engage them in compromising, idolatrous religious practices. At least, a lot of times in our modern-day, governments and religion are kept separate. But in the first century, most of what John is aiming his criticism at could not be understood unless we understand in the first century, religion and politics and economy were closely intertwined. And certainly, part of John's critique of the Roman government has to do with the idolatrous religious practices that one would engage in if you also participated in Rome politically and economically.

Luke chapter 11, what is the significance of Luke chapter 11, the parable of the so-called good Samaritan? What is the significance that the Samaritan is the hero of the story? Again, we will misunderstand this parable, especially in our modern-day North American context, where the Samaritan has been domesticated. We have things like "Good Samaritan Food Pantries" and "Good Samaritan Hospitals," etc. etc. We have domesticated the Samaritan. But as we'll see, a few times throughout these lectures, that's not how they would have looked at a Samaritan in the first century, especially a first century Jew. So without understanding something of the culture, and how the Samaritans were viewed, one is likely to miss the force of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

What about Luke 15 and the well-known parable of the prodigal son? Once again, I have to confess for years and years, I read that parable – and perhaps some of this is because I grew up, or spent several years, in Montana surrounded by ranches, and I pictured the farm, or this father, living on a ranch out in the boondocks somewhere separated from society. In Montana, sometimes you can drive for five miles and still not be to the end of your driveway, let alone within sight of another house. So I envisioned this father off somewhere on a ranch out in the middle of nowhere. But what if he is living in a typical Middle Eastern village, and everyone knew what was going on, and everyone was observing what was happening? What then was the significance of the father out running out to greet and hug a son who had treated him the way he did? No one in the town would have missed what went on. Yet, if we don't understand the culture, and if we're – as I did – too quick to read our own culture into what's going on, again, we may misunderstand the parable, or at the very least, we may miss something important. But again, with the parable of the prodigal son, what's the significance of the father running out and greeting the son and hugging him before the watching eyes of the community?

The book of Ruth, interestingly towards the end of the book of Ruth, you have this very interesting reference to the men sitting at the gate. Are they being lazy? You know, we sometimes picture the women probably working and cooking and doing all kinds of things, and here's the men sitting around at the gate and just being lazy. The text takes on a different color when you recognize that this is where the leaders met to decide important business for the town. So these men are not being lazy and just sitting there shooting the breeze and talking. They're most likely, conducting business.

Cultural Differences

Or how might our individualistic culture affect the way we read certain biblical texts? That might be better understood as addressing a culture that was more attune to community and a culture where the persons understood the communal relationship that they belong to, as more important than who you were as an individual was the group that

you belonged to? So there's a cultural distance between us and the biblical text that could cause us to misunderstand the text.

Historical Separation

There's also a historical distance. Again, this is related to the previous two. The biblical texts record and assume events that are far removed from us. And furthermore, often the biblical texts are not interested in giving us a detailed, blow-for-blow account of everything that happened. For those of us that were not there to witness the events, at times we struggle to understand what was the event that was taking place, and what was the nature of the event. What historical circumstances lead up to what the author is talking about and discussing? Again, for example, in John chapter 4 – and we have already mentioned Luke chapter 11, the parable of the Good Samaritan – but John chapter 4, where Jesus goes to the woman at the well who is a Samaritan. Once again, we will misunderstand these texts if we fail to understand the long history of antagonism between the Jewish people and the Samaritans, and how this affected the way the Jews viewed this certain group. When that is taken into consideration the fact that the Samaritan is a hero of a parable, and the fact that Jesus would go visit one is rather startling, and would be rather shocking to the first readers.

qWithout understanding the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD, one will have a difficulty understanding texts like Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 that record where Jesus, at least partially addresses the situation surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. Old Testament narratives are full of all kinds of references to historical events, whether references to accounts of warfare, or the political situation in Israel, but the point is, often there is a historical distance that separates us from the biblical text, and hermeneutics helps us to bridge that gap.

Language Barrier

Another distance is a linguistic distance. The Old and New Testaments are written in at least two languages. The Old Testament also contains parts of a couple of texts in a third language: Aramaic. But the Old Testament and New Testament are written in two languages that are very different than our own. And so, once again, hermeneutics and

principles of interpretation help us to bridge that gap, and help us to overcome that distance. So, for example, in the Old and New Testament, in contrast to how it seems to be used today – and we'll return to this issue later under the topic of translation – often the Hebrew and Greek words that we often in English translate "man" or "male, man or brother" – they're masculine terms – in the Old and New Testament, they seem to be terms that could be used of groups of both males and females. As I understand it, that's becoming less and less prominent, especially in the English language, and a number of other language as well. And so, the Old and New Testament texts may use language in a very different way – especially gender type of language – than were used to in some of our languages. Words seldom mean the same thing, even words that stem from a similar root, or words that are derivative from another language, or words that are derivative from an earlier language. Word meanings almost never completely overlap. So that we cannot, even though we have a rough equivalent, we cannot assume that the meaning of a word in one language is going to approximate the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word. I still remember, even in one of my seminary classes, a student struggling with the fact that Paul would use the word "hope" (obviously he didn't use the English word "hope") but we translate the Greek word *elpis* that Paul used, with the English word "hope." And this student struggled that Paul would see Christianity and Jesus' return as merely "a hope." Part of the problem was that he was trying to understand Paul's use of the word by our English word "hope," and struggled for quite some time due to a failure to understand that words very seldom, if ever, overlap between languages.

Another interesting one that I'm always interested in is, when it comes to interpreting Greek tenses. For example, unlike English, that is a primarily temporal in orientation – we have past, present, and future – Greek verb tenses didn't seem to primarily indicate time that was indicated by other means. So, when someone is dealing with a Greek text, we have to be careful when we are interpreting the Greek tenses, or even Hebrew tenses, that we are not reading, for example, our English verb system or tense system back into the Greek or Hebrew one. So those are just some examples of how there's a linguistic difference between the language that the Old and New Testament was

written in, and the language that we now try to understand it in, modern-day 21st century English.

Geographically Separated

There is a fifth difference or fifth distance, and that is a geographical difference. So there's a temporal distance: the biblical texts were written in a very different time, at least around two-thousand millennia and earlier from our own time. That also creates a cultural difference: the biblical text attests to a culture with cultural values very different from our own. There's a historical difference: the biblical text refers to events and assumes events that once again we are separated from. There's also a linguistic difference: the biblical texts are written in languages that may or may not correspond to the languages that we speak today. The next difference then is a geographical difference. There are a number of interesting geographical features that again, are referred to or are assumed in the biblical text that may not be familiar to modern readers, but that might influence the way we understand the biblical text, and again, hermeneutics and interpretation help us to sort of bridge that gap.

For example, and interesting one from the Old Testament is when Jonah flees. In the book of Jonah, God calls him to go to the Assyrians and to preach the gospel, and Jonah refuses and flees to Tarshish. If you look at a map you'll find Jonah didn't just kind of go to the town next-door. Jonah went about as far as you could get in the opposite direction. But unless one is familiar with the geography of the land, one fails to see the extreme that Jonah would go to not to go preach to this wicked, horrible nation that God was calling him to go to.

Another very intriguing example comes from the book of Revelation, and one of the letters in the first couple of chapters. Revelation chapter 3, and a letter to the church in Laodicea, and starting in verse 15, I'll read verses 15 and 16 of chapter 3. John says, actually, John is quoting the words of Jesus, communicating the words of Jesus to the church of Laodicea, one of the seven churches in Asia minor, modern-day Turkey, that John was addressing his revelation, his apocalypse to. But in verses 15 and 16, Jesus says to the church through John, "I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish

you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Now, usually when we interpret this text, and the way I was taught to read it, was from my own perspective. That is, usually hot and cold were seen as sort of binary opposites—hot was a good thing, and cold was something bad. To be hot meant to be, in religious jargon which I grew up in, to be hot meant to be on fire for Christ, and to be cold means to be turned off, to completely be antagonistic towards Christ, to refuse to obey, to refuse to follow, to want nothing to do with Christ. Then lukewarm was placed kind of in between; so you have hot up here, which is a good thing--someone with a relationship with Christ and their witness is vibrant, and then down here is someone who's cold—they're completely dead and turned off and want nothing to do with Christ. In between is lukewarm. These are the Christians that are wishy-washy and they ride the fences, I was told, they don't want to refuse and reject Christ, but they really won't take a stand; they just kind of sit there in the middle. So when Christ says, "I wish you were either hot or cold, instead of lukewarm," he's saying, "At least, I wish you would be on fire for me and follow me and be completely obedient, or at least I wish you would take a stand against me, but at least make known where you stand, don't sit in the middle." Perhaps you've heard Revelation 3:15-16 understood along that line. So John's calling them to do something, "Don't just ride the fence, even if you hate Christ or reject him, at least do that. Don't be a fence rider."

However, I think the way to understand this text is to understand something about the geography of Laodicea and the surrounding regions. Now that places a completely different spin on understanding this text. Laodicea was a fairly typical first century Greco-Roman city, except it had one problem that was usually considered significant and important for first century cities in the Greco-Roman world, and that was: Laodicea didn't have a good water supply. But it's interesting, two cities near Laodicea did. One of those cities was a city named Hierapolis. The city of Hierapolis was actually well known for its medicinal hot-springs, its mineral springs, and people would even come from some distance sometimes to sit in these springs for their healing and medicinal value. There was another town not too far from Laodicea known as Colossae, and Colossae also had a

reputation historically and geographically as being a place known for its refreshingly cold water that was good to drink. So, the problem was Laodicea had to pipe its water in from somewhere else, and by the time it got there, the water was tepid, and it was just grotesque—it really wasn't good for much. What I think John is saying, drawing on the geography of the area, he's saying: "I wish you were either hot or cold—that is, I wish you were hot, like the water of Hierapolis that's good for healing, or I wish you were cold, like the refreshing water from Colossae. Instead, you're like your own water supply; you're lukewarm, your worthless, and I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth." It's like they have lukewarm, stale, stagnant water that's been sitting there and no one wants to drink that. So, John is drawing on the geography of the area to remind the readers not to be like their own water supply.

So when we read the text from that perspective, it takes on a whole new perspective; hot and good are both positive metaphors—they're not opposites in this text. To be hot is to be like the water of Hierapolis; to be cold is like to like the good cold refreshing water of Colossae. To be lukewarm is not to ride somewhere in the middle, it's to be the exact opposite—it's to be useless and worthless. That's exactly what John warns the Laodiceans of doing—of losing their witness, of being useless and worthless like their own water supply. It's not good for anything, not good for drinking or anything else.

A better modern-day analogy than hot spiritual temperature, either hot or cold, would be: how many of you if you go into a café or restaurant, why does the waiter continually fill up your water, your cold ice-water? No one likes lukewarm water. Or why do they keep filling up your coffee cup? No one likes lukewarm coffee. You like it hot, you like your beverages hot or cold – I know there are some exceptions to that. Most of us, when you take a shower, you usually like a hot shower, not a lukewarm one. So, those, analogies provide a better fit for what John is doing. John's instructions primarily depend on the geography of the area—Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colossae and their water supplies. I think both John intended that and I think the readers would have immediately picked up on those associations in their own day. Besides the fact that I know of nowhere in the Bible where God or Christ ever calls on his people to reject him, to either reject

him or except him. It's always to embrace Christ and to recognize or avoid the consequences of not doing so. So I think the geographical background provides a more compelling reading of this text.

Literary Separation

A last and final distance is a literary distance. That is, the Old and New Testament texts are produced in a literary environment that is in many respects very different from our own. That is, the Old and New Testament are composed of literary types that may or may not have similarities to literary types of our own day and literary media of our own day. For example, a couple of examples that may have some correspondence would be narrative and stories, and also, epistolary literature. We read stories and we read narratives. We write narratives and stories, and we read and write letters. So we have some familiarity with that kind of communication. But even then, we can't necessarily assume that story writing and narrative writing and historical recording or writing letters or poetry was identical with the way we do it today. In fact, there may be literary types that simply have no correspondence to ones in our modern day. So, for example, when's the last time that you read or wrote an apocalypse, or when's the last time that you read a prophecy? To compound the difficulty too is that we have a whole different medium of communication with the onset of texting and different electronic means of communication that produces a whole different in a sense "literary genre." In order to understand the Old and New Testament, we need to be aware of the different literary types that the Old and New Testament authors wrote in and the environment in which they produced the documents, and we can't assume again that our similar literary types are necessarily identical. So there's a literary gap, a literary distance, that interpretation and hermeneutics helps us to overcome.

Conclusion

So, to summarize, hermeneutics then is a reflection on how we understand. What do we do when we read the text? What are we doing when we understand something? Hermeneutics helps us to reflect on that and be more intentional about how we do that. Interpretation, hermeneutics and interpretation, also focuses on the methods that we

utilize for interpreting a biblical text. What are the methods and the techniques necessary for coming to grips with understanding and interpreting a biblical text? But these are necessary because we are dealing with a series of documents that in many respects are very distant from us, although there's a commonality that helps us to understand to some extent, there's also a distance, whether it's a temporal distance, that the documents were produced in a different time; a cultural distance, that different cultural values lie behind references in the biblical text; whether it historical events; whether it is a geographical distance or a linguistic difference; or the literary genre difference, of different literary types. Hermeneutics and interpretation helps us to bridge the gap between these distances so that we can hopefully arrive at a more informed understanding of the biblical text.

Now what we will do in the next lecture is we will look at and ask the question: What assumption about the Bible do we bring to interpreting the biblical text? Although we've seen hermeneutics ranges very broadly to cover any of human discipline where understanding is prominent, we're concerned with interpreting biblical texts. So what assumptions guide the way we interpret and understand the biblical text? The next lecture will focus primarily on the character of the Bible, especially on inspiration. What do we mean by that? What does that say about the biblical text? And how does that influence and impact the way we interpret the Old and New Testament?

Transcribed by Josh Hill and edited by Laura Schirillo
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 2

Culture, Language and Genre

Recap from Previous Lecture

In the last lecture we looked at: "What is hermeneutics, and what is interpretation? What are we doing when we do that? Also, what are the barriers or the distances, the gaps, that necessitate hermeneutics? We said that although many would prefer to just sit down and read the biblical text, that also, reveals assumptions about hermeneutics, but is also unaware of the distance that might create misunderstanding, and hermeneutics allows us to overcome that distance.

What I want to talk about in this session is the character of or the assumption that we hold about the Bible that we interpret. What is it that we interpret when we talk about interpreting the Old and New Testaments? What assumptions about the Bible influence the way we do hermeneutics? I want to look at the character of the literature that we are interpreting and how that might affect the way we approach interpreting the Old and New Testament.

Introduction to Inspiration

Theologically, a key word for describing how we understand the Bible is the word "inspiration." Basically, when we say that the Bible is "inspired," that word itself can generate a variety of understandings. What they all have in common is inspiration simply means the Bible has some connection with religious literature, with God himself. There's a connection between God and the Bible. The question is: how we understand that connection? What do we mean when we say that the Bible is inspired, that it is literature that claims to be the word of God? What do we mean by that? How does that affect the way we read the Old and New Testament? What do we mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? In its theological sense, in its full theological sense, the Bible owes its origin both to human beings, and also to God himself. Part of the issue is to wrestle with how do we understand the Bible as a fully human document, that demonstrates its full human dimension and the fact that it is produced by human beings, but yet at the same time, it

claims to be nothing less than the very word of God. How do we understand this? Actually, a lot could be said about this, but I want to restrict most of my comments to the issue of how that affects the way we interpret. I do want to look at the biblical text itself and examine just two factors in understanding what we mean by inspiration that must be taken into account when we consider the Old and New Testament texts as inspired literature. Obviously, when we think in terms of hermeneutics and interpretation, this is what sets the Bible apart from other forms of human communication and other forms of communication that we would interpret. By calling the Bible inspired, we recognize that it is religious literature that is set apart. It is in some way the very word of God, and that's what we want to explore.

But there are two factors that need to be taken into account when we think of the Old and New Testament as inspired literature or as the word of God. The first one is: statements about the Bible itself. The second one is: the phenomena that you actually find in the biblical text. What do we find going on in the text? Again, the first one is what does the bible say about itself as far as what it is; and then, what phenomena do we find in the text itself when we start to examine its details?

Biblical Statements on Inspiration

The two perhaps most significant statements, at least when you start reading treatments of inspiration, two texts that seem to always surface as kind of the classic texts when it comes to inspiration are both found in the New Testament, though there are a number of Old Testament texts as well that attest to its character, and I think particularly of a lot of the prophetic literature, where it's clear that the prophets are consciously claiming to speak God's word to the people.

But two passages: the first one is found in the Pauline literature, and that is 2 Timothy 3:16. Paul instructing Timothy says: "All scripture is God-breathed" – and that word "God-breathed" is the one from which theologically we get the word "inspiration." There are some questions that perhaps Paul created this word himself out of two Greek words that basically resemble this translation "God-breathed," but we'll look at that later on in a moment. But, "All scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching,

rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." Then verse 17: "So that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." So 2 Timothy 3:16 – we'll look at it later – although primarily Paul is referring to the collection of texts as the word of God that would have been available to him and his readers—primarily the Old Testament. Although, I think you could make a good case that Paul might also include the gospel in that as well, if not obviously his own letters and other New Testament documents. Paul is primarily perhaps then referring to the Old Testament, but clearly sees it as – and if I understand this text correctly – he's including the entirety of the Old Testament, the entirety of scripture, as nothing less than the product of the very breath of God, the very speech of God. So this text is an important sort of a meta-statement about the entirety of the Old Testament. Again, it's possible when you read before and after this text, Paul might also include the gospel that he preaches in this as well, as that to which the Old Testament testifies. But clearly, Paul, in this sort of meta-statement, would see the entirety of Scripture available to him as nothing less than that which is the product of the very breath of God, the very word of God.

The other text that in the New Testament that is prominent in establishing the Bible's own view of itself – again, sort of a meta-statement that encompasses the entirety of the Scripture available to the author – is found in 2 Peter 1:20, and I'll back up and read verse 19 as well. Starting at verse 19: "We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it as to the light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Verse 20: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy" – verse 21 – "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." And we'll return to this text very briefly later on. Again, there may be some limitation to this text in that the author is primarily referring to prophetic texts, but clearly, to prophetic texts at least, he sees them as a product of God's spirit moving the persons along to speak God's very word to his people.

So these two statements establish the fact – again sort of meta-statements that transcend Scripture – establish the fact that Paul and Peter, these two authors, look at the Old Testament and see it as nothing less than the product of the very speech of God, as the result of God's divine activity, of God's spirit, working in the lives of human beings to produce this. So it's from these two texts primarily that we get the understanding of inspiration—that the biblical texts are to be seen as the product of God's speech, as the product of divine activity, of God working and moving individuals to speak what is nothing less than the word of God.

Phenomena of Scripture: God Speaking to Human Authors

Yet, not only do we need to look at statements of the biblical text itself, and what it says about itself, but the phenomena of the Bible. What do we actually find in the biblical text? And again, I'll give kind of a painfully brief survey of some of the details of what we find in the text that have to be taken into account when we understand: "What do we mean when we say the Bible's inspired and how does that affect the way we read and interpret the biblical text?"

The first thing we find – and again, I'm just going to list a handful of things and give some very brief examples – the first thing we often find in the biblical text is God speaking directly to human beings, to human authors. The best example of this is the prophetic literature. Here you find that repeated formula throughout the prophetic text: "The word of the Lord came to Isaiah the prophet," or "The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel," or "The word of the Lord came to whoever." And then often: "Thus saith the Lord," which is a prophetic speech formula. The prophets seem to be, at the very least, whatever else they are doing, the prophets seem to be aware that what they are speaking is nothing less than the result of God directly speaking to them or through them. So often, in some theological textbooks, you find prophets described as the mouthpiece of God or something like that. But a text such as the prophetic text where the prophets are aware of the word of the Lord coming to them and "thus says the Lord." They are aware of directly reporting a message that is a result of God directly speaking to them. You can think in the Old Testament of the Decalogue, that God himself writes and gives to his people or a

book like Daniel or Revelation, in apocalyptic works where God – especially in Revelation – where in the very first verse of Revelation chapter one, the very the prologue to his book, John labels his book "the revelation of Jesus Christ," and I am convinced Jesus Christ is the source of the revelation, the one who is giving the revelation. But notice he says: "The revelation of Jesus Christ"—it is the revelation that comes from Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his prophets. So ultimately, John claims – again, whatever else he's doing in revelation – ultimately, John claims it is nothing less than a result of the revelatory activity of Christ, and ultimately God himself, to John. So in a number of texts in the Old and New Testament, especially prophetic type texts, we find the authors recording a message that God speaks directly to the human author.

Another interesting sort of text is: you have a few places where human words, words apparently spoken and written by human beings unaware that they're doing anything else than writing their own words, are, by later authors, often attributed to God. Just to give you one example: in Genesis 2:24 – I'm a little uncomfortable using Old Testament examples because I have an Old Testament scholar videoing all this, and so if his head starts shaking "no" I know I'm on the wrong track – Genesis chapter 2, and verse 24, a passage that later gets picked up a few times in the New Testament as well. But in 2:24: "For this reason" – at the end of Genesis 1 and 2 being two accounts of the creation from different perspectives, at the end of the account in chapter two, the author ends by saying: "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Interestingly, a number of commentaries think that this is what is often called "an interpretive aside"—that is, it is kind of the author's own comment. In modern day, we might put it in parenthesis or in a footnote or something. It's kind of an aside comment, that as the author's narrating something he says: "Oh, by the way, let me make this comment to help you understand." So, this is probably the author's own interpretive comment, his own narrative aside on the biblical text. It's his own words, his own evaluation of what he's written so far.

But it's interesting when Jesus himself picks this text up in Matthew 19, in one of his debates with the Pharisees, the Pharisees come to him and say: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" and in verses 4 and 5, Jesus responds by quoting this text, but notice how he introduces it. Jesus says: "'Haven't you heard,' he replied, 'that at the beginning, the creator'" – a reference to God himself – "'made them male and female and said: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'" Apparently Jesus thought that God himself, the creator, was responsible for saying these words. There are a few other examples of this, but this is, I think, a very straight-forward example of human words in their original context of Genesis 2 now being attributed to the creator, to God himself. So, there are places where God speaks directly to his human authors and they appear to record what he says. There are other places—a few places, where the human author says something and then later on it is attributed to God himself, such as Jesus does in Matthew 19.

Human Authors Speaking to God

There are also examples of human beings speaking to God, where it doesn't appear that God is addressing them at all, but its solely human beings addressing God. The Psalms, in the Old Testament, are full of examples. Psalm 103: "Praise the Lord, O my soul. All my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Psalms such as this, and you could turn to just about any one, are expressions of praise, lamentation, or other sorts of expressions of the psalmist to God. They are not a record of God speaking to the psalmist, but a record of the psalmist pouring out his heart to God. So this is a record of a human being speaking to God. How is that the inspired word of God?

Authors of the Biblical Text Use Sources/References

Other biblical texts seem to reflect very human processes of compilation, production or writing. That is, you have – I'm thinking especially of having in mind references, explicit references in the biblical text, of the human author relying on previous writings, even secular writings, and making that clear. For example, I could

point to a number of examples, but in 2 Kings – and this happens in several places – but 2 Kings 12:19 at the end of recording the exploits of one of Judah's kings, in verse 19, the author of Kings says: "As for the other events of the reign of Joash, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the Annals of the king of Judah?" which I'm not sure what that is, but apparently the author of Kings has been relying on another source, which would have been common during the day. He is researching and utilizing another document that he calls the Annals of the Kings in order to provide information for his own written work.

You find something similar going on in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke, the third Gospel, where in a sort of prologue type statement at the very beginning, Luke actually tells us something about the means by which he produced the Gospel of Luke. He tells us a little bit about the workings of his Gospel, and how it was that he produced it and it came about. Chapter 1:1-4: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus," – who may have been the patron that funded the work and the research for Luke to produce this – "so that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught."

Now, notice what's going on in this text. A couple things: first of all, Luke uses a quite a bit of language that was common in other narratives or biographical works that Luke's resembles, such as: "writing an orderly account." A lot of this language resembles other works. Second, Luke seems to be aware of other accounts of the life of Christ. Notice his line: "Since others have undertaken to write up an account." So Luke seems to be aware and seems to be utilizing the work of others, whether that's one of the other Gospels, such as Matthew or Mark, is possible, but Luke doesn't tell us what other resources he had available. But he's clearly aware of other accounts of the life of Christ, and perhaps he's intending to supplement them or maybe correct some of them. The other

thing Luke tells us is that he's aware of eyewitnesses and others who testify to these accounts, and he's relying on them as well.

So, putting this all together, Luke seems to reveal a very human process of interpretation. In fact, it is so human is it that I wonder if one of the motives – we'll talk about this a little bit later on in another session – that there are a couple of manuscripts of Luke that in these verses where Luke says "It seemed good to me," there's a couple manuscripts that supply "and to the Holy Spirit," which is also a phrase found elsewhere in Luke, so maybe they are drawing from that. But it's also as if some scribes thought that this was too human, and they wanted to add a divine sanction that certainly Luke did not write this on his own, "It seemed good to me," but it must have divine sanction behind it as well. But if those two manuscripts are incorrect in adding that, we're left with Luke undergoing a very human process of production. He's relying on other sources, he's aware of eyewitnesses, he's aware of other accounts of Jesus' life, and now it seems good to him to write his own account, for Theophilus, perhaps at Theophilus' request. So it doesn't' appear that Luke all of the sudden one day began to glow and felt compelled by the Spirit to sit down and start writing this. It would seem to be the result of a very human process, much like the author of 2 Kings, using sources to compile his own account of the life of the king. So how is this inspired Scripture? How does this fit with an understanding of the Old and New Testament as inspired?

Authors Distinguish Their Own Words From God's Words

Another type of evidence that we find in the Old and New Testament is, especially this example comes from the New Testament, it's interesting that Paul seems to distinguish at times his own words from the words of God, or the words of Christ. Some have even on this basis called into question whether Paul thinks that what he writes is more his own opinion as opposed to what has been revealed to him through Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul is addressing instructions to certain situations going on in Corinth. Chapter 7 would be another wonderful example of the distance that exists between the modern reader and our history, culture, and background, and the ancient text, and its culture, background, and history. But Paul's addressing a situation related to different

issues, revolving around marriage, divorce, sexuality, abstinence and widowhood etc. In the middle of that, he says something interesting as he addresses the situation of some who are perhaps questioning about whether they should get divorced or not, and I won't go into details about what may have prompted some of the Corinthians to think this. But in verses 10-12, Paul says: "To the married, I give this command," but he says, "not I, but the Lord." And then, here's the command: "A wife must not separate from her husband, but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, and a husband must not divorce his wife." Now verse 12: "To the rest I say this," – Paul qualifies it by saying: "I say this, not the Lord." And here's what he says: "If any brother has a wife who's not a believer, and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who's not a believer, and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him."

So what's going on in this text? Is Paul really distinguishing his own words which are his own opinion when he says, "I say this not the Lord," from something that was revealed to him through Jesus, so that he'll say: "the Lord says this, not I"? Is Paul distinguishing his own opinion that can be taken more lightly from the very word of Christ that he now communicates to his readers? I think there's probably a better explanation for this text. Instead, I think that Paul is not distinguishing levels of authority, that somehow, "If Christ reveals this you should obey it, but this is my opinion so you can take it with a grain of salt or you can decide what you want to do with it." Instead, I think he's distinguishing simply whether his words can find support in something Jesus taught or not. So when in verse 10 Paul says, "To the married I give this command, not I but the Lord," I think he's drawing on a specific saying of Jesus from the Gospels. You go back to Matthew, the Matthew text in chapter 19 and the Sermon on the Mount, or the Gospel of Mark where they record the sayings of Jesus regarding divorce. I think that's what Paul is referring to in this text. We read part of that when we read Matthew 19, in Jesus' instructions regarding divorce. So I think Paul when he says, "I give you this command, not I but the Lord," he's not saying that this is something that Jesus revealed to him, therefore it's on a higher level of authority. He's simply saying, "I can appeal to a

direct command of Jesus from the Gospels, or from the traditions of Jesus' teaching." But then in verse 12 when he says, "To the rest I say this, I, but not the Lord," he's not saying that this is merely his own opinion. He's simply saying: "I don't necessarily have a saying of Jesus to back this up." Yet it's interesting, at the end of chapter 7, he can say: "And I think too that I have the spirit of God." So the entirety of chapter 7, Paul seems to be aware that what he's saying is authoritative and is to be obeyed. In fact, later on in chapter 14, Paul will basically say that: "Anyone should realize that what I say is nothing less than the command of the Lord." So Paul does not seem to be distinguishing levels of authority that what he says is somehow his opinion to be taken with less seriousness, and therefore what Jesus says is what has been revealed to him and they should listen to that. But instead, I think in chapter 7, Paul is simply distinguishing whether he can appeal to a saying of Jesus, from Jesus' earthly teaching or not. Yet even when he can't, Paul is still convinced that he has God's spirit, and he speaks a message that is authoritative, and he expects his readers to obey.

Differing Accounts of the Apostles

Another detail, another phenomenon, that one finds in the biblical texts – again, I appeal to the New Testament for this one, though you could probably find similar examples in the Old Testament. It's interesting that when you read the gospels, especially Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the so-called Synoptic Gospels because there appears to be some literary relationship between them in the wording, and the order of events. We'll look at this later under "source criticism" in a different section. But the Synoptic Gospels seem to be recording the same, at times, the exact same wording, and the exact same statements of Jesus. Yet it's interesting that they don't always appear to be interested in recording the exact words of Jesus. So for example, how do you handle this: in Matthew 5:3, one of Jesus' so called beatitudes in his Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit." But Luke 6:20, in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, you have "Blessed are you who are poor." Now my point, my intention, at this point is not too adjudicate between these two or solve the issue, but merely to point out that the wording is very different. Matthew has "poor in

spirit," and Matthew has it in the third person, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke just has "Blessed are the poor," and he has it in the second person "blessed are *you* who are poor."

Furthermore, if Jesus – although I think Jesus was probably tri-lingual; probably spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek – if Jesus as many think spoke this in Aramaic, the fact that these are recorded in Greek clearly suggests that we don't have the exact, precise words of Jesus. Did one of them get it wrong? Did Matthew have it wrong by saying: "The poor in spirit"? or did Luke get it wrong by leaving out "spirit"? Or, more likely, should we understand the Gospel writers as not so concerned to preserve the precise, exact words of Jesus, but instead to produce accurate summations or accurate accounts and summaries of what it was Jesus said? Yes, at times they may record close to precisely what Jesus said, but at the other times is it possible that Matthew and Luke both accurately are getting at exactly what it was Jesus was communicating, without necessarily recording the precise words? I think we have to come to a conclusion like that, or else we have to conclude that one of them was wrong. If Matthew and Luke are trying to preserve the exact words of Jesus, one or both of them got it wrong. But, if, as was common, and we'll say it again: one of the distances we experience is a literary distance; in the first century it was very common for persons to summarize, to give an accurate and adequate summary of what was said. As long as it accurately portrayed what someone communicated, it was fine. It didn't appear that they were as interested as we were in quotations, where you put quotations around and preserve the exact, precise reading. Instead, they were often more interested in providing an accurate summary, so that Mathew and Luke both got it right. They both captured the meaning of exactly what it was Jesus was trying to communicate.

Or another interesting example is the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7, the longest version of it. If you took time to sit down and read it in a good English translation, I would guess it would take, ten or fifteen minutes maybe, give or take a few minutes. I seriously doubt that Jesus taught for ten or fifteen minutes. More likely, it went on for a day, perhaps, or longer, maybe a little bit less, but for the greater part of a

day. So that even the cherished Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5-7 is – at times it may capture some of the exact wording – but more likely, again, is an accurate summary and an accurate portrayal of what it was that Jesus said. So that had Jesus read the account itself that Matthew wrote, he would have said, "Yes, that captures exactly what I was communicating." So how is that the word of God? The fact that we have writers in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels recording the words of Jesus that never exactly portray the precise wording, but they feel free to summarize, and sometimes they do it differently. Matthew seems to emphasize being poor in spirit, where Luke seems to emphasize physical poverty, and there's, I think, a way to harmonize that. But how do we understand that as the inspired word of God?

The Evolution of Salvation from Old to New Testament

The last phenomenon that we find – and there's a number of others we could refer to, but – the last phenomenon that we find in the Old and New Testament is: the Bible seems to be arranged salvation historically. That is, the Bible seems to be arranged so that the New Testament brings to fulfillment, even at times, eclipsing the previous revelation in the Old Testament. Christians today can reflect on the question, "Well, why don't we offer sacrifices, when that was commanded of God's people in the Old Testament?" That's a biblical precept, a biblical command. Yet, most of us don't offer sacrifices today. Most of us don't keep the Sabbath, as far as keeping all the regulations on the Sabbath day that God's people, Israel kept. How is it that that's the word of God, the fact that certain parts of the revelation in the Old Testament are no longer applicable? Sometimes Jesus and New Testament writers even overturn them, such as the sacrificial system and some of the regulations related to the Old Testament sacrifices. How do we understand that as the word of God?

So, taking all this information into consideration—the different phenomenon that we find in the Old and New Testament. Sometimes God speaks directly to the authors. Sometimes the authors speak to God, such as the psalmist when they praise and expressions of praise, lamentation and worship. Sometimes human authors speak and a later author will attribute that to God. Sometimes we see revealed very human processes

of composition and production. Sometimes we find authors not interested in producing and preserving the exact words, but summaries, and sometimes the summaries even differ. How is that the word of God? Then relating that to the Bible's own meta-statements, that the Bible is inspired, or that the Bible is the product of God's spirit moving human authors to produce what, at least in 2 Timothy, is nothing less than the very words breathed out from God, the very breath of God.

Four Differing Views on Inspiration

Historically, there have been at least four ways this has been understood. I'll just summarize them briefly, and then communicate what I think might encapsulate or might account for this evidence. First of all is, historically, there are four views of inspiration that have wrestled with this – and again, these all could have sub-views and different ways of looking at them. This is not exhaustive; there might be some other views that could be added. But I'll paint this with very broad brush strokes. One view has often been labeled the "fundamentalist view," and that is that God actually dictated the words of Scripture. So not just the prophets, but the prophets in the sense – some have called this the prophetic model – the prophets in a sense provide the model for understanding Genesis to Revelation. It's the result of God actually dictating and speaking directly the words to the biblical authors, so that the author basically becomes a passive secretary, simply reporting and inscribing "Thus says the Lord." So the prophetic: "Thus says the Lord" is extended to the entire Bible, so that God has sometimes in the past has been understood as actually dictating the words of Scripture to the human author.

Another view, in exact contrast to that, is known as the "liberal view," and that is that the Bible is not to be equated with the word of God. The first view, the "fundamentalist," would find a very strict equation with God's word with the biblical text itself. The liberal view would say that the biblical text itself is not to be identified with the word of God, but merely, and largely, the record of human religious experience. Its inspiration is to be understood in line with other inspired and inspiring types of literature. So it's really not any more important, or at least no more authoritative, than any other religious texts or any other text.

Another, a third view, that in a sense is meant to respond to the second one, was a view often associated with the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, and that is known as "neo-orthodoxy." And Barth said that the Bible, the written word of God, is not to be equated with the word of God, but it can become the word of God. To kind of just put this in simple terms: it can become God's word when God chooses to reveal himself to his people through this record of revelations. The Bible is a witness to – often you'll find in Barth or others discussing Barth describing the Bible as a witness to revelation – the Bible is a witness to God revealing, but it can continue to become God's word. It can continue to when God chooses to reveal himself through this record of revelation to us. It stems from Barth's understanding God is wholly other, and no human language or document could hope to reveal and capture God's revelation. So the Bible is basically an errant and fallible human document, but it can become God's word when God chooses to continue to reveal himself through this witness to his revelation.

A fourth view is known as – often for lack of a better term, I've labeled it, and others have labeled it – an "evangelical view." That is: the Bible, much like view number one, is to be equated with the word of God, unlike number two and three, but unlike view number one, the fundamentalist view, the evangelical view realizes that the Bible is the very word of God, but it's communicated through human authors and through very human and diverse methods and means. So God was at work throughout the entire process. So, for example, Luke chapter one, where Luke is utilizing other sources and doing his research based on eyewitnesses. He is aware of other accounts of Jesus' life, perhaps sees shortcomings in some of them, and now decides to write his own account. God is at work through the entire process, so the result is nothing less than the very words of human beings, but at the same time, nothing less than the very word of God. So the divine production of Scripture, the divine involvement, the fact that the Scripture is to be identified as God's word, does not diminish the human aspect.

Some have compared this to the incarnation: the fact that Jesus is at the same time fully God yet fully human. This can be seen as the incarnate speech of God and at the same time fully the word of God, yet somehow the words of human beings. And so, we

can read the scriptural text and see the different emphases that we see between Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount and Luke's, or Old Testament narrative and the Psalms as the psalmists crying out and expressing their praise to God. We can see very human processes of communication and writing. So we can distinguish Paul's Greek from the Greek of James or Mark. An evangelical view affirms that the Bible is in some way God's word without in some way diminishing the full human element as well.

Interpreting the Meaning of "God-Breathed" Scripture

Let me return to, just briefly, to look at the two biblical texts that we raised at the very beginning: 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20f. The 2 Timothy 3:16 passage—it's important with both of these texts to understand not only the contribution they make to our understanding of inspiration, but also the limitation. Then we'll summarize what do we mean by inspiration perhaps in the next session. What do we mean by inspiration? How does this affect interpretation and hermeneutics? With the 2 Timothy 3:16 passage: "All scripture is God-breathed and inspired by God." First of all, we've already mentioned that although this text by extension, perhaps by deduction and extension could apply to the entirety of the Old and New Testament, Paul is rather clear, or at least this context he's rather clear that the Scripture that he's primarily referring to, although it may contain the gospel as well and the teachings of Jesus, Paul is primarily referring to the Old Testament, the Scripture that would have come down to him.

The other thing is that – to emphasize this text and its contribution to our understanding of the Bible and inspiration – is that it focuses and emphasizes the product and not the process. Although it says that the entirety of Scripture (primarily Old Testament) is God-breathed – it's the very breath of God, the very word of God – it doesn't tell us how it does so, or how that works. One attempt to answer that question was the first view, the fundamentalist view, that God dictates it, but there's too much evidence to the contrary that suggests that there's very few places outside of the prophets where the biblical writers are aware of speaking God's word or God speaking his word through them. But in what sense then are they still inspired?

So 2 Timothy 3:16 emphasizes the product, that the end product, the Scriptures themselves, the text themselves are, in some way, the very word of God, that have their genesis in the very speaking of God, have their origin in the very speech, in the very breath of God. Yet it says nothing of how God does this. How was it that Luke reading other accounts of the life of Christ, perhaps aware of some shortcomings, doing his own research, wanting to produce – desiring himself, in response to a man named Theophilus, to write his own gospel; how is it that that is the very breath and the very word of God? 2 Timothy 3:16 doesn't focus on the process, but assures us that the product is nothing less than, while still being the words of human beings, the very word of God.

The last thing I want to say about this text is that inspiration is not theoretical, but is pragmatic and practical. Verse 17 reminds us that the inspired text is not something that we put on a shelf for safe-keeping and say: "Look, there's the inspired word of God." But it does not good if it does not reach into our being and transform us and evoke obedience. If the Bible is really the inspired word of God, then we cannot help but respond in a way consistent with that. If it's the very word of God, then it stands in authority over us, and we must respond in obedience. The last text then, 2 Peter 1:20-21, when the author said that the prophets did not write on their own accord and according to their own interpretation but were individuals moved by God's spirit. Again, I think we need to realize the limitations in that Peter does not seem to be, at least here, explicitly addressing all texts. I think he makes clear and if you read the context and understand what's going on in 2 Peter is Peter is primarily defending the Old Testament prophets and even perhaps the apostles as well when he says that when they prophesied, it was not a result of their own human desire, human ingenuity, and their own interpretation, but prophecy came as a result of human beings moved by God's spirit to speak the very word of God. Although we don't want to exclude other New Testament books, certainly 2 Peter 1:20 as we have it mainly addresses prophetic literature, and doesn't say anything about how narrative or poetry or other types of literature or other texts were produced, but certainly it does provide a helpful model for understanding how God's spirit could work through human beings to produce something that was nothing less than the product of the

human author, but still in some way at the same time was nothing less than the very word of God and something that owed itself to the very breath of God.

Interpreting the Inspired Word of God

How does this affect biblical interpretation? First of all, because the Bible is a human document, then the various methods of criticism that we're going to talk about – we'll define what we mean by criticism later on – the very methods of interpretation, the different criticisms that we'll discuss, and how we analyze human understanding, are all valid and necessary because we are dealing with documents that are thoroughly human. They're produced by human beings in a specific historical context in response to human problems, etc. etc. So because of that, because of the human dimension, it validates using the different methods and the different criticisms that we will be talking about.

But second, because these documents are divine, because the Bible is nothing less than the word of God, it has a claim on our lives. It demands to be obeyed; we must submit to it, and obey it. In other words, historical methods can only take us so far in understanding the biblical text, as necessary as they are. But the biblical text is also a spiritual document and behind it lies the God who has inspired it and who communicates to his people, and who desires to be our God and desires us to be his people. So as a spiritual book, as a divine book, it has a claim on our lives and it must evoke a response of obedience.

The third thing is the text itself is, and must be, the locus of our interpretive activity. Not the traditions or sources behind it, as helpful as that may be. We'll talk about the necessities; we've already seen the historical and cultural distance that often separates us from the biblical text, but ultimately it's the text itself that is the locus of our interpretive activity, not the reconstruction of the historical background or a so-called hypothetical reconstructed source. But ultimately, it's the finished text, the product, that is, the locus or the center of our interpretive activity as the product of the very speech of God as the very inspired text.

The other assumption that I just want to mention very briefly is that I will assume that the canonical Old and New Testament that we now confess, especially evangelical scholars confess, the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 of the New Testament, are the inspired word of God or are the canonical scriptures, based on the testimony of Jesus and other ancient Jewish authorities, based on the evidence of the early church from the 4th and 5th century AD, as they were wrestling with and working out which documents they would accept as historical Scripture and recognize as the very word of God. Based on the evidence, the center of, locus, and object of our interpretive activity will be the canonical Old and New Testament.

Conclusion and Preview of Next Lecture

So with that we've considered the origin of Scripture and how that influences the way we interpret, and how that influences the way we approach interpretation. The next step that we'll take is a preliminary one, and that is: how can we be confident that we have the inspired text of Scripture, or something close to it, perhaps? This is the process known as "text criticism," and I want to talk about that a little bit in our next session. But now that we have discussed the origin and production of the Bible as the inspired word of God, how do we know that what we hold in our hands is in fact the inspired word of God? That deals with issues of textual criticism and also translation that we'll talk about in the next two sessions.

Transcribed by Josh Hill, edited by Victoria Tennant
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 3

Text Criticism

Origin of Scripture: Review

The last session we talked a little bit about the origin and production of Scripture, mainly discussing what theologians call "inspiration." We looked at a number of texts that describe and reveal the character of Scripture, what it says about itself, the phenomenon of Scripture, and how we put that together to formulate an understanding of the Bible as inspired. One of the better descriptions that I found comes from I. Howard Marshall, where he says, "on a human level we can describe its composition, that is, the composition of the Bible, in terms of the various oral and literary processes that lay behind it, the collection of information from witnesses, the use of written sources, the writing up and editing of such information, the composition of spontaneous letters, the committing to writing of prophetic messages, the collecting of documents together and so on. At the same time, however, on the divine level we can assert that the spirit who moved on the face of the waters of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, was active on the whole process so that the Bible can be regarded as both the words of human beings, or men, and the word of God. This activity of the Spirit can be described as concursive with the human activities through which the Bible was written." So, according to this understanding and our discussion during the last session, we suggested that the Bible while the very word of God at the same time reveals very human processes of production. But God's spirit was so at work in that process that the product is nothing less than the very word of God.

We said one of the offshoots of that for hermeneutics and interpretation is that the various methods and criticisms that we start to discuss today and even study of the different contributions of different historical persons in hermeneutics and our understanding of the interpretations, are all important because the Bible is nothing less than a human document. But it is certainly more than that, as the word of God it's more

than just a human work. It has a claim in our lives, it is authoritative.

One of the corollaries of inspiration is a term that we haven't discussed and I don't intend to go into detail is “inerrancy.” That is mainly built on a deductive argument, if the Bible is the word of God and if God is truthful and does not lie, it follows that that product, Scripture, therefore does not contain errors, does not deceive, et cetera.

Scribal Transmission of Scripture

So we talked a little bit then about the origin of Scripture, but I want to talk more about the transmission of Scripture. That is, how do we know that the Bible that we have does indeed reflect what God originally revealed through that process of inspiration? How do we know what the human author actually recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? How do we know that the text of the New and Old Testament that most of us have access to in translation, though if you know Greek and Hebrew we are going to talk about today is something immediately relevant to that point, how do we know that the Bible that we hold accurately reflects what it was the human authors wrote? What was it God intended to communicate in the inspired text of Scripture?

The first stage of transmission, there's actually two stages that are relevant to us, one of them is, that we’ll talk about next session, is translation. That describes how it is that we have access to the Old New Testament in our own language. When we saw, in one of the last sessions that one of the hurdles to overcome, or one of the distances to overcome in interpretation is that the Old and New Testament were written in languages that are very different. There is a linguistic distance between us and the original text. Translation allows us to have access to the Old and New Testament in our own language, so we will talk about that.

Text Criticism

But the issue that I want to discuss briefly today is one that most of us will not necessarily participate in or engage in, but one that is relevant for hermeneutics because in some sense it is the initial state of hermeneutics because it deals with the foundation of Scripture or the text itself. How do we know that the text that we have is an adequate basis and an accurate basis for hermeneutics and interpretation? That discipline is known

as text criticism. So my main purpose is not to make you text critics though some of you might choose to do so because as we will see text criticism is a very specialized field. Mainly what I want to do is introduce you to what text criticism is so that you can follow the arguments, and you can follow discussions about it, but also so that you will have a greater appreciation for the Old and New Testament texts that you have. The Bible that you have in your hands is the product of a rather long and arduous journey that has been undertaken by various scholars that have done the hard work to provide scriptures that you have that you interpret and read. So I want to talk a little bit about this thing called text criticism.

What text criticism it deals with the transmission of Scripture starting with inspiration, the fact that the Old and New Testament claim to be God's inspired word, but the fact that we don't have any of the original manuscripts, we don't have the original documents that the prophet Isaiah wrote and we don't have the original documents that Paul wrote, or Matthew wrote, or the author of Ruth, or 1st and 2nd Samuel, we do not have the original documents. Instead, what we have are copies of that, actually more literally sometimes copies of copies of copies of the original text. One way perhaps to visualize it is that text criticism is a little bit like a tree, the trunk of the tree will be the original text that we don't have access to and all the branches that go off in different directions and themselves have shoots and branches that would be the manuscripts and the copies that have resulted. Often we only have access to the very tips and ends of the branches that are at quite some distance, although integrally related to the trunk of the tree.

So with textual criticism then because we don't have the original manuscripts but we only have copies, usually it's copies of copies of copies. Often several hundred years separated, although the New Testament sometimes is a little bit closer, but often the manuscripts are separated temporally from the original manuscripts. But what text criticism does is it actually works in reverse, it works backwards in attempting to explain how did we get from the original manuscripts to what we have now. Based on all the evidence, it's an attempt to work backward and try to recover as accurately and

adequately as possible what the original manuscript would have looked like. So by looking backward, and we will explain a little bit of the process by working backward using all the evidence and all the manuscripts we do have. By working backwards it's an attempt to reconstruct as closely as possible what the original author most likely would have written. Remember we don't have the original manuscripts, we just have copies of copies of copies and we have quite a bit of them especially in relationship to the New Testament.

The assumption is that in the process of copying the original— starting with the original manuscripts— the point of the process of copying and making copies was to make them more available. The assumption is that certain changes, certain errors, certain differences crept in as the manuscripts were copied. So what we have is a group of manuscripts that sometimes differ from each other in certain places. Based on all that, because all the manuscripts have differences, again we need to try to work back and ask how did those differences arise and can we figure out which of those readings out of all the evidence where can we figure out which of them is probably what Paul intended. The assumption is in all the manuscripts somewhere with each word with each sentence with each verse somewhere there is the original text that Paul wrote or Isaiah or whoever. So text criticism tries to establish the most accurate text possible. Text critics often say it's both a science and an art. There are definite principles that help us get back to the text but it's also an art. It's not like a recipe where you simply add all the ingredients and there is your end product it takes a lot of creative thinking. It is an art as well as a science.

The process of copying the manuscript as it –obviously in the days before we had a printing press or now we have computers and printers where you can easily print multiple copies with accuracy of virtually anything— back then obviously the only way they could produce multiple copies or produce copies for public consumption was by human copying, that is, a person sitting down with the scroll and whatever instruments they used to write throughout the centuries, and by hand going through the rather laborious process of copying a text. Often what would happen, and by the way I need to preface my statement, most of my comments again reflect my area of specialty that is

with New Testament, actually the Old and New Testament both approach textual criticism in a slightly different manner because they are working with different kinds of evidence, and actually we will see the New Testament is probably more well attested historically as far as the amount of evidence then virtually any other document. As we will see there's close to 6,000 different manuscript witnesses to the New Testament texts. We'll talk a little bit about that later.

But what would usually happen especially with the New Testament is a couple of things. Number one, if a scribe it was copying a text what would happen is the scribe would have a text or manuscript next to him with, let's say the Gospel of Mark. His sheet or his papyrus sheet or whatever he was copying it onto in his writing material what would happen, the process goes, the scribe would read a group of words or perhaps a line of the text, and then have to hold it in his mind and then divert his eyes from that to his manuscript and remember what he just read and write it. Now you can see this process of going back and forth a number of things can take place. As we will see in just a moment author might forget what he wrote, and no doubt if you've ever tried to write like this and copy something you're reading by hand at times you will make mistakes. You might add a word, you might miss out on a word, and we'll see in just a moment that there are other things that can take place. But the point is as a scribe is copying that manner, going from one manuscript, the one that he has access to, to the writing utensil that he is now recording in, there are different things that could happen. Different errors, different differences, could actually transpire as he's copying. You've heard the statement "to error is human" and that's certainly true in copying manuscripts.

The other thing that would often happen, one way to mass produce New Testament manuscripts would be for someone to stand as I am and read from manuscript where you have several scribes actually copying down what is being read. Now, obviously, how the scribe, how the person reading pronounces something or said something or maybe the person reading it might not pronounce clearly or might accidentally miss a word, that's all going to be reflected when the manuscripts are copied. So you can see through these processes— very human processes— of copying by hand

and by sight, the manuscripts of the New Testament certain differences and certain errors can creep in.

Now one question that we won't spend a lot of time with because it's anyone's guess, one could obviously ask why would God allow, why would he inspire his word, and then allow through the human process of copying certain errors to creep in or certain differences? I'm not sure why that is, there's a number of possible explanations, but I think it's anyone's guess why God would allow the very human process of copying. But having said that, there is a very high degree and a high level of confidence that scholars think through the process of textual criticism they have indeed recovered and restored exactly what it was the original writers have communicated. Most of the textual changes, especially in the New Testament, that have been made are rather inconsequential. Nothing significant hangs on most of them so that we can be very confident that what we have is an accurate and reliable reflection of what it was the New Testament authors and the Old Testament authors wrote.

Observations on Textual Criticism

Let me make just a handful of observations related to textual criticism, and again, most of my comments are geared towards the New Testament. First of all, we have already mentioned with the New Testament there is an embarrassment of riches or an embarrassment of evidence when it comes to New Testament text. One scholar said there is an oppressive surplus of materials when it comes to the different New Testament manuscripts. We said there are close to 6000 different pieces of manuscript. Now let it be said not all of them are on the same level. Sometimes you have some manuscripts that have virtually the entire New Testament, and other times you have manuscripts that will only have one book, or a few books and sometimes they don't have the entire book. We also have fragments, for example some of the earliest ones are just fragments of one chapter in John or part of one chapter in John. So the manuscript evidence is very diverse as far as it's completeness, it's character, and it's quality. But the point is that there is an embarrassment of riches to work with and that can be both a blessing and a curse. Obviously, because we have so much evidence we can be confident that we have more to

work with to try to reconstruct the text. But, because there's so much sometimes it can be oppressive and daunting to work with that much material. The point is there is a surplus or embarrassment of evidence when it comes to the New Testament text, more than just about any other historical document. So again, we can be confident that we can reconstruct to a very very high-level of probability what it was that the New Testament authors actually wrote.

Terms of Textual Criticism

The second thing is that it's important for you to understand some important terms when it comes to textual criticism again just so when you're reading discussions of text criticism or hermeneutical textbooks or whatever, you'll be able to follow what what's going on. The first one obviously would be the word “manuscript.” “Manuscript” as the name implies is actually a hand written document then, or a hand written scroll, or we will look at the different kind of writing materials, but a hand written document that attests to the New Testament. Again as we've said sometimes the evidence we have, sometimes it’s virtually the entire New Testament or sections of it or only sections of the book, or a fragment of a chapter or paragraph in one of the New Testament documents. A manuscript is simply a hand written document or part of a document or fragment or whatever, that attests to the New Testament or part of the New Testament whether the chapter or book or whatever, that is a manuscript.

Another term that you need to be familiar with is the term “variant.” A variant is basically any change when you compare the manuscripts, or wherever they differ where one manuscript differs from another. Often it's just a word, sometimes it's a spelling difference, sometimes it may be a group of words or something larger. We will talk a little bit about the Gospel of Mark had a couple different endings attached to it. So sometimes it could be an entire paragraph. But a variant is simply a difference between two or more manuscripts when you compare the manuscripts where one manuscript differs in reading. It might have a different word or missing a word or whatever that's a variant. It's out of all those variants that the text critics start to determine which one of

them, when you compare all of the texts probably reflects exactly what it was that Paul wrote or Isaiah wrote or whoever the authors of First and Second Kings or Genesis.

Another term that you need to be familiar with is "papyrus." Papyrus was very early writing surface. A papyrus was a sheet that was constructed by using strips of a papyrus plant found in Egypt, and by drying them out and gluing them together they basically would form a sheet or page that was a very early means of writing or recording something. So you need to know what a papyrus is.

Two other terms related to that that you will need to know is a "scroll." A scroll was again a very early form of writing technique. What it was is you took several papyrus sheets and basically glued them together, and they could be rolled up that was a scroll. Another one is "codex." You need to understand what codex is as well. A codex was where sheets were bound together in book form, much like the very early form of putting a book together and so instead of attaching the sheets and rolling them up they just bound them together sort of in book form and that was a codex. These are simply different types of manuscripts that we have, that we have available and have access to.

A few other terms you need to be aware of one that probably is obvious but still needs to be mentioned is a "scribe." Scribes would simply be those who copied and made copies of the New Testament text and Old Testament text. A couple of other words that you need to understand is "scribal tendency," you will often see that word in discussions of textual criticism. Scribal tendency just refers to the types of things a scribe would do usually. How scribes recorded or copied a document was that they would read a document have to hold that, what they just read, in their mind and then transfer to their page and copied it down. There are certain tendencies that we will talk a little bit about later, certain tendencies might dictate what happened when that text was copied. Again a scribe could forget something or a scribe could intentionally try to harmonize something. For example, if a scribe was reading something in one of the Gospels and it seemed to conflict with what he just copied the Gospel of Matthew the week before and now he is working on Mark and there seems to be a difference, he might try to harmonize it and make the two Gospels sound like each other. So there are certain tenancies as a scribe

was copying or as a scribe was listening to a text read in recording there are certain tendencies or certain things a scribe might do. We will talk a little bit more about those.

The last two, and there are a lot of other terms we could talk about, but I want to keep it simple and introduce the major terms, one of them is the word "uncial." That is a description of a type of manuscript. And Uncial manuscript was basically— and this refers more to the style of writing, unlike papyrus or scroll or codex that refers to the kind of manuscript, this refers more to the style of writing. An uncial manuscript was one that basically was written in all capital letters. Most of the New Testament documents probably would have been written in uncial script, that is, the writer would have written in all capital letters in Greek. There would have been no spaces between words, unlike most of our languages today, where we put space between words so it's easy to determine. Uncial manuscripts would not have had spaces between words. The sentences would have been run together and there would have been virtually no punctuation as well, that's an uncial manuscript. Much later on, several centuries later, many of the manuscripts are what is called "minuscule." That is the last term I want to introduce you to. Miniscule, that was more of a cursive type of writing that developed latter on when words began to be distinguished from each other and divided.

So those are some of the more important terms: manuscript, variant, papyrus, scroll and codex, scribe, scribal tendencies and then uncial and miniscule script types of manuscripts. Those are terms you will often see when you are reading discussions or listening to discussions of text criticism. But those are just ways of describing the types of evidence the text critics work with to try to reconstruct, as accurately as possible and as closely as possible, the form of the original manuscript that the New and Old Testament authors would have produced.

Other Text Critical Sources

So, first there is an embarrassment of evidence when it comes to the New Testament. Second, I've introduced you to some important terms, a third thing to say about textual criticism is that the manuscripts are of very different kinds. The manuscript evidence that New Testament authors work with are of very different kinds. Sometimes a

lot of the manuscript evidence consists of actual copies of the New Testament in the Greek language whether they are uncial manuscripts in the capital letters with no division between words, or later on more of the cursive type miniscule scripts. Some of our— a lot of our manuscript evidence is in the form of actual copies in Greek of the New Testament text. And we said sometimes those are very fragmented, a piece of a section in the New Testament and other times it's an entire book or part of a book or several books or sometimes virtually the entire New Testament. A lot of our manuscripts consist of actual copied New Testament texts. Also we have examples from the early church fathers especially from the third and fourth centuries where the early church fathers, or leaders of the early church. After the completion of the writing of the New Testament the early church fathers often quote from the New Testament and their quotations from the New Testament text often tell us what manuscript they might have, or what form of the New Testament they might have had available to them. So in other words the quotations the church fathers are quoting from the New Testament, their quotations provide valuable evidence for the constructing or helping to reconstruct the New Testament and the wording of it and what it said, so the church fathers are important.

We also have, we also have various versions or early translations of the New Testament. As the New Testament manuscripts spread to more widely geographically and needed to be made more available to the other peoples speaking other languages, we have the very early translations of the New Testament in languages like Syriac or Latin and some other languages and those translations also help provide evidence for what form of the New Testament text did these early Christians seem to have available to them?

So text critics take all of these pieces of evidence into consideration to try to reconstruct what most likely did Paul write or what most likely did Matthew write in the original form of the manuscript and the original text.

The fourth thing to say is that all the evidence of all the manuscripts that we have available is— New Testament text critics have tried to think that they can classify them according to different families. So instead of having all this hodgepodge of evidence based on similarities between certain texts textual critics— and that's another term

“textual critics” refers to anybody that is engaged in textual criticism and is attempting to reconstruct the original text – but textual critics think that they can classify all of these manuscripts and all this evidence into certain families. There are manuscripts that seem to have a genealogical relationship to each other. They are manuscripts that seemed to come from a common parent or common source. For example, I will just mention or describe briefly two of the families the text critics seem to think existed seem that they can classify the manuscripts into. One of the more well known is called the Alexandrian family. The Alexandrian family describes a group of manuscripts that seem to have a common lineage that goes back to the manuscript copied in Alexandria Egypt, hence the Alexandrian family of manuscript. That family of manuscripts is thought to be of more high-quality. It's thought to have less changes and less harmonization in an attempt to smooth the text out. It often seems to reflect older readings. So, most text critics think that the Alexandrian type texts are of very high quality and very important in trying to reconstruct the original New Testament text.

Another type of family is called the Western manuscript family. But the third type that I want to just discuss very briefly is called “the Byzantine.” Most of our New Testament Greek manuscripts fall into this category. It's much later, it seems to be a later manuscript family that arose much later than the Alexandrian. It's often characterized by attempts to smooth the text which is where if a scribe thought a text was too difficult he might try to smooth it out or he might try to harmonize it with another text or something like that. The Byzantine manuscript family seems to be important though often not quite as important sometimes as the Alexandrian, but it still provides evidence for possibilities that these manuscripts might contain the original reading of the New Testament text. It's important to understand text critics though don't simply help the evidence, or say that if the Alexandrian has it or if 50 manuscripts have this reading and only three or four have this the one then the 50 is right. It's not simply counting the manuscripts but it's taking all the evidence you'll see in a moment, and weighing it up to try to figure out what most likely did Paul, Luke or Matthew or for the Old Testament Isaiah or the Psalmist, what most likely did they write? So again the scholars out of all the manuscripts think they can

divide them into different families which seem to have a similar relationship with all the manuscripts in that group. They seem to have a similar relationship to each other have similar types of readings and so belong to a common family.

External and Internal Evidence

The fifth concept to introduce to you is the idea that there are two types of evidence that text critics deal with in reconstructing the New Testament text. One of them is known as external evidence and one is known as internal evidence. The external evidence would refer to things like the date of all these manuscripts and what family they belong to. We just looked at Alexandrian, Byzantine, or Western. So they look at the evidence as far as what family do these manuscripts belong to, what's the date of these manuscripts, and are they very early are the much later? Just because one is early and one is late that does not automatically mean one is correct and one is not. It's just part of the evidence that they take into consideration.

The geographical distribution, whether a certain reading in one manuscript seems to be tied to one location as opposed to a variant reading that maybe spread widely geographically showing up in several geographical locations. There are a number of other factors as well that are taken into consideration like scribal tendencies. What is scribes likely to do as he's copying or as he is listening to the text read? All of that is what is called a external evidence. It's all taken into consideration when trying to determine what most likely did the Old or New Testament author write.

The other one is called internal evidence, internal evidence refers to the evidence in the text itself, that is, what do we know about the author's style, what do we know about his grammar and the words he used, and what do we know about his theology? So looking at the broader context of the document itself especially for Paul, looking at all of his letters and looking at theological tendencies et cetera and using that internal evidence in the text self.

The text critics established what most likely was the original text, so for example someone again when you look at all the manuscripts there some variance between them. The correct one may be the one that would conform to Paul's style, his vocabulary, his

theology in the letter and elsewhere in the letters he wrote trying to pick the reading that is most consistent with what we know about Paul, his theology and his writing elsewhere. So that is internal evidence. Again some text critics prefer one over the other. Some would give a nod to internal evidence when deciding which reading was correct, and some would focus more on the external evidence. Others would again try to weigh both of them taking both of them into consideration as much as possible. Some might prefer to focus on one family. For example, some text critics have given priority to the Alexandrian family, remember we talked about the different manuscripts that can be grouped according to families and genealogical relationship. Some text critics would give priority to the Alexandrian text alleging any readings found in Alexandrian type manuscripts are probably the original. Other text critics might give preference to the Byzantine and everything else being equal, a reading found in the Byzantine manuscripts would be the one preferred.

Eclectic Method of Text Criticism

One method of text criticism that seems to have caught on and most I think would agree with is what is called the an eclectic method. Eclectic or the reasoned eclectic system is the fancy term for it. Simply what that means is taking into consideration all the evidence and weighing it up and not giving priority necessarily to anyone but weighing all the evidence, the internal and external, the date of the manuscript, and the family it belongs to. Again, if you're looking at the other manuscripts and in one verse there are some variants in the manuscript weighing all the evidence the date, the distribution, whether it's Byzantine or Alexandrian, looking at scribal tenancies, internally looking at the authors style, his vocabulary, and his grammar et cetera; taking all of that into consideration one tries to make the most reasoned reconstruction possible that most likely reflects exactly what the original author wrote. In the New Testament at least there are two new Greek texts that have emerged as the common texts that most New Testament professors and students use. One of them is the United Bible Society, the UBS fourth edition has just come out and by the way most manuscripts of the Greek New Testaments

that we have they usually continued to be edited and sometimes as we discover new ways of looking at text problems it's an ongoing trying to again reconstruct as closely as possible what the original manuscript looked like. But one of the common edited manuscripts is the United Bible Society, the 4th edition.

The other one is what is known as the Nestle-Aland, those two names Nestle-Aland reflect the primary editors. The Nestle-Aland text is in its 27th edition. Those are two very common, and today the most prominent New Testament texts that have been produced based on text criticism. So again taking all the manuscript evidence and weighing all the probabilities et cetera, these are the texts that have been produced that reflect and attempt to most closely represent what it was that the New Testament authors actually wrote.

Scribal Changes

One other final issue to talk about briefly is the different types of changes and motivations for those changes that a scribe might introduce. Again remember as a scribe has a manuscript that he is copying from and as he is copying it, he must read a line, or however much a scribe can read, a few words or a line, and then hold that in his mind as he then moves over and begins to write it on the blank page. The other possibility was that a scribe might be listening to someone read a text, as those two scenarios are taking place certain changes might take place and might be introduced into the manuscript the scribe is producing. For example, and to back up a little bit these changes are of two types, some changes or variants are accidental. These variants or mistakes introduced are accidental, that is, they occur unintentionally and we will talk about a couple of those. The other type is intentional. A scribe might intentionally try to improve the manuscript in some way. So he has this manuscript, he might see a difficulty in it or something that his unclear that he will try to improve. So there are some changes that are intentional. So intentional changes might be this, a very common intentional change is harmonization. Again a scribe, especially with the Gospels, might try to harmonize one gospel with the other. Again if the scribe is coping, for example, this is a very prominent example of how

this has happened, if the scribe is copying the Lord's Prayer in Luke and perhaps the scribe is very well aware of the version of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6, the scribe who is copying Luke might intentionally try to make Luke's version of the Lord's prayer sound just like Matthew's because he wants them to sound that same. There can't be any discrepancy or difference so a scribe might intentionally try to harmonize, especially with the Gospels. Again, if the scribe has perhaps just copied Matthew or knows of Matthew and as he is now copying Mark or Luke he might intentionally try to make them conform to each other.

A second one is a scribe might try to improve or smooth something out that is rough or appears to be a problem or inaccurate, or an inconsistency. So again a scribe might be reading a text, and especially maybe theologically the text the way it's worded might seem to call into question something that the conflicts with the scribe's theological beliefs. So the scribe might change it or update it to reflect accurate theology or something like that.

So those are examples of intentional changes and the result is the scribe, and this is important, is trying to improve the texts in some way, he is trying to clarify it, harmonize it, remove conflicts or inconsistencies as he sees them, make it conform to the theology of the church and standard theological belief and try to remove any inconsistencies. Most intentional changes are attempts to improve the text, but there is the other type of change that is unintentional. Those changes that are introduced by the scribe unintentionally and the scribe is not trying to improve the manuscript but these are changes that are introduced accidentally.

Again, most of the scribes read the manuscript and then transferred that verse to record it in another manuscript, or as the scribe is listening to the text read and was recording it, certain intentional changes can arise. For example, a scribe might loose his place, you might have done this before if you are reading and especially if you get tired. If they are really tired and you are reading a paragraph and you've experienced reading the same line over again, scribes often got tired when they were reading and recording manuscripts so at times they may, especially if they are going from one manuscript to the

other, read the line and record it and when go back and read the same line again, so they will record it a second time. Another common one is if they accidentally skip a line or two so as they reading the manuscript they record a line and when they go back they may not come back to the same spot. They may accidentally skip a line especially if the line begins in the same way as the line before it. But the point is they may accidentally skip a line when they are going back and forth between the manuscript they are copying and the new manuscript they are producing. So certain changes like that that are unintentional are reflected in the new manuscript the scribe has produced. Then you can see what happens if someone uses that manuscript and copies it. That same mistake may get perpetrated in subsequent manuscripts and as a branch in a tree as it branches out, other manuscripts might pick up the same mistakes that were unintentional changes that the scribe was making.

Another source of variants in the manuscripts is through hearing or errors of hearing. As a scribe, or as someone is reading a manuscript again, that person may not pronounce something clearly, and furthermore especially as the Greek language progressed in the early centuries, in the centuries beyond the first century and this was already happening in the first century, certain vowels or even a combination of vowels begin to be pronounced similarly or certain words may be pronounced the same way as well. So as a scribe hears a sound, and it can actually be represented by more than one letter, which letter is he going to write? For example, in the English language when someone says the “bored,” is that “bored” that “I am bored out of my mind” or is it "board" such as “a board,” or even then the word “board” itself can have several connotations. So even in English you know words often sound similar and often the context is enough to help disambiguate that but you see what I mean, as someone is reading something it may not be pronounced the same or in Greek especially when vowels begin to be pronounced similarly when a scribe is listening to something being read, how is he going to spell that? There may be different ways of spelling what he is just heard and presumably they did not have the luxury of raising their hand asking how that was spelled or something like that. So some of the changes in the manuscript and

some of the differences between manuscripts may be the result of the different sounds of certain Greek words.

Another example of a variant might come from an error in sight. An English example of this, one way of doing that would be just reversing a couple of letters. For example, that can make a big difference in the meaning of the word, look at the difference between the English word “dog” and “God.” By simply reversing two letters that makes a quite a difference in the meaning of the word and the same was true and Greek. Often as he's going from one to the other he might accidentally see— reading a word reversed, two of the letters, causing a very different meaning. Again, scribes got tired and some of them probably had bad eyesight or they may have woken up with the bad attitude that day or not had a good night’s sleep. All of that is going affect their ability to accurately copy the text and so sometimes errors of sight when they are copying manuscripts might cause them to write a word again reverse letters or something like that can produce a change in the manuscript.

A final one, and this is kind of interesting, is once in a while, and these are a little bit easier for text critics to deal with is sometimes, it was a common practice for scribes in the margins to make notes. Sometimes it might be a rather serious note about the text sometimes it might be a something else like “my hands are cold” or “I'm running out of ink,” or “my wife burnt the toast today” or something like that may be written in the margin. Then when some other scribe has that text and is copying the scribe might accidentally include that note in the margin right in the text so right in the middle of Mark’s text there might be something such as “my hands are freezing,” because that's what kind of an note the original scribe might have written. So again when scribes write little notations in the margins once in a while if that manuscript later on gets copied by someone else those little notes in the margin might actually end up in the text. So, again, my understanding of what's going on is text critics are allowed to kind of remove that and realize that probably a scribe inserted that himself.

So those are some of the scribal tendencies those are some of the things a scribe might do and so again a text critic will work backwards and out of all of these variants try

to say, can I explain some of these changes based on unintentional or intentional changes made by scribe, and if I can do that then I can start to narrow down what most likely then was it that Paul, Luke or Matthew wrote.

Principles of Text Criticism

Let me say one final thing about text criticism then we will just look at a couple of examples very briefly. Let me give you three principles that text critics often operate with. What principles or what kind of standards did they use, what principles inform the decisions they make? One of them is that usually when you start, when you compare all the readings— so again if you are a text critic who looks at Mark 1:1 and all the manuscripts there are some differences in them. The question he's trying to ask is: "Which one of these differences most likely reflects what Mark wrote?" And again I don't want to leave the impression that every verse has multiple differences, sometimes there's only a couple and sometimes there's more than one. Sometimes it's very obvious and other times it's a little more difficult to determine but if a scribe is working with a verse and out of all the manuscripts there are some variants some differences the scribe or the text critic wants to know which one of those most likely is the one that Mark wrote?

So, one of the principles is this: that out of all those differences the most difficult or the hardest reading is probably the most correct one. The reason for that is that a scribe is more likely to introduce an improvement because the scribe is more likely to smooth out, to harmonize, to improve the text then he is to introduce a difficulty with a text. Again these are just principles, they don't always work because a scribe might make a mistake, because of an error in sight or because of skipping a line a scribe might make the text more difficult and in that case the most difficult reading would be not correct. But generally a scribe is more likely to improve a text to smooth out what he perceives as an inconsistency or theological problems or and roughness in the text tending to make it smooth. So with that basis of most text critics think that, everything else being equal, the more difficult of all the readings or the harder of the readings will probably be the correct one.

A second principle is the shortest reading is most likely to be the correct one. So, out of all of the various differences the one that is the shortest will probably be the correct one. Again that the reasoning for that is a scribe is more likely to expand and smooth out and improve the text and add to it. Although again there are exceptions we saw a scribe might accidentally skip a line in copying a text produced in a shorter text. So this is— these are not hard and fast rules, they are principles that are usually followed and everything else being equal the shorter reading will be the correct one because a scribe is more likely to expand and elaborate and smooth out.

A third one is that is as usually followed is when you have manuscripts with different readings, the reading that can best to explain the origin of the others is probably going to be the correct reading. If you can explain the origin of all the other readings based on one of them it's probably the correct reading. One example is a lot of times what you find taking place is if a scribe has more than one manuscript or he knows of more than one reading the easiest way might be to combine them all and so sometimes you'll have manuscripts that have several readings and again because the scribe might have had several texts or he might have known of more than one reading instead of trying to figure out which one is correct he just put them all in there and combined them all together. So, that's one way to describe how some of these readings might have given rise to by one of the other manuscripts. So if you can explain of all the variants if you can explain them all based on one of them one of them seems to give rise to the other readings it's probably the correct one. So those are just some of the principles that text critics utilize in trying to determine what most likely was the correct reading of the text.

Examples of text critical texts in the New Testament

Now let me just give you a couple of brief examples from the New Testament, one of them we've already referred to, and again most of these are just differences in the words. Again I don't want you to think, or leave you with the impression that if you have a manuscript on Mark and all the other manuscripts will diverge from it then almost every aspect a whole manuscript is different. It's often just differences in wording here and there and but we will see you sometimes the difference is more substantial. One

example of a very easy one that we have already mentioned comes from Luke 1:1-4 in Luke's prologue where Luke says “it seemed good to me to write my own” or “produce my own account of the life of Christ so that you Theophilis may know of the certainty about these things.” There are a couple of later manuscripts that added the words when Luke says “it seems good to me,” they added the words “and to the Holy Spirit.” Interestingly, there are only a couple of manuscripts that do this out of all the manuscripts that don't include the words “and to the Holy Spirit.” We do see the words “and it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” elsewhere. So most likely it was added because these are two later manuscripts and there's no other manuscripts that attest to this and because Acts does include this phrase elsewhere and because it seems most likely to be the attempt of scribes to perhaps reflect what Luke says elsewhere and maybe even add divine sanction to the text. In other words, it's not just Luke’s story it must have the sanctioning of the Holy Spirit probably Luke did not write those words. Luke simply wrote, “it seemed good to me to produce these this account.”

Another interesting example is Revelation 21:3 which in John's new Jerusalem vision, John now is actually quoting the Old Testament covenant formula. Chapter 21 says in verse 3 of Revelation, “and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with the men (or with people) and he will live with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.” If you recall from the Old Testament you'll know that that is the covenant formula that frequently in various forms crops up throughout the Old Testament, “I will be their God, they will be my people.” John appears particularly to be drawing on the Ezekiel 37 version of that though it's found in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and a number of Old Testament texts. Leviticus 26 is a full expression of the covenant formula. What is interesting is that there are two types of manuscripts for Revelation 21:3. In the section where it says “they will be his people and God himself will be with them” some manuscripts have the singular “people” whereas other manuscripts have the plural “people,” or we could say in sort of stilted English “peoples.” We don’t use that very much but some manuscripts from Revelations 21

where we have, “they will be my people” singular, others have “they will be my peoples” plural.

The question is which one is the correct reading? What did John most likely write? When you look at the manuscripts themselves like external evidence as far as the date, and the number of manuscripts, and the Byzantine, Alexandrian families, etc. it's very difficult to arrive at a certain conclusion so that other types of evidence are usually brought into consideration. For example, is it more likely that a scribe would write “peoples” plural, or that a scribe would write “people” singular. One important piece of evidence is it's interesting that John frequently universalize his Old Testament texts, Old Testament texts referred specifically to the nation of Israel. Now John takes it to apply to people more generally, including Gentiles. John has that phrase over and over again throughout Revelation, “people from every tribe and every tongue and language, and nation” so that is it possible that John himself changed the Old Testament formula that had singular people referring to Israel, and now he intentionally made it plural “peoples” to make it clear that all people, not just the Israelites but Gentiles, people from every tribe and language and tongue and nation now belong to the people of God plural. Maybe a scribe would have, a scribe knowing the Old Testament covenant formula that is in the singular “people,” may have tried to change it back to make it sound like and conform to the Old Testament covenant formula from Ezekiel and Leviticus 26 that have singular “people.” So here’s an example where John probably originally wrote “peoples” plural, and later a scribe somewhere along the line may have change it back to the singular to make it sound more like the Old Testament formula.

Another example, an intriguing example, is found in Romans 5:1. In Romans 5:1 Paul begins a new section by demonstrating sort of the results or implications of justification by faith that he has argued for in the first four chapters. So, based on that fact that one is justified by faith in Jesus Christ starting in verse 5, “therefore, since we have been justified,” chapters 1-4 “through faith, we have peace with God.” Now that seems to be a statement of what is true and what we indeed posses by virtue of being justified, we have been justified by faith: therefore we currently, we presently, have a peace with God.

We no longer are at enmity with God we are no longer in a hostile relationship and now we have a peaceful relationship. However some manuscripts interestingly have a word here that could be translated "let us" or "we should have" peace with God, more of an exhortation or a command. So which is it? Again some manuscripts read, "we have peace with God" making an indicative statement or an assertion; some other manuscripts have, "we should have" or "let us have peace" or "we should have peace with God," more of an exhortation or a command. This one makes a little bit of a difference, which did Paul write? Was Paul commanding us to have peace or we should have peace; or was he simply making an assertion, this is in fact true based on the fact that we have been justified. The difference is one letter in Greek, it's the same word "we have," or it's the same word "to have" or that we translate "to have" in English. But the difference is, is this word to be translated "we have" as an assertion, a statement would be spelled one way, or is it a command, "we should have," "let us have," that would be spelled another way. The difference is one letter that could have been pronounced the same way. Remember we said if a scribe is sitting there listening to the text read, sometimes when a letter is pronounced the same way, what is he going to write? And this is an example of where the verb "to have" could have been written with the change of just one letter and both letters would have been pronounced identical. Does everyone see that if the author were to use the Greek words, one of them would be *exomen* which would be "we have," the other would be *exōmen*, you see the difference is just one letter, *exōmen* would be "we should have" or "let us have" as opposed to *exomen* which would be "we have," as an assertion. The problem is the *o* and the *ō* were pronounced the same. So if you have someone reading that says "exomen" what am I going to write? Am I going to write, "let us have" or "we should have" or am I going to write "we have" as a statement or assertion. Most commentaries of Romans I have read are all convinced that most likely the translation is "we have," it's an assertions or statement that is the correct one. But you can still see what text critics have to do, when they have manuscripts such as Romans 5:1 that even have just the difference of one letter that probably goes back to the fact that both letters would have been pronounced identically and causing some scribes to write

one letter or others to write another letter that would result in interpreting the text in a slightly different way.

The final example is a much more significant one as far as the length. Most of what we've looked at so far has been simply— for example, Luke 1, a couple of words, the other two were just the spellings. Literally both the other two were just one letter and instances of the difference between the one letter. But I want to look at one briefly that is a little more lengthy and that is the ending of Mark chapter 16. And again I don't hope to solve this and I don't hope to go into any detail as to why this took place or how we should treat the text and this was so substantial that almost every English translation I've ever looked at includes a mention of this. If you look at most English manuscripts they will have a note like this, I'm looking at an NIV text and it says "the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16: 9 – 20." So if you look at most of your Bibles, Mark 16, the very last chapter of Mark goes all the way to verse 20. But, every English translation I've seen has some little note there in a text or maybe in the footnote that says, "some early manuscripts or other witnesses do not have verses 9 through 16." There actually was another— some English Bibles also have another possible ending that's a lot shorter and they will have a similar note. This ending sometimes will be in a footnote, and again they will say it wasn't in some of the earlier or ancient witnesses. So the problem is we have apparently two versions of Mark, one version contains Mark chapters 16 that goes only through verse 8: the other version of Mark has an ending such as the verses 9 to 20. I'm not going to take time to read it but verse 9 of Mark 16 begins "when Jesus rose early on the first day of the week he appeared to Mary Magdalene out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him" and then it goes on and actually in verse 15 has Jesus telling his disciples: "go into the world and preach this gospel of this good news to all of creation" et cetera, et cetera. So you have this long ending that again my English Bibles says, "some manuscripts don't have this ending verses 9 through 20."

So the question is where did Mark end? Did Mark end at verse eight? A lot of manuscripts have Mark 16:8 and in verse 8 that's it, that's the end of the Gospel. Other

manuscripts include verses 9 through 20 so where did Mark end? Again I don't want to solve this problem and go into all of the details on this but, is it possible that Mark did indeed intend to end at verse 8? I will read it here is how Mark 16:8 ends. Chapter 16 is the account of Jesus' resurrection and appearance to some of his disciples and verse 8 says, "trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb, they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid" and that's the end of chapter 16 verse 8. And so you may wonder, what kind of way is that to end the Gospel with the women trembling of fear and being afraid to go tell anybody? That's not how a Gospel ends especially when you read Matthew, Luke and John. But perhaps that's how the ancient scribe thought, and perhaps verses 9 through 20 were some ancient scribe's attempt to construct a proper ending for the Gospel. Many manuscripts then picked up on that and included verses 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark actually ended at verse 8? I think there are good reasons even theological reasons and contextual reasons with Mark that suggest that that's maybe where it ended. Some suggest that actually verse 8 of Mark himself wrote more after verse 8 and somehow that got lost, cut off, or burned off a manuscript or something. Somehow that got lost and later on a scribe included verses 9 through 20. But is it possible that Mark intended to end at verse eight and we won't go into why that might be but perhaps a scribe having a manuscript where Mark ends at 16:8 thought that that was an insufficient way to end the gospel and knew of Matthew, Luke and John even some of these verses 9 through 20 resemble, especially 15 and 16, very closely Matthew chapter 28 the Great Commission text. So maybe a scribe thought that he needed to add an appropriate ending to the Gospel of Mark and so verses 9 through 20 appear on some manuscripts but they may not be the original ending that Mark himself wrote.

Conclusion

So In conclusion to textual criticism, textual criticism is meant to take into consideration all the evidence possible, external and internal. Externally the date of the manuscripts, the families that they belong to, the distribution of the manuscript, whether the certain manuscript is located or has its origin in only one place or whether a reading

seems to be spread geographically across several locations and was more well-known. Also one should look at the date of the manuscript and the scribal tendencies. Then internally looking at the authors style, the vocabulary, grammar, elsewhere in the book where the author of other documents such as Paul, looking at his theology, and style in the broader context. Using all of that information and trying to reconstruct as closely as possible and as accurately as possible, by working backwards from all of the manuscript evidence, using all the criteria and information working backwards to reconstruct as accurately and as closely as possible what most likely did the author of Mark, Matthew, Romans, Jeremiah, Isaiah or Genesis, did they write. Remember much like the tree where a trunk branches off in several directions we don't have the trunk. We don't have the original manuscript we just have the branches, and usually the ends of the branches, so we try to work backwards and reconstruct how, most likely, the original manuscript read. Out of all of the manuscripts and in the process of copying, differences crept in, changes crept in and text criticism tries to work back from the evidence to reconstruct what most likely was the original reading.

But again, I would like to add, it must be said that nothing important is at stake in my opinion and most evangelical scholars have confirmed this. Nothing important to our faith in Jesus Christ hinges on text critical differences. The process of text criticism allows us to arrive at a very high degree of probability exactly what the original text said, and we operate every day with high degrees of probability. It allows us to reconstruct with a very high degree of probability what, most likely, the biblical author originally wrote. When we look at the manuscripts the evidence text criticism allows us to work back and reconstruct to hide a degree of probability what it was that the author wrote so that we can have confidence in the text that we have and that we have something that is an accurate object of interpretation that provides a basis for hermeneutical thinking, reflection, interpretation, and application of the Bible as the Word of God.

So that is the first stage of the process of transmission that will lead us into discussing hermeneutics in more detail the process of transmission from inspiration of the original production and origin of the biblical text through all the evidence as the text was

made available working back and reconstructing through text criticism to a text for the Old and New Testament that is an accurate reflection of the original inspired text.

That now leads us to the second stage of transmission that is based on the reconstruction of the Old and New Testament text: translation of the Greek and Hebrew into a modern language like English. Translation then allows that text to be made available in a variety of languages that we speak so that now we can have an adequate basis for hermeneutics and interpretations. So in our next session we will talk a little bit about translation, the process of translation, what makes a good translation, what are the different types of translations, and what role does translation play in hermeneutics and interpretation and what translation should you perhaps utilize in your own hermeneutical endeavors.

Transcribed by Megan Azadian
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 4

Translation

Introduction to Translation

The basis of interpretation is a good translation. Text of the Old and New Testament is established through textual criticism that we discussed last session. Through the process of textual criticism out of all the manuscripts some of them with various variants and different ratings one works backwards to establish what most likely was the original text, the exact wording of it. Then based on that, the next part of the process the next phase of the process of transmission is translation into the language of the modern day reader. Again text criticism establishes from all the manuscript evidence the original text in Hebrew and Greek. Then the next step in the process of transmission is translation into modern day languages. But there are a number of questions raised in discussing translation. What makes a good translation? What are the principles that are utilized to produce translation? What types of translations are available? What translation should I be using? What role does translation play in hermeneutics? The purpose of this session is not to necessarily defend any one translation but to introduce you to the philosophy of translation and again what role translation plays in hermeneutics and interpretation. We will also talk a little bit about gender trends in translation. One of the translations in vogue are gender inclusive or gender neutral translations as they are often called. We'll talk a little bit about those and the philosophy that that lies behind that. What makes a good translation, and what one should I use in interpretation?

Theories of Translation

The first thing is to understand what translation is. Basically, at its most simple form, translation is simply the transference of a message from one language to another. The original language that one is translating from is using the called the "source language". The language that is being translated into for our purposes it would be English or whatever language you speak. The modern day language is what is known as

the “receptor language”. Then in between you have the message. So translation then is translating a message from a source language for our purposes that would be Hebrew and Greek and translating that message from the source language into the receptor language which is for our purposes the modern day language that you speak whether English or whatever other language.

There are a number of theories about how that is done. Usually the theories revolve around whether a priority is given to the source language or whether priority is given to the receptor language. That is do I give priority to the Hebrew and Greek text and the form of the text or do I give priority to the modern day receptor language such as English which I am translating into. For example, a focus on the source language the focus on the source text usually is associated with and results in more literal types of translations. The goal in this type of translation is to focus on the source language which again for our purposes is Hebrew and Greek. The goal is to usually reproduce as closely as possible the language and the structure and the form of the original language even if at times it sounds awkward and wooden and stilted in the receptor language. The goal again is to preserve as closely as possible the form and the structure of the source languages, again Hebrew and Greek. This is often known also as a formal equivalent translation or a formal equivalent philosophy of producing a translation. It focuses on producing as much as possible the exact form of the source text. In other words it’s willing at times to sacrifice understanding and clarity in the receptor text in order to preserve as closely as possible the form of, the structure of, the wording of, the length of the sentences of the source text, again, for our purposes Greek and Hebrew. Modern day examples of this might be the NASB the New American Standard or the NRSV is a classic example of a more formal equivalent type of translation a translation that focuses on source text, and the source language.

The other kind of competing theory or philosophy or translation focuses not on the source text but on the receptor text. Usually these types of translations have a more contemporary sound to them when they are read. The goal of a translation that focuses on the receptor text is to reproduce the message of the source text even if not the form and

structure at least to produce the message in a way that will be understood by the modern reader or those who are reading in their receptor language. The focus is more on the receptors and the receptor language. Will the modern day reader for whom I'm producing this translation will they as accurately and as closely as possible understand the message of the source text. This translation is quite willing to sacrifice the form and the structure and the exact wording and the form of the source text in order to communicate as clearly as possible in the language of the receptor. This is often known as a dynamic equivalent type of translation. The goal is to get the modern reader to respond. I should say that most who follow this philosophy translation that focuses on the receptor language do not do so with the idea or intention that of abandoning the source text. The goal is to try to reproduce the meaning as closely as possible but in a way that will be understood by the receptors and by the receptor language. So the goal is that modern readers will respond to the text in an equivalent way, in the same way emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually that the first readers would have responded to the source text. That requires in this philosophy of translation introducing certain changes that is, changing it in a way that will be understandable by the majority of contemporary readers so that they will respond in a similar way. Again it is to reproduce an equivalent response in the receptors as those who have originally read the text. It is quite willing to change the structure, the wording, the length of sentences, it's willing to sacrifice the form and other things in their source text so that the readers will be able to understand it and respond to it in an equivalent way. So they sacrifice form for meaning. One example of a thorough dynamic equivalent translation is the Today's English Version or the TEV.

There are other examples of translations that focus on more of the receptor language or are dynamic equivalent. There are also, one could quibble over this but there are some who would even distinguish from dynamic equivalent translations go a step further and look at or those New and Old Testament texts that could be labeled a paraphrase such as Eugene Peterson's *The Message* or traditionally the Living Bible or the New Living Bible are often placed in this category of paraphrase.

Rather than seeing these as opposite translations theories it's probably more helpful to place them on ends of a spectrum. Instead of simply opposite self-contained theories there is a place for more dynamic equivalent approaches and formal equivalent approaches. Again dynamic approaches that focus on the receptor language the modern language as strive for understandably and intelligibly and those formal equivalent that focus more on the source text try to reproduce the form and instead of seeing them as two opposite or opposed translation theories that are sealed off from each other. It is better to see them standing on opposite ends of the spectrum from more formal to more equivalent. In fact, I would argue that a completely formal equivalent approach is impossible. Every translation is, in some respects, an interpretation of the biblical text. So a completely literal translation is in my opinion theoretically impossible and practically impossible as well. So it's better to see them on opposite ends of the spectrum as translations that tend more to the focus on the source text and that are formally equivalent and other translations that tend more towards dynamic equivalence focusing more on the receptor text.

The number in between in my opinion an example although it is usually often a considered dynamic equivalent but I think an example that tries to balance the two approaches that fall somewhere in between whether it does so successfully can be debated but would be the NIV especially the 2011 updated version of the NIV. It is actually, by their own admission, an attempt to balance the formal and dynamic equivalent maybe a little bit more towards the dynamic side of that spectrum. Again my purpose is not to defend one these perspectives or to defend a particular translation, though I think there is much to be said for dynamic equivalent type translations and what the NIV is doing. My attempt is not to defend a particular translation as much as to introduce you to the philosophies that lie behind translations so you know what is going on and you can identify what kind of translation you are dealing with and what contribution that might make to the process of hermeneutics and interpretation.

Observations on Translation Theories

Instead, I simply want to make a number of observations related to translation by way of evaluating translations and understanding what they are and what they do and your ability to utilize them. First of all as I've already mentioned there's no such thing in my opinion as a completely literal translation. The reason for this is linguistic because no two languages are identical. Although languages do overlap and there are similarities and that's what makes translation possible but on the other hand there is no such thing as a completely literal translation. No two languages completely overlap. No two languages are identical. Since this is the case, a strictly literal translation is impossible. Again, even words that overlap in meaning are not completely identical words and aren't even spelled the same. Even a word that is in English that is equivalent to a Hebrew word has different letters and even different numbers and letters and are obviously spelled very differently. Their meanings usually over-lap but are usually never completely identical. Languages have different structures. Something that Hebrew or Greek does grammatically English doesn't or does in a very different way. So there is no equivalent overlap between languages, so that a completely literal translation in my opinion is impossible. In fact, if I were to strive for a rather wooden, I prefer the word "wooden" to "literal," usually if I were to strive for a completely wooden translation, that is if Hebrew or Greek has a word or a certain construction I will reproduce that exactly in English, usually the result is often nonsense. That's because the two languages don't ever lap.

Let me give you an example. This is from a rather wooden word for word following the words in the Greek text and following the grammatical structure construction in the Greek text with the closest equivalent in English. Here is a rather wooden translation of Colossians 3:17 "And all what anything if you do in word or in work all in name of Lord Jesus." Now some of that you picked up on and maybe you caught the general sense of the whole thing but much of it is rather awkward and unintelligible if I am to translate it woodenly, which is how I just did it. However, to give just one example from the NIV, and that's just because it's the translation I have at hand right now, you could use a number of others. But here is how the NIV has handled Colossians 3:17 it says, "And in whatever you do whether in word or deed do all in the

name of Lord Jesus Christ." This makes a lot more sense. So you see its actually sacrificed a little bit of the strict grammar and wording in order to preserve more accurately the meaning while still maintaining some of the grammatical texture of the text itself. But the point was to demonstrate a precise and completely wooden or literal type of translation often miscommunicates or fails to communicate anything to the readers in the receptor language.

Another example, this is from Mathew 13: 4. The well-known Parable of the Sower and Mathew's version of it as spoken by Jesus in introducing it a very wooden almost word for word translation finding the closest formal and literal equivalent in English to the wording and grammar of the Greek text would sound something like this perhaps "And into the sow to him which on the one had fell by the way." Tell me what that means. The difficulty is because there are a couple of ways that the English words have been combined are not acceptable in English where as they may have been in Greek. So "And in the to sow" and "to sow" meaning "to sow seed" "And in the to sow him which on the one had fell by the way." Now chapter 13 verse 4 again this is just one example from the NIV how that has been clarified "As he was scattering the seed" or "as he was sowing the seed, some fell along the path" which again is an attempt to still follow the order of the Greek text as close as possible but to use appropriate English constructions that are equivalent to, as closely as possible, the Greek ones. I will use these as examples to demonstrate that a literal wooden translation often is not the best and frequently risks being misunderstood or not understood at all. Furthermore, as I said a completely literal translation it is actually an impossibility because no two languages completely overlap.

The second observation I want to make is that every translation is an interpretation, period. No matter what you hear and I still hear people saying that a certain translation is neutral, it doesn't interpret, it's not an interpretation. Some translations are discredited because they're interpretations where other translations are preferred because they are not interpretations. The difficulty is no matter how wooden

even the examples I just read for Mathew 13 and from Colossians 3, no matter how wooden every translation is an interpretation.

One well known New Testament scholar I was talking to told me, some may think this goes too far perhaps, but perhaps overstating but he told me that every translation is commentary on the biblical text in disguise. What he was trying to get at is what I think we were saying in some degree: every translation is an interpretation. Again some may interrupt more than others but it is impossible to produce a translation that is not an interpretation on the biblical text.

So for example, if I'm going to use an English word I'll just talk about the word level for this example. If I'm going to use an English word, "man," to translate the Hebrew word *adam* first of all I have to know what the Hebrew word *adam* means, that is I have to interrupt it. I also have to know what the English word man means to make sure that's an appropriate English word to translate *adam*. I can't use the word "tree" or I can't choose any other word I want I have to know what the Hebrew word means and then I have to find the appropriate English word. I have to know what that means so that I can determine if that's an appropriate word to use, that is interpretation. That's why I say every translation is an interpretation. Or again, if the Greek text that I'm translating has a certain grammatical construction I have to interrupt that correctly and accurately in order to know what English construction to use. Therefore I have to interpret and understand the meaning of the English construction to know if that is an accurate and adequate construction to use to represent the Greek. So interpretation no matter how wooden I want to be even if I want to be very wooden and use a word for word I still have to interpret the Greek and Hebrew text in my own language to determine whether I'm going to use this word or this construction to translate and represent this meaning and this construction in the Hebrew or Greek text. So again, every translation is an interpretation.

So again, for example, Genesis 1:1 how do I know that the English word "heavens," just to use a very simple example, how do I know that this is a good English word or even an accurate or a bad word to use for interpreting *shamaim*. I have to know the meaning of that Hebrew word in that context and I have to know the meaning of the

English word “heavens” in order to make sure it’s a good fit. Or Galatians 5 when Paul contrasts the spirit with the flesh actually for the Greek word that “flesh” is usually used to translate is *sarx*. But again I have to know what *sarx* means I can’t just randomly use the word “flesh.” I have to know what the word *sarx* means in order to find the appropriate English word. Then, again, I have to know the meaning of that word to know that it is an accurate and suitable word to use in order to translate the Greek word *sarx*. So every translation is to some degree an interpretation; no matter how literally you are trying to translate or how wooden you are trying to be. So again when someone says I don’t like this translation because it is an interpretation this is not an interpretation it’s a translation has probably misunderstood things because every translation is inevitably an interpretation of the biblical text.

A third thing in thinking in terms of translation is that translations usually give priority to the spoken language over the written. That is because most translations are meant to be read and heard. Think about it, in other words, translations are not primarily produced for scholars. Most people that read them are persons sitting in a worship service in the pews or the chairs of our churches, sanctuaries or auditoriums on Sunday mornings or whenever your church meets. Most persons are hearing it read, they are hearing it spoken. So most translations are often geared for the hearing, and often what that means is that sometimes translations will be geared towards eliminating offensive sounding translations, etc.

For example, a very good example that is probably true at the spoken as well as the written level is the fact that the older King James Version would include the word “ass” when referring to a donkey. That now has been removed because, at least in modern day English, to have that word spoken someone might read it, especially if you are raised with reading the King James Version or if you are raised with biblical jargon, you might be used to that. But if that word is utilized in a congregation in modern day for many not biblically trained or not used to reading or hearing the Bible, something like that may sound offensive. So a lot of translations today are geared towards the spoken

over the written and will often give priority to how something will sound when it is written, though again perhaps that is not true for every translation.

The fourth observation to make about translations is that translations, again I'm just making observations not so much evaluating them. The fourth thing is most translations are written to be understood by the majority of the audience for which they are intended. That takes into consideration the readership level, the social economic level of the majority of readers who it's intended. For example, just to utilize the NIV as an example. It is aimed at about a 5th or 6th grade reading level because that reflects the majority of the readers and listeners of that text will be operating at that level. As opposed for example to a translation that might be produced for academics or scholars it might operate at a different level. Translations are usually meant, especially dynamic equivalent translations, to be understood by the majority of the readers for whom it is produced.

Number five, in my opinion though is translations still must strive to retain a sense that one is still reading a foreign document. It is possible to update a translation to such a degree that one feels that one is reading a document that was produced in the twenty first century. For example, when Jerusalem is all of a sudden translated or becomes Philadelphia or Atlanta, Georgia or Sacramento, California or something like that or it is updated to become a modern day city as where Babylon is updated to become Las Vegas or something like that. However that might gain it seems to me at times though that some of those are extreme examples are sacrificing the fact that I'm dealing with a document that was not written in the twenty first century. So while one might strive for a document that is understandable to the receptors, at the same time it still must retain a sense that one is reading a document that was written in a century two millennia or more removed form my modern day context and situation. To update a text that sounds like it was produced in a twenty-first century context, culture and time is probably to sacrifice something at the expense of making it sound contemporary.

The sixth observation I want to say about translations is regarding observations about translations and what they are and what they do is that new translations or updating

translations is a necessity. There is no such thing as a final translation or the official translation of the New or Old Testament. The reason for that is not that the Bible changes, although sometimes we may find going back to text criticism we may find documents or information that will help us produce a more accurate text at least in viewing the details here and there. The reason is not so much the source language changes but the receptor language changes. Because modern day language changes because "ass" in the twenty-first century does not mean what it did in the sixteenth century. Another modern day example is the word "gay" in the twenty-first century does not mean what it did back in the twentieth century or early nineteenth century. It is because of that our translations have to change. Especially if we are focused on a dynamic equivalent type of translations or at least we are striving to produce a balance between translations that capture the original text yet still will communicate accurately to modern day readers because languages change it is necessarily to continually update. Not so much always in a wide scale manner but at least to revise and rethink our translations.

Gender and Translation

In light of all this I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about gender translations and how that relates to this and then we'll go back and gather all this information together. I want to talk just little bit about what role does translation play in the process of hermeneutics and interpretation. But again to review before we talk about gender translations again. Translations range over a scale from more formal equivalent where the goal of the translation is to reproduce as closely as possible the original form, grammatical structure, and wording. Again, that is impossible to do completely and exhaustibly because languages simply do not completely overlap. There is no one to one correspondence between the source language and my receptor language. So again that is why we said these philosophies of these translations are to be seen on a sliding scale. But formal equivalent translations tend to focus on more of the source text reproducing as closely as possible the grammatical structure, the wording, even sometimes sacrificing understandably and clarity in order to capture and retain the structure of the source text.

On the other end of the spectrum, we said are dynamic equivalent translations that focus more on understanding the source text not completely obliterating or doing away with it but trying to understand the messages communicated but making sure that it is understood in the receptor language by the majority of readers of that text. The goal is to reproduce an equivalent response in the readers of the receptor language as the original readers would have responded intellectually, physiologically and emotionally to the original text.

Let me say no translation, because no languages are identical, can hope to completely capture with exhaustive of accuracy the meaning of the original text. Instead, the question is whether the translation is an accurate and an adequate reproduction and reflection of the original text. By the way, just as an aside at least in my opinion, one can ask the question on how one's translations relate to inspiration? Inspiration refers to the original text so I would conclude that modern made translations can be labeled as "virtually" inspired in that they are accurate and adequate if not exhaustibly and perfectly, at least substantially and adequately if they are adequate and accurate reproductions and representations of the original text of the Old and New Testament.

So we have the scale from the more formal equivalent to dynamic equivalent translations. Translations that try to balance translations can fall on that scale of more formal and dynamic equivalent types. One issue that especially dynamic equivalent translations raise is an issue that is kind of encouraged today and that is the issue of gender translations, what some have called "gender neutral" translations or "gender inclusive" translations. I think the words "gender inclusive" translation is a little more accurate. Gender neutral seems to be suggesting taking gender out all together making reference to gender neutral whereas a gender exclusive suggests where the biblical text is clearly referring to both male and female, one makes that clear in the receptor language. So if the Greek and Hebrew language are clearly referring to male and female then in my modern day language that will also be clearer in the biblical text, so gender inclusive or gender neutral translations.

The issue behind it is this, in both Greek and Hebrew and if you've ever studied other languages especially if you are an English speaker this is often where other languages are very different than English. Greek and Hebrew, like a number of other languages like German and Spanish, etc, will have gender built into the language. That is, certain words will actually be classified as either masculine or feminine. Some words again to take Greek, which is my area of specialty and interest, some words will have endings on them or will have a character that is a form that is masculine. Others will have a form that is feminine. Some words are naturally masculine and feminine. For example, the word *anthropos* or "man" is naturally going to be masculine. The word for "woman" or female *gune* will naturally be feminine because it is referring to females. But there are other words in languages like that that don't seem at least for first century readers, to have any connection between the words and gender. For example, the Greek word for "sea" or "ocean" is feminine. There doesn't seem to be any connection as if there is some feminine quality in the ocean or sea. There may have been in history but I'm convinced that most first century readers who were Greek would have no idea why the word that we translate as sea or ocean was feminine. The Greek word for "word" or "speech" *logos* is masculine yet I'm not sure that there is any natural connection between that and the masculine gender. So some words in the languages are just arbitrary seem to be feminine or masculine.

Others seem to have a closer connection. The word for "woman" naturally or the word for "daughter" is naturally going to be feminine. The word for "husband" or "man" or "male" is naturally going to have a masculine form or masculine endings to them. Again, if you've studied a language that has gender most again with Greek and Hebrew certain words are either masculine or feminine, that is sometimes that's just the way they did it. The difficulty is in a language such as English, that doesn't have gender in the language, gender endings that are masculine or feminine or forms of words that are masculine or feminine, that can be tricky translating from one language that does that to another. This gets us to the heart of the problem sometimes Greek and Hebrew could use a masculine word, a word with a masculine form and use it to refer to both males and

females. The question is when that happens even though Greek and Hebrew use a masculine form like "he" or "man" especially if it's using the word "man" and it is clearly referring to all of humanity, both male and female. Is it appropriate to do that in the receptor language? Again, I'll use the example from the English translation. That is if Greek or Hebrew uses a masculine pronoun that could be translated as "he" or "him" or something like that, is it appropriate to use "he" or "him" in a English translation? Or if the Hebrew or Greek uses the word that we usually translate "man," is it appropriate to use the word "man" in the English translation? The question is if Hebrew and Greek are using a masculine term that clearly refers to both male and female in English should we make that more clear? That is, if in English I use the word "he," or "him" or "man," when the biblical text is clearly referring to both male and female even though they've used masculine language, if I used masculine language will I be misunderstood in translating it that way? If I use the word "man" will the majority of female readers think they are excluded from the text thinking it's only referring to men? If I use the word "him" or "he" when the biblical text is clearly referring to male and female will I be misunderstood? Will I lead readers to think that only males are being referred to and excluding females?

Not everyone agrees with that question but I think more and more many are starting to agree that we need to at least think about how we translate masculine language again. In Greek and Hebrew the Greek word for "man," *anthropos*, could be used to refer to men or a male but it also could be used to refer to humanity referring to all people, males and females. In English if I used the word "man" to translate *anthropos* not when *anthropos* is being used as males and men but when it is being used to refer to females and males, all of humanity, if I use the word "man" in those kinds of contexts will I be misunderstood? Or should I use another word in the English translation to capture the fact that there are both male and female. So sometimes you will find gender inclusive translations when *anthropos* in Greek the word that we often translate "man" in English refers to both males and females. What might be more appropriate? You'll find some English translations using the word "people" instead of "man." By using the word

"people" then it just makes it clear to the modern reader that the Greek and Hebrew were referring to both males and females. What if I use the word "man" every time *anthropos* occurred even when I was referring to male and female if I used the word "man" in English will I cause misunderstanding? Will I cause people to think that only men are being referred to.

The same thing occurs with "he" or "she". In Hebrew and Greek pronouns are masculine then we would translate "he" and "him" in English but it is clearly referring to male and female then it is legitimate in English to translate in a way that makes that clear. It all depends on whether, at least one of the main issues, there are other issues involved but one of the main issues is whether the English now uses "men" or "man" and "he" or "him" only to refer to males and never to females. Someone argued that's the case and therefore we need to be careful that when the Old Testament clearly refers to both male and women we need to make that clear in our English translation so that it will not be understood. The question is again should we avoid misunderstanding? Should we try to reproduce the exact form? There might be other reasons for preserving the masculine language in Greek and Hebrew or should we strive for understanding and communicating accurately and change the masculine language in English to make sure that the readers will be clear that females are included as well. So sometimes "him" and "he" are turned into "they." You could put a slash between "he" and "she" but that gets kind of awkward over long periods of texts. But often you will find "him" and "he" turned to "they" or "them" or something like that in English translations to make clear that it is not exclusive to males.

Now let me make clear that at least for most evangelicals this is not an issue of pushing some feminist agenda that is trying to make the entire Bible feminine sounding and feminine inclusive or gender neutral. Instead, the issue is if the Old and New Testament text clearly intend to include male and female, then why not make that clear in the English translation. But, on the other hand, those who follow this type of translation would admit only men are intended then that needs to be left intact in the translation. So it's not wherever you find masculine language in the Old and New

Testament change it to become neutral or inclusive that's not the issue. The issue if there is masculine language in the Greek and Hebrew Bible but it's clearly in the context clearly intending a reference to male and female then that should be made clear in the New and Old Testament translations. So again things like changing pronouns that are usually translated to "he" and "him" to "them" or "they" changing the word "man" to "person" or "people," again when it's clearly referring to both genders, changing the word "son" to "sons and daughters" or perhaps "children." Again only when the word "son" clearly in the context is intending to include children of both genders then the change is made. But if the word "son" in the context clearly it is referring only to sons of the male gender then that needs to be kept intact and made clear that is what is being referred to. You see again the issue is often one of meaning. If the masculine language in the Hebrew and Greek clearly refers to males then that needs to clear or retained in the English translation. If the masculine language is refereeing to males and females then gender inclusive language changes in the receptor text communicates a way to make that clear by using language that is gender inclusive.

Again, it needs to be said that this is, at least for most evangelicals, not an attempt to push a feminist agenda or tamper with the biblical text but it's a call for clarity and accuracy according to most who advocate gender neutral translations and are calling for increased understanding. It's interesting too that most of the genders supporters that I know who argue for gender neutral translations are not actually not egalitarians when it comes to the issue of women in ministry, whether women should have a identical roles and functions as ordained pastors and ministers in the church. It is interesting a lot of them are not egalitarians but many are more hierarchical or complementarians as they would see a distinction between male and female. Some of those people are the most ardent supporters of gender inclusive translations. On the opposite end some would interestingly say "But the New Testament uses the word 'man'" for example this is something I often hear, "The New Testament often uses the word 'man' so English has to use the same word? The New Testament doesn't use the word 'man.' the New Testament uses the word for example, *anthropos*, a Greek word. The question again is what is meant

by that word? If what is meant by that word is male or man then that's the word we need to use in English. If what is meant by that is human beings both male and female then maybe "people" or "peoples" or another word would more accurately capture the meaning.

To give you a couple of examples, and again I'm not using these examples to support or argue for political correctness, I'm just using examples that are often pointed to demonstrate what is at stake. I'm not arguing for the correctives of these examples or necessarily you'll buy into them, although I think they are good examples and reflections of what is going on. For example, in the Old Testament in Psalm chapter one this is the NIV version, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the sea of mockers." A more gender neutral translation and interestingly this was the original NIV, "Blessed is the man" the new 2011 version of the NIV says "Blessed is the one" because their rational is that this is not just addressed to men but this is addressed to anyone who falls within this category. So they've changed it to make this clear and so "blessed is the man" which is presumably the committee thought that some might read this to be restricted to males in order to make it clear they changed it. Instead of translating "man" they've translated "blessed is the one" to be more inclusive.

Another interesting example comes from Hebrew 2:6. This is another one that could be debated but I only use these translations as examples of how a gender neutral translation works and some of the questions that it is trying to ask. In Hebrews 2 the author is exalting or extolling the son, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate and climatic mode of God's revelation to his people. As the author says in chapter 1, "in these last days God has spoken in his Son." The rest of chapters 1 and 2 go on to exalt the son especially to show that the son is superior over the angels. The reason I think he does that is because the angels would have been associated with the covenant and the giving of the Mosaic Law and so by showing that Jesus is superior to the angels the author can show Jesus is superior to the old covenant means of revelation. It's the climax or the fulfillment of that. One of the ways he does that in chapter 2 in verse 6 I'll back up and read verse 5 where

the author says, “Is it not to angels that God has subjected the world to come about which we were speaking, but there is a place where someone has said” and that is kind of and interesting way of introducing an Old Testament quote but the author of Hebrews does that frequently. But what comes next is an Old Testament quotation again I’m reading from the original NIV “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him” which is a quotation from Psalms 8. I won’t go back and read Psalm 8 but this is the author quoting from Psalm 8 is sort of the psalmist’s praise for the climax of God’s creative activity in human beings. It is sort of a poetic praise and response to the creation narrative from Genesis 1 and 2. But now interestingly the author of Hebrews 2 applies it to Jesus Christ. So again the original NIV says, I’m just using this as an example you can find other translations that would translate it similarly, “What is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you are mindful of him.” I want you to notice that masculine language, “What is man that you care for him, what is the son of man that you are mindful of him” notice the masculine language. This however this is the translation for the New Revised Standard Version, the NRS. “What are human beings that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them?” Notice the change from “man” to “human beings” and “son of man” to “mortals” and the “him” to “them.” Now at first glance this could be seen as a distortion of the biblical text and that the translators of the NRSV have tried to tamper with the text or promote a gender or be more gender friendly or neutral but therefore have distorted it. Furthermore, some especially if you are attuned to reading the Gospels where “Son of Man” is the most frequent title Jesus uses to refer to himself. One could be upset with or conclude that this is an illegitimate translation.

It is important to look at the context to determine why the author or why the translators of the NRSV have done it this way? Why have they substituted “human beings” for “man”? Why have they substituted “mortals” for “son of man” from the translation like the NIV? The main issue is that in Hebrews 2 the author of Hebrews seems to be demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the representative of all of humanity. If you read the rest of chapter 2, the emphasis is not on Jesus’ maleness that he is a man but

the emphasis is that he is a human being who represents all of humanity, male and female.

Furthermore, I would suspect the translators of NASV have interrupted Psalm 8 in the same way as extolling God's creation, not of Adam or males, but of humanity so they're taking those together because they've understood Psalm 8 to be praising God's creation of humanity. Jesus in Hebrews 2 is representing all of creation, all of humanity therefore they've made that clear by changing "what is man," to "what is humanity," "what are human beings," the pinnacle of God's creation that Jesus now represents. Now what is the son of man? What are mortals? Jesus now takes weakened mortal human beings the pinnacle of God's creation and now representing all of humanity he brings them to their intended destiny, as the author and finisher of our faith.

What humanity failed to achieve now Jesus Christ achieves by bringing them to their true intentions. Therefore the NRSV has made it clear that Jesus is not just representing males, the focus in Hebrews is not Jesus as a male, the focus is Jesus representing all of humanity and fulfilling Psalm 8 as extolling human beings as the pinnacle of God's creation but they've failed to achieve what God intended. Now Jesus Christ the human being does achieve God's intention for humanity. Therefore, for text like that the NRSV has made it clear by using more inclusive language.

In the next session, we will wrap up our discussion of gender neutral translations and we will also talk a little about the role translation plays in interpretation, and what translation should you use in hermeneutics and interpretation, or is there a correct one, and what roles should they play?

Transcribed by Melissa Eadie
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 5

Translations and Early Interpretation

Translation Discussion Review

In our last session we discussed issues related to translation and particularly translation philosophy, looking at two major philosophies that stand on opposite sides of a spectrum. One was a more formal equivalent that focused on reproducing the form of the text, and a second which was more of a dynamic equivalent that focused more on clarity and the response of the reader being able to understand accurately trying to reproduce the equivalent response in the modern reader as the ancient readers of the ancient texts.

We also talked a little bit about gender-neutral translation by giving some examples. What is important to understand about gender neutral translations is that they are simply attempts to not necessarily, although they can be, but not necessarily promote an agenda to tamper with Scripture by prioritizing, updating it and prompting the feminist agenda as opposed to being more accurate. But gender neutral translations are an attempt to capture the meaning of the ancient text where the Hebrew or Greek language used masculine language such as the masculine pronoun or masculine words that are usually translated “him” or “he” or “man” but when they use those in a context where clearly all humanity is intended, both male and female, then a gender neutral translation tries to capture that and wants to make clear that that’s what the original text was intending.

As the examples that we looked at Psalms and Hebrews of where a previous translations that maintained the gender language, the masculine language, might have the potential of being misunderstood in our modern day society where often, and this is sometimes the debate, but it appears that often masculine language in English is understood to refer exclusively to males, but if the context clearly makes the case that male and female are being referred to, then the gender translation brings that out clearly, where as if only males are being referred to in the original context then gender

translations still maintains that masculine language to make it clear that males are being referred to.

Four Guidelines for using Translations

So issues of gender translations fit within our discussion of a more formal equivalent, do I maintain the exact form in a more literal wooden translation, or do I change the form and sometimes sacrifice form in order to communicate more accurately? How do I use a translation then in interpretations, or what translation is the best one? What I want to do is just give you four guidelines that I see in my opinion as important, and again these are just general. There are other things that could be said, but four guidelines for using translations in interpretations of the biblical text.

First of all is simply: know what kind of translation your dealing with when you use a modern day translation or even whether it's an ancient translation like the King James Version or a more up to date modern translation. Know what kind of translation your dealing with. Know where it falls on the spectrum from a more formal equivalent, more wooden types of translations, to more dynamic equivalent translations. So know where your translation falls.

The second thing is: understand that no translation, and we' ll bring this up on the last point as well, but understand no translation completely captures the meaning of the original text. That's because again, not only back to our discussion of the distance that exists between us but also the original readers and the context and author and the original political and historical situation that cannot always completely or exhaustively be overcome.

So not only is there distance, but we've already seen that languages don't overlap. Part of that linguistic difference or distance that we talked about, and since languages don't completely overlap no one translation can completely capture all of what is involved in understanding the biblical text.

For example, sometimes especially in some of the Psalms and some of the Hebrew poetry you might have a text that is arranged according to the alphabet; each line or each verse begins with a Hebrew letter of the alphabet, the first word does. That's impossible

to capture in English. Certain types of poetic structures are sometimes sacrificed, or even sometimes figures of speech in one language might not be a figure of speech in another language. Some of those will obviously be missed, or we might not fail to capture it precisely. Again there may be a motive or effectual impact of a text that's going to be lost in the modern day translation. So the point is: recognize that no translation captures all the nuances and meaning of the biblical text even if it can capture its meaning substantively and accurately, no one claims necessarily that it does so exhaustively and perfectly. So recognize that.

The third thing is: for non-Hebrew and Greek students usually the standard advice is to use a fairly literal translation, at least as one of the tools you use. A translation that is more formally equivalent that will at least to some degree be close to and expose you to the structure, and expose you to the grammar of, and the form as close as possible to the original text. So most who do not read Greek or Hebrew will probably at some point avail themselves of a more wooden translation that might be again, not perfectly or exhaustively but somewhat closer to the structure of the original languages themselves and there's a variety of more wooden often called literal translations, that are more formally equivalent that do that.

The last thing I want to say about translation, actually the other thing I want to say in that connection "no translation can completely capture all the meaning." It is the goal of interpretation not just to produce a translation, especially if you work with Hebrew and Greek. The primary goal is not just to produce a translation. Again, translations don't capture the entirety of the meaning. That's where at times, commentary and explanation and your exegesis come in. That's why you do interpretation, don't think that a translation will or has to capture everything in the text. It is in my Greek exegesis that I teach, I am at times a little bit flexible on translation, there are good ones and there are bad ones, but at the same time I am not looking at the translation to capture everything. I'm looking at the explanation, the commentary, the exegesis and the interpretation themselves to capture all the meaning and nuances of the text.

But that brings me to my last comment. Probably the best use of translation, in my opinion, is to use as many as you can because of the things we've just said. Because there are different philosophies of translation, because no translation can capture everything, it's probably best to use as many translations as possible. Sometimes the differences in the translations can do one of two things. Probably more but I'll highlight these two.

Number one: the difference might capture nuances that are both intended in the text, the Greek or Hebrew text, but can't be brought out in one English translation. The other thing is that sometimes where translations differ will reveal an interpretative issue or difficulty you need to deal with if you're reading three or four translations. If they all, or at least a couple of them, differ significantly, sometimes it's that difference in the way they've translated that might reveal an interpretative problem. Sometimes the differences are just stylistic, as far as making it a smoother reading or something like that. But at other times the difference might reveal a significant interpretive issue that you'll have to deal with in interpreting and understanding a biblical text.

For example, in Ephesians chapter five, and this is verse twenty-one. It's interesting when you compare translations, chapter five verse twenty-one comes halfway through chapter five, and why I say that is because the first half of chapter five, towards the end of that first half we find that famous text "be filled with the Spirit. Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit" and then what follows are a number of, what in the Greek text are participles, or a numbers of phrases or clauses that further define or describe what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Now if you start looking at translations, what is interesting is that same translation actually begins a new paragraph and most English translations, but not all of them, but a lot of them, kind of to make it easier to read and digest will break the text down and give you paragraph headings. A lot of them begin a new paragraph at chapter five verse twenty-one of Ephesians; "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" and the rest of the text talks about, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, and the long comparison between the husband's love for his wife and Christ's love for the church.

Some translations will begin a new paragraph at verse twenty-one. They'll break it off from verse twenty and perhaps even have a paragraph heading. Other translations, such as the one I'm looking at, actually include verse twenty-one with verse twenty, actually with the verses nineteen through twenty of Ephesians chapter five. That makes quite a big difference. In other words, in verse twenty-one, "submit to one another out of reverence" does Paul begin new topic at this point? Is he beginning a new section in his letter? Or, if I take verse twenty one with the previous verses, then "submitting to one another out of reverence from Christ" is further explaining what it means to be filled with the Spirit. In verse eighteen "do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery instead be filled with the Spirit," and then verse nineteen and twenty give examples of what this means. Should we include twenty-one with that so that submitting to one another is an example of what it means to be filled with the spirit. Or does twenty-one begin a brand new section in Paul's letter?

So looking in a number of translations and where they divide Ephesians five reveals, I think an interpretative issue in the text that you're going to have to deal with. That's true elsewhere, as hopefully you know, the paragraph divisions and headings in your Bible were not placed there by Paul, Matthew, Mark, Isaiah, Daniel, or whoever, but are the result of the modern translators in the editions and the translations they've produced. They're there just to help us break the text down, and it can be a little bit unwieldy and difficult to read the entire book of Ephesians without a break, but just so you know that these are human inventions. These are the decisions of the translation community. They are not put there by Paul and so they're not inspired and they're going to differ at times. But you'll notice the more you read translations, sometimes, but not always, sometimes where translation can maybe divide a text or where that differs between translations, sometimes might reveal an interpretative issue and might make a difference in how you read the text.

So it's important to compare translations. To not only perhaps see some added nuance, but to see where they differ or where they may reveal an interpretive issue or significant problem perhaps. Again the Ephesians five text is a good example. I think you

could make a good argument based on the Greek text itself that verse twenty-one goes with verses eighteen through twenty. It's a further explanation of what it means to be filled with the spirit. So verse nineteen "speaking to one another with songs, hymns, sing to the Lord," Verse twenty "always giving thanks to the father for everything," twenty-one "submitting" or "submit to one another out of reverence." That goes back to verse eighteen further describing what it means to be filled with the spirit.

So be aware of even how a text will divide or how a translation will divide the text into paragraphs, and again realizing those are were not Paul's, John's or whoever, those are the decisions of the translators and sometimes you might disagree with those. Having said that, even more generally, chapter divisions and verse divisions, hopefully you know to ignore those as well. They're simply there to help us get to the same place in our learning. You can imagine a pastor trying to tell help his audience find the right text and somewhere in the middle of the book of Isaiah without chapter or verse divisions, but other than that they may or may not indicate how the text is to be divided or how it develops or unfolds.

Another example, again I'll use a New Testament example, one that we've already mentioned is back in chapter five of Galatians the well-known "fruit of the Spirit" passage where Paul contrasts the works of the flesh, which I think he's referring to the works of the law. The reliance on the law ultimately does not overcome the works of the flesh rather it's by living in the spirit in chapter five. However what is interesting in verse five through sixteen, when he introduces this contrast between the flesh and the spirit, is the "spirit" or referring to the Holy Spirit?

Again as kind of an aside, this is interesting because the Greek New Testament, for example, did not use capitalization or use lower case letters. In fact, in our discussion of textual provision we talked about uncial script or manuscripts, that most likely the original manuscripts would have been written in capital letters and would have had no spacing in between words. Because of that it is interesting when you come across a word like "spirit," if you find that capitalized in your English text that's an interpretive decision. Again Paul did not originally capitalize the words "spirit" or the Greek word

pneuma. He did not write that as a capital "P" in Greek for *pnemua* or capital "S" for English, so whether we say "spirit" with a small "s" referring to just a spirit or a human spirit or capital "S" the Holy Spirit again is an interpretive decision made by translations. There may be some verses where some translations would translate it with a small "s" referring to the human spirit, where in the same verse another translation might use a capital "S" referring to the Holy Spirit. So even then things like punctuation, is again, punctuation was not present in the original text whether a words is capitalized or small letters, most of that is the decision of modern translators.

So chapter five verse sixteen of Galatians begins "so I say, live by the Spirit" capital "s" making clear that the translators thought this word refers to the Holy Spirit. "So I say live by the Spirit," and this is where it becomes interesting. Again I'm going to contrast the older NIV and the new, 2011 NIV. The older NIV translates it like this, "so I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" and notice that phrase, "the sinful nature," suggesting perhaps that they have interpreted this as that we have some impulse, some inclination, some nature inside that is bent towards evil.

But the Greek word there is, we've talked about this already, the Greek word is actually *sarx*. A single word *sarx* which interestingly other, more literal translations, try to find a single word in English, and the word they usually chose is "flesh." So we're prone to think of this phrase this text in terms of the contrast between the spirit and the flesh. But interesting the word Paul uses is the Greek word *sarx*, the spirit. But in chapter five verse sixteen, the old NIV said translated it "the Spirit and the sinful nature." Now notice what the new NIV does the 2011, it says, "live by the Spirit," almost using the identical wording found in the old NIV, "live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." In going back in the more, the single word "flesh."

So now again my purpose is not to try to solve this issue right there. We'll actually talk about the word "flesh" later on in the course when we deal with semantics and word studies and lexical analysis. The point is, when I compare even the two same translations, the NIV, one an updated edition, as well as other translations and I see one translation saying, "the sinful nature" and another translating it "flesh," that then raises the question

in my mind, how should I understand this word? What is going on? Why the difference in translation? On one level one can see that the word "flesh" in 21st century English might suggest the physical body, that something is wrong with the physical body, or it's the seed of sin is somewhere in the physical body. Maybe Paul has gnostic tendencies where he denigrates the physical body itself, but the original NIV was trying to avoid that I think by trying to bring out what Paul meant by "flesh" by saying "sinful nature."

Now one may disagree with that, I myself think "sinful nature" is not a good translation of *sarxtes*, but at the same time you can understand that you can see the difference in translation philosophy in trying to avoid perhaps a misunderstanding. But when I read these two texts, at the very least I have to ask, why the difference that probably reveals an interpretive issue. So I need to go back and figure out what is it that Paul's trying to communicate and then see if you can explain the differences between the translations.

So it's in my opinion and I think the best move in utilizing translations in hermeneutics and in interpretation is to use as many translations as possible to compare them number one, to perhaps see different nuances from different translations, but second also to note where they differ. Some difference may be rather inconsequential as a result of style, but of the difference whether it's the way they divide the text, the words they used to translate, where they might stop a sentence and begin a new one, those kind of differences may reveal an interpretive issue that as an interpreter you're going to have to deal with. So hopefully now you understand a little bit more about what a translation is, the philosophy that lies behind it and also how to use translations in an effective way.

Early Biblical Interpretation

Alright, what I want to do now is move down the line a little bit further and even historically. We've looked at the origin of Scripture in process of inspiration and how that influences hermeneutics. We've looked at the transmission process in terms of reconstructing through textual criticisms what most likely was the original text of the Hebrew and Greek Old and New Testament as a basis for interpretation. Then even

further in the process of transmission is how that has been translated, how that text has been made available to readers in our contemporary world and their languages.

Inner biblical Interpretation

But now I want to move along a little further and talk about early biblical interpretation, begin to talk about hermeneutics or biblical interpretations especially. Actually, I want to begin and the beginning that might sound kind of silly but why I say that is when you pick up a text, and I've said this already but it's worth reiterating, when you pick up the Bible and begin to interpret it you are not the first one to do so. You're not the first one to interpret the Bible but you stand in a long tradition of interpreting the biblical text, of engaging the biblical text, of trying to make sense of it and understand it that goes all the way back, not only to the first Christians of the first century but all the way back to the Bible itself.

Yes, the Bible itself reveals that interpretation has already taken place in or within the biblical text. That is, biblical authors as you're already aware of, the Bible is produced over quite a span of time so that often biblical authors will pick up earlier texts, biblical texts and interpret them and apply them to their own day and age and for their own unique situations. So that the author would pick up and reformulate, reinterpret for his own day and for his own audience previous biblical texts. Scholars often refer to this as inner biblical interpretation, but the point is that interpretation is already taking place within the Bible itself. Authors take earlier texts and try to make sense of them, try to apply them and understand them for their own context. Again, the goal was to make previous texts relevant to the modern reader. So it wasn't just theoretical to explain the meaning of an obscure text, although that could be true, but it was often to demonstrate that the text was still relevant as the word of God was still relevant to later generations of God's people.

One very good example of this, we'll look at a couple examples of this in detail, but especially the prophetic literate in the Old Testament. Sometimes earlier predictions and prophecies of prophets are picked up by later prophets, such as after the exile when Israel goes into exile, and then they finally return back to the land. Sometimes you have

prophets after the exile picking up earlier texts and interpreting them and demonstrating that they're still relevant and they are reasserting them for their people to demonstrate that God is still in control, that God still keeps his promises, the promises haven't failed, the prophecies haven't failed, that God will indeed bring them to pass and bring them to fulfillment.

So let me give you some examples in both the Old Testament and also some of the Jewish interpretations of the day and then in the New Testament. Again, my purpose is not to give a detailed account of the interpretative activity in the Old or New Testament, or the theory or the theological assumptions behind it or exactly what they were doing, but mainly to give you just a flavor of what or how within the Bible itself earlier texts are being interpreted and applied and utilized in a way to make it relevant to latter generations of God's people.

So, for example, in the Old Testament, just to give some very common typical examples, but not to spend any time in them, 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles take up material for example from 1 and 2 Kings. And there may be a similar relationship between those books as there are between Matthew, Mark and Luke the so-called Synoptic Gospels that we'll take about later. But 1 and 2 Chronicles probably takes up material from 1 and 2 Kings and now interprets this for a new setting that is a time after the exile, perhaps a post-exilic perspective on these events. Again, the goal is to reassert God's word or to make God's word relevant to a new situation; to demonstrate how it addresses God's people in a new setting, and to show that God's word is still valid. God's word still speaks. God's promises in his word have not failed.

We find, as we've already said, something similar going on in the prophetic literature. Often I think, later prophetic texts and writers will pick up earlier prophetic texts sometimes, and especially those prophecies that were unfulfilled that for some may have seemed to be failed predictions or prophecies. The authors picked them up to demonstrate and to reassert them, to demonstrate that, indeed, God will fulfill them. Especially the basis seems to be that these prophecies are still valid, these prophecies are still the word of God, that God is faithful to keep his promise too. The prophets can pick

them up and reassert them and demonstrate that they still will indeed be fulfilled and God will indeed accomplish his purposes. So they take up theses prophecies and assert them for a new generation.

So, for example, a number of earlier prophets, and a number of prophets anticipated a restoration of the Temple when Israel was in exile and the Temple was destroyed. A number of prophets promise and predict that God indeed will fulfill his promises by bringing his people back into the land, restoring them to the land and rebuilding the Temple. You find that perspective especially in the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah. Ezekiel 40-48 goes into some detail about the reconstruction and rebuilding of the eschatological Temple, the new Temple where God will dwell with his people. So early prophets anticipate this restoration of the people from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple where God in the new covenant relationship will dwell with his people in the Temple and in the land. But interestingly the situation in exile, according to some of the prophets, doesn't quite measure up to and match up to those expectations as you find in Isaiah or Ezekiel. So because of that you do find later prophets still anticipating the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of God's people.

For example, if I can find it tucked away in the minor prophets, the book of Haggai in chapter 2. Listen to Haggai chapter 2, "on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ʻSpeak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak,[a] the high priest, and to the remnant of the people and ask them, Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'"

So it's as if the prophet is assuring them that after they come back from exile, God indeed is still with his people, and you'll notice the repetition of the covenant formula, "I am with you." But then he goes on to say "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a

little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine, the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace.'"

So, it's almost as if in the situation after the exile, when the people have returned from the land now doesn't quite measure up to the great prophets and the prophecies. So now Haggai reaffirms that God still will fill this house with his glory and still make spectacular vision that one finds in the prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel. So later prophets often take up earlier prophet texts, again not because they're trying to save face or correct a mistake, but I think because they're convinced that despite appearances, God's promises are still valid, God is still in control and will indeed fulfill his promises. So they picked them up again and demonstrate that they are still relevant for the people of God. God has not forgotten his people and God will indeed fulfill his promises.

So the Old Testament itself reveals that the process of interpretation is already taking place. Again whenever you pick up your Bible to read it, you stand in line of a long tradition of taking up, reading, understanding and interpreting biblical texts, attempting to make it relevant to yourself and to the modern reader. Interpretation is nothing new; it's already taking place within the biblical texts themselves, by the biblical authors themselves.

Early Jewish Interpretation

To move on, especially in a relationship to the Old Testament, we have other examples of very early attempts to interpret the biblical text. For example, rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism of the early centuries even leading up and into the first century, the New Era, reveals a number of attempts and a number of ideas related to how the Old Testament text was taken up and interpreted and understood. Again, the main goal, it appears to me, is as we saw in the Old Testament, to demonstrate how these texts are

relevant. It wasn't only intellectually to uncover the bare meaning of the text, but to ask how are these texts are relevant, how do they continue to speak to the people?

What I want to focus on is three of four main bodies. Actually I'll focus on four main bodies of work that are associated with rabbinic Judaism, Judaism's attempt to come to grips with its own scripture and understand it and make it relevant. It's important to understand much of this. Much of this, the bodies of literature that I'm going to talk about, much of it was written down even after the New Era, especially with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and even after that much of this was committed to writing, but it still probably and in many places reflects interpretive activity that was already taken place long before it was ever written down.

So for example, one body of literature is known as the Mishnah. The Mishnah is basically the written codification of the oral interpretation of the law by the rabbis of the day. In other words, along with the written law of Moses grew up a body of oral teaching and literature that later on, about AD 200, so two hundred years roughly after the birth of Christ. Two hundred years after that you have the Mishnah produced which is then the literary encoding of this oral tradition. So again although this, the Mishnah, occurs and emerges in written form much later than the New Testament writing, probably written towards the end of the first century; it probably still embodies interpretive activity and understanding of the Law that occurred much earlier than that. So the Mishnah is the written form of the oral law. The oral law was committed to writing in the form of the Mishnah.

Another body of literature is what is known as the Talmud, and again I'm just giving the very brief descriptions. There are actually two bodies, two Talmuds you might say. One was known as the Palestinian Talmud, and the other one was the Babylonian Talmud, you might see those two names utilized. They were produced about 400 AD and 600 AD respectively. Again, although these were committed to writing much later, they once again may embody a very early interpretative activity by Jewish interpreters. Basically, what the Talmud was was a further commentary on the Mishnah. Again the

Mishnah itself seemed in need of updating and so the Talmud is further commentary and further explanation of the Mishnah, which was the committing to writing of the oral law.

Another, the third body of literature briefly to emphasize this is the Midrash. Midrash was basically kind of a running commentary on the biblical text where often a biblical text was treated like this: a line of a verse of a text was quoted and then it was unpacked and then it was interpreted. Often texts were brought in from the Old Testament, which were used to interpret it, and the compilation of what Rabbis were saying about this verse. So the Midrash was kind of a running commentary on the biblical text, not unlike what some preachers Sunday morning do where they work verse by verse though the text with their commentary and their explanation.

Then a final and fourth body of literature is, could be, the Targums. The Targums were basically Aramaic translations or paraphrases of the Old Testament. As Aramaic became the standard language there was a need then for the Bible to be communicated in Aramaic. Most think that the Targums had their origin in the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures in the synagogues in Aramaic. Again, later on, those were committed to writing in the form that we now have as the Targums. Once again the Targums were written, most of them much later than the Old Testament or New Testament, but probably a lot of times embody and contain interpretative activity and paraphrases that are much earlier than the date that they were actually committed to writing.

Within the Rabbinic literature there were often rules that characterized the Rabbinic interpretive activity. One feature of this, without going through all the rules, there are plenty of text books that go through them, but just to highlight a couple of them, a couple of rules, and there's even debate whether they are rules they followed or just explanations that tie in what they did and where those originated. I won't go into that. For example, one of the so called rules of rabbinic interpretative activity is to argue from the lesser to the greater. That is, if something that is less important is true, than the greater must also be true. Perhaps we find this type of argumentation present in Jesus' parables where presently he argues from lesser to the greater. In the Sermon on the Mount he

argues that if God cares about the birds, and clothing them and caring for them, the lesser; then certainly he cares about the greater, which would be humanity, which would be the climax of creation, which is human beings.

So you'll see Jesus arguing that way, even in his parables as well. If an unjust judge, if a human unjust judge would treat, finally treat a woman justly, certainly the lesser truth, certainly the greater is true, that God will seek justice for his people who ask him. So, one feature was arguing from the lesser to the greater.

Another one feature is that you often find, and I mention these two because I think you do find them often in the New Testament, as another feature is interpreting a text, an Old Testament text in light of other Old Testament texts that have similar wording or vocabulary. Sometimes it's only one word that links them together and taking a biblical text with that word and finding another Old Testament text with a similar word and using it to help fill out and unpack and interpret that text. They're kind of linked together by common vocabulary or theme. But again, the importance of this activity is to demonstrate how early interpreters understood their own Scripture and the importance of studying how Old Testament authors used earlier Old Testament texts or looking at rabbinic bodies of literature.

How they interpreted Old Testament texts shed light on how early interpreters understood their own Scripture and how they interpreted it. Also they raise the question, how might this affect how New Testament authors interpreted and read and utilized Old Testament texts as well.

Qumran: Dead Sea Scrolls and Interpretation

Another non-biblical source of interpretation, an attempt to interpret and wrestle with Old Testament texts is the Qumran literature, which comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Qumran community was a sect that secluded themselves in a community near the Dead Sea, hence the title, the Dead Sea Scrolls. They found themselves at odds with what was going on with the establishment, the status quo, and priesthood in Jerusalem. They responded to that influence by secluding themselves and forming their own community where they would await God's kingdom and even expected that God

would rebuild the Temple. In the meantime they were the Temple, the eschatological Temple of God where God dwelled. No one else not even other Jews, they alone were the true people of God and God dwelled in their midst. They were the true Temple that one day God would build a Temple in the midst of.

But the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding biblical interpretation is that Qumran found in the Old Testament justification for their own existence. They read Old Testament texts almost prophetically as anticipating and justifying their existence. Some of us might read some of the Qumran texts and think that they're allegorical and their playing fast and loose with the Scripture, but again they're attempting to provide justification for their own existence. They're trying to explain and provide a reason for their own existence, their own activity, and their own expectations and hope, given their situation.

There are all kinds of examples in the Qumran literature. Sometimes the Qumran literature reveals simply editions, or manuscripts of Old Testament texts just copying of Old Testament texts themselves. Sometimes it reveals texts that are more geared toward providing guidelines, rules and regulations for life and the community. In other times, some of the texts are interestingly more like the Midrash that we've talked about; they are commentaries on biblical texts.

A very interesting open and revealing one and one of the more famous ones is the Commentary on Habakkuk, the Habakkuk Pesher. But an even more interesting one I think, or at least as interesting is the Isaiah Pesher or the commentary on Isaiah. What it does, much like what we talked about with Midrash, is that, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls are fragmentary and so we don't have a complete commentary or complete text. But often what they'd do is work their way through a biblical text, line by line and interpret each line. They'll quote a line and then they interpret it and expound upon it, demonstrating how it applies to their own community and how it applies to their own situation.

One intriguing text is the commentary or the Midrash on Isaiah chapter fifty-four. Chapter fifty-four is a prophecy of restoration. Again Israel has gone into exile because

of their idolatry and sin and Isaiah anticipates a time of restoration where God will bring his people back to the land and restore them and enter into a covenant of relationship with them ultimately in new creation towards the end of the book. But chapter fifty-four is very intriguing, and in verses eleven and twelve we find a very interesting explanation of the restoration of Jerusalem and its people.

You can remember they're in exile, and now Isaiah anticipates a time of restoration. Verses eleven and twelve "O afflicted city," that could be God's people Israel and Jerusalem that is to be destroyed and overrun by foreigners to take them into exile as a punishment for their sins. Now the prophet says, "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted," now here's the construct, "I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of ruins, you gates of sparkling jewels and all your walls of precious stones." Then in verse thirteen "all of your sons will be taught of the Lord and great will be your children's peace. In righteousness you will be established and tyranny will be far from you."

So, the situation of exile will be reversed. They will be brought back. The city will be restored but the author describes it in terms of being rebuilt with these precious stones and jewels and stones. Notice that he itemizes the main features of the city: the foundations, the stones that make up the city, the battlements the gates, and the walls, et cetera. The city is portrayed in terms of these precious jewels that will make it up when it is rebuilt.

Now the point I want to make about this is that it's interesting what the Qumran community does with this text. What they do is they take all of the stones and the parts of the city and they allegorize them to refer to members of the community. So the original founding members of the community, the council of the Qumran community, the chief priests and other groups are equated with these pieces of the city, these architectural features of the city and the jewels, which make them up. So the Qumran community found in the text a justification for their own existence. They thought that Isaiah was really predicting and anticipating the founding of the Qumran community. So it's interesting that they found in this not a prophecy of a literal rebuilt city, but they

allegorize the parts of the city of Isaiah 54:4-12 to refer to actual persons. This is not unlike what Paul and other New Testament authors do when they equate building blocks of the city, or stones of the city, or parts of the Temple with the people of God. So that even Peter can talk about the fact that God's people are part of the stones that are being built up, and Paul can talk about the people as a temple being built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets; Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone.

So the Qumran community read this text, as I think, justification of their existence and establishment to show that the very founding as a community is nothing less than what Isaiah himself was predicting. They can find in the Scripture anticipation of their own existence and justification for their existence.

So again the Qumran community is another example of taking biblical texts and taking them up, interpreting them, or reinterpreting them, to refer to their own existence, to refer to their own community, to make them relevant as God's people, to demonstrate how they can have ongoing significance and validity. Again the Qumran community and others are not just trying to, they don't just look at the text as a bare artifact to be exegeted and to draw out the original historical meaning, but it is interesting they are attempting, to whether we would agree with what they are doing or not, or whether, however silly it seem to us, they are trying to take the text and show its relevance and validity for the people of God, for their day.

Interpretative Activity in the New Testament

Now moving on to the New Testament we find that interpretive activity continues into the New Testament. One of the questions is, because most of the New Testament authors are Jewish or have their backgrounds in Judaism, to what extent are they simply reflecting and following standard methods of interpretation such as we find in Rabbinic interpretation? Again, I don't want to address that issue specifically. We might get a few examples where they might be following similar techniques, but the key is, in my opinion, because of the coming of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ comes to bring to

fulfillment to the Old Testament, the New Testament authors for the most part read the Old Testament though the lens of fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They saw the entire Old Testament as pointing to Christ.

In fact, Jesus Christ himself may be responsible for this very perspective. One of the most well-known texts that suggest something like this is the one found in Luke chapter twenty-four and verse twenty-seven. After Jesus resurrects he appears to two men on the road to Emmaus, and he begins to converse with them. Luke 24:27 is one of the more interesting verses. Verse twenty-five begins, "Jesus said to them," to these two men "how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets had spoken. Did not Christ have to suffer these things and enter his glory?'"

It's interesting to think that Jesus himself thinks his suffering is predicted in the prophets. And then verse twenty-seven, which perhaps encapsulates Jesus approach to the Old Testament, however that's understood and probably lays the basis of how his followers interpret the Old Testament. Jesus says, or Luke goes on and says "and beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them" Jesus, "what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself."

So based on a the text like this, most likely the New Testament authors read the Old Testament through the lenses of its fulfillment in Christ. They ultimately, whatever else they do with it, they ultimately see Jesus Christ as the climax of Old Testament revelation, as the fulfillment of what the Old Testament was ultimately pointing to.

So they read the Old Testament finally in the light of fulfillment in Christ. But to give you some examples of the New Testament interpretation and to demonstrate the range of interpretive activity of even with the New Testament authors, it's interesting that we can see anywhere from more literal interpretations, to interpretations that we'll demonstrate are more kind of analogical or typological. That is sometimes New Testament authors appear to find rather straight forward what we would say are literal fulfillments of Old Testament texts, and other times when you read it it's not quite so clear as to how the New Testament authors think that Jesus or some event fulfills this Old Testament text. In those cases the connection may not be one of prediction or fulfillment,

but may be more analogical or typological. That is, the author sees repeated patterns: the same way God worked in the Old Covenant in the Old Testament, now he's working in a similar, but greater way, under the New Covenant is brought about through fulfillment in Christ.

There are also a number of other ways that the New Testament authors utilized Old Testament texts. So in our next session we will look at a couple of specific examples of how New Testament authors utilize Old Testament texts. Then we'll move on in looking at the history of interpretation. We'll leave some rather large gaps, we'll leap over a lot of the periods of church history, again to paint in rather broad strokes and to touch on main figures of interpretation, and how they affect the way we approach hermeneutics and how we participate and engage in biblical interpretation, again remembering we're not the first ones to pick up and read this text. When you pick up and read the text you do not do so in isolation. You do not do so in a vacuum, you come to it, whether you realize it or not, as influenced by and taking your position in a long line of those who have gone before, who attempted and tried to understand and make sense of the biblical text.

Transcribed by Elspeth Currie
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 6

Early Interpretation

History of Interpretation

We've been talking in the last section about the history of interpretation and we'll continue to do that for a couple of sessions, again moving rather quickly through the main characters and the main features of the history of interpretation. The main purpose is to demonstrate, number one: that no one picks up the biblical text and interprets for the first time. We all stand as part of a long tradition that actually goes all the way back to the Old Testament itself, where Old Testament authors picked up and utilized, interpreted and applied biblical texts for their own readers, and to demonstrate and to understand that we're not the first ones to pick up and read the text. But second, along with that, to demonstrate the influence and how the way we approach Scripture and interpret it, whether we realize it or not, we're often indebted to and influenced by what we employ or what we avoid negatively. The way we approach Scripture is often indebted to a long history in engaging the biblical text.

Interpretation in the New Testament Period

We ended by looking at New Testament authors and how New Testament authors frequently picked up and utilized Old Testament texts with the conviction that Jesus Christ himself was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He was the climax of God's revelation to his people.

A very interesting text in that regard is Hebrews 1 and verses one and two. We're at the very beginning of the book. The author in a sense establishes how the Old Testament was read, at least by himself, but I think other New Testament authors as well, where the author of Hebrews said, "in the past God spoke to our forefathers," that would be the prophets and Old Testament authors through the prophets, "at many times and in various ways but in these last days," in the time of fulfillment "he has spoken to us by his son." So Jesus Christ is seen as not removing, eclipsing or setting aside the Old Testament but as showing, as bringing it to fulfillment, as the climax and the true

intention of what the Old Testament was pointing to. So the New Testament authors wrote and read the Old Testament with the assumption that Jesus was the climax and the fulfillment of God's revelation to his people.

We said that probably stemmed from Christ himself, where several places especially in texts like Luke 24 Jesus demonstrates, or he argues, unfortunately Luke doesn't record what Jesus said, but he simply records that Jesus explained from the entire Old Testament how all Scripture was fulfilled in him, how all Scripture pointed to him. Even later on, Paul will say that when he's summarizing the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 he says, "I pass onto you what was passed onto me, that is, Jesus died, was buried and rose again on the third day according to the scriptures." New Testament writers operated with the assumption that the Old Testament was to be understood as pointing to Christ and to be interpreted through the lenses of fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We also said that the New Testament reveals a number of ways of demonstrating that, from what we might call more literal, more strait forward prediction of fulfillment all the way to more a analogical or typological type fulfillment. So, for example, an example of a more literal type of fulfillment can be found in Matthew 2:5, in the early section of Matthew the narrative of the birth and the early childhood of Jesus Christ. Chapter two and starting with verse five. I'll back up, this is part of the story where the magi come to King Herod in Jerusalem to ask where this Messiah is, where he's been born and Herod has to go to his some of his scribes to find out. So he calls the people, the chief priest and the teachers of the law together and he asks them, where is the Christ, this Messiah, to be born because obviously King Herod wants to exterminate him since he's a threat to King Herod's throne. He can't have another king laying a claim to his rulership, there can't be another Christ, Messiah, or king to compete with his throne. So he asks them, where is this Christ to be born, because, of course, he wants him to be found so he can kill him. "'In Bethlehem of Judea' they reply 'for this is what the prophet has written.'" Now comes a quotation from Micah 5:2: "but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judea, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." Although there may be a couple other

things going on with this text, there is at least at a basic level, the author sees, and at least his scribes saw a rather straightforward, literal fulfillment, that the Messiah would be born in the city of Bethlehem. A city of very little means would become great in reputation because the Messiah would come from there. So chapter two verse five and six of Matthew probably provides one possible example of a more strait forward, literal reading of fulfillment of a biblical text. We often think of when we think of fulfillment, we think of a prophecy or prediction which then gets fulfilled according to pretty much the way it was predicted, and this is as close as we get to that.

Luke 4:18-21 Interprets Isaiah 61

But interestingly, there are other examples, in Luke 4:18-21. Again to set the stage Jesus then goes to Nazareth, this is the early, after Jesus' temptation. Remember Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by Satan, now he begins his ministry. According to Luke then he goes to Galilee, then he goes to Nazareth where he had been brought up, "and on the Sabbath day he went into the Synagogue, as was his custom, and he stood up and read," and perhaps this would have been the reading for the day, "and in the synagogue the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it he found the place where it is written 'the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and the recovery of slight for the blind, the release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lords favor.'" Again this is a promise or prediction in Isaiah of what would happened when God restores his people. Now Jesus literally seems to see himself as fulfilling this. The Spirit of the Lord has come upon him, which we saw taking place back in the temptation and baptism of Jesus when the Spirit came as a dove. Now Jesus says "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he's been anointed to proclaim the good news to the poor, which is exactly what he does, to recover, the sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, all of which he does in the rest of the Gospel of Luke. Luke records the ministry of Jesus. So Luke 4 is an example of quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 probably now seems rather literally as a predictive promise that gets fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

But as I said there are other types of fulfillment that New Testament authors see happening in the Old Testament as they read the Old Testament texts in light of Christ. Sometimes I'm convinced, and this I find this happening often, the connection between the Old and New Testament especially when you find New Testament authors quoting Old Testament texts saying they're fulfilled but there doesn't really seem to be a connection when you look at what's going on in the original context in what the Old Testament authors seems to be saying and how New Testament author seems to be using it. There doesn't seem to be a strait forward connection. Although this is not the only possibility, one that I find often taking place is what can be called more of a typological or analogical connection that is an event or person in the past and the Old Testament provides a model or type of something that now takes place, a person or event in the New Testament. The idea or assumption that seems to underlie it is not so much that the Old Testament writings is actually prophecy and predicting this, but instead the New Testament authors, because they operated with the conviction that God, the same God that was at work under the Old Covenant with his people, who delivered them and who is redemptively and historically at work with his people under the Old Covenant, the same God was now in a great way, and in fulfillment of the Old Covenant, was now acting again to redeem and restore his people in a greater way through the person of Christ in the New Covenant era of salvation.

Because of this conviction New Testament authors often see correspondence and analogies again because they are convinced what God did under the Old Covenant has now escalated, now been repeated, in a far greater way in fulfillment in Jesus Christ. So they're not necessarily saying the Old Testament author was predicting this but within the text and the event or person it attests to, we see a pattern, model or type that is now being repeated and filled up as it were in a greater way in the person of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant of Salvation that he brings.

Matthew 2 Interprets Hosea 11

We'll deal with this text a little more, but this may be the explanation for, again to go back to Matthew 2:14-15 especially verse fifteen. We've already seen in the beginning

part of chapter two of Matthew and verses five and six that Jesus could be seen as rather literally fulfilling a text, that is the king, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Now we see a very different reference to the Old Testament in chapter two and verse thirteen, the angel appears to Joseph, and it's not accidental that I mention Moses because this chapter two is modeled on a New Exodus motif. We'll talk about that later on when we talk about the old use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, but Joseph, now an angel appears to him and tells him to take the child because Herod is now on the warpath looking to exterminate this rival to his throne, this Messiah. Now an angel appears to Joseph and says "take the child and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So verse fourteen says, "they got up, he takes the child during the night and leaves for Egypt." Then verse 15, "and they stayed there until the death of Herod, and so it was fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the Prophet, 'out of Egypt I have called my son.'" This quotation is actually a quotation from Hosea 11:1. We'll deal more with this text when we talk about the use of the Old Testament in the New later on in this course.

But the thing I want to mention now is, when you go back to Hosea 11:1. Without Matthew 2 I'm convinced that most of us would never read this as a reference to Jesus Christ and Joseph taking his family to Egypt and then bringing him back once Herod has died. In fact Hosea 11:1 doesn't appear to really be a prophecy at all. It's more of a recitation of the deeds of God in rescuing, delivering and caring for his people. So Hosea 11:1 is not a prophecy of a coming Messiah, it's a reference to when God delivered his people out of Egypt back in the book of Exodus.

Now the question is, how does Matthew get off finding in this a fulfillment in Jesus Christ? Well probably, instead of seeing this as a prediction or having some double meaning or hidden meaning that now Matthew uncovers, is it possible that Matthew is reading the text typologically, that he finds in the same way that God acted to rescue and deliver his people from threat under the Old Covenant, now he is acting in a greater way to deliver his people, starting with the Messiah, Jesus Christ, from threat as well? He now begins to save and deliver his people under the New Covenant of salvation. So I think the

relationship between Hosea 11 and Matthew 2 is more of a typological or analogical, that is, the same God who was working to deliver and rescue his people is now acting again in a greater way in the person of Jesus Christ. In the same way God kept his son, the people of Israel, delivered them, kept them safe and rescued them, now in a new exodus God is acting again to recuse his greater son Jesus who now basically will fulfill what Israel failed to accomplish as a people.

So we could point to other examples of the where apparently New Testament authors saw a typological or analogical connection between the New Testament events and persons, especially Christ, and the Old Testament in certain events and persons and seeing the New Testament as the fulfillment, the climax of that pattern.

Again the fundamental assumption behind this is that Jesus Christ has brought the long awaited age of fulfillment. What the Old Testament texts were pointing to and awaiting, has now been brought to fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore New Testament authors could find types and patterns being picked up and repeated in light of the conviction that in the same way that God acted in the Old Covenant to rescue and deliver his people in a significantly redemptive-historical event is now repeating itself in the new redemptive-historical event founded in the person of Jesus Christ.

Lesser to the greater: Rabbinic Interpretation

Now sometimes the New Testament authors may reflect typical or common methods of rabbinical interpretation. Remember we looked at a couple: the lesser to the greater, or connecting texts together via connections of vocabulary. Two Old Testament texts might be brought together because they refer to similar themes or refer to a similar word or similar vocabulary. For example we've already looked at Jesus' statement in Matthew 6. Matthew 6:26 Jesus is telling his disciples, his kind of, the nucleolus of the new people of God not to worry about life, what they will eat or drink in the context of the well-known Sermon on the Mount. Then Jesus says in verse twenty-six, "Look at the birds of the air. They do now sow or reap or store away in barns and yet their heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are." Notice that argument from the lesser to the greater. If God would care for the birds of the heaven certainly he

will care for his people who seek his kingdom and his righteousness as the rest of the text goes on to tell us.

Hebrews 1:5 and Rabbinic word association interpretation

But another interesting example in the New Testament is Hebrews 1:5, where the author as we've said, is demonstrating the superiority of Jesus Christ over the Old Covenant scriptures, not that they were bad, inferior or useless, but simply that now Jesus is the fulfillment, the climax. Therefore, he is the climatic revelation of God to his people. Now the author is demonstrating that by appealing to a number of Old Testament texts, especially showing Jesus as superior to the angels who were part of the Old Covenant and part of the giving to the law. In chapter one and verse five, notice this, he says, "for to which of the angels did God ever say," and here's the first quotation "'you are my son, today I have become your father', or again 'I will be his father, and he will be my son.'" That first quotation, "'you are my son, today I become your father'" is taken from Psalms 2, which is one of those psalms which is considered a royal psalm that often gets applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. But the second text the author of Hebrews says again, "'I will be his father and he will be my son,'" this is part of the covenant formula. When God spoke to David and made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7:14, "'I will be his father,'" that is, the king who sits on David's throne, "'and he will be my son.'" Probably these two texts, whether the author of Hebrews did this, or whether early Christians did this, because these two texts appear to be combined elsewhere, most likely much like the Rabbis at time brought Old Testament texts together based on word associations and similarities of vocabulary. Most likely both these came together because of the similar wording and similar theme of father and son and the covenant formula. The author now brings these together and again finds their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Now this may be an example of the Old Testament linked together by the words "father and son" and perhaps because of the covenant formula as well.

The desire of the New Testament authors again is to actually summarize the material from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran community and rabbinic interpreters

and all the way back to Old Testament authors. The desire over and over again is to understand Scripture but also to demonstrate its relevance for the contemporary readers and their situation. In one sense, many of these examples are nothing less than what good preachers and expositors attempt to do today. It is not so much a dry exposition of the explanation of the text but to demonstrate the ongoing relevance and significance for modern day readers of the text. So in biblical interpretation, it goes back, in fact, all the way back even to the Old Testament. Later Old Testament authors, sometimes pick up earlier Old Testament texts and reinterpret, and reassert them for subsequent generations. We see that interpretative activity continuing through the New Testament authors, through Rabbinic interpretive methods, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Apostolic Fathers

But now I want to move on to, jump ahead a little bit and consider beyond the Old and New Testament to look at just very briefly early methods of interpretation. I want to start with the apostolic fathers and then just briefly, that is the early church founders and leaders after the writing of the New Testament documents, that period roughly from 100 to 150 A.D. The apostolic fathers actually belong to a larger period from about 100-600 A.D sometimes called the Patristic period. So if you see those terms Patristics or early church fathers, often times the Patristics is the broader period of 100-600 A.D roughly I think. The church fathers is a more limited period of time from 100-to roughly 150 A.D. But the significance of this is that the early church fathers give us a glimpse into biblical interpretation of the period immediately following the writing of the New Testament. So many early church leaders and church fathers, names such as Clement, Polycarp or Ignatius produce writings where they actually appeal to Old and New Testament texts and interpret them therefore giving us examples of early biblical integration. Often what they're doing is they're frequently defining and defending the Christian faith especially against false teaching that has arisen. So they're often interpreting the biblical text to

show how they should be understood and how they support Christian belief as opposed to Gnosticism or some other heretical teaching.

There are actually two characteristic features of the interpretation of the church fathers that I want to look at. One of them is what is known as typological interpretation. This is a more extreme form of the typological or analogical approach we looked at with the New Testament authors. The other is more allegorical interpretation, and we'll briefly describe those and give a couple of examples. For example, typological where the church fathers would often find reference especially in the Old Testament and find correspondences in the life of Christ and in the teaching of the New Testament.

For example, one early writing called the Epistle of Barnabas in chapter twelve of the first seven verses, sees the outreached arms of Moses in Exodus 17. In Exodus 17, you have that story of where Moses stretches out his arms as the Israelites are fighting I think the Amalekites, and as long as he has his arms stretched out, they are victorious. But the Epistle of Barnabas sees that as a type of the death of Christ where he literally has arms stretched out and nailed to the cross. So again he's found a reference starting with the assumption that Jesus Christ fulfills all of the Old Testament, he's found a reference to Jesus' stretched out arms and the reference to Moses's arms being stretched out in Exodus 17.

Another more famous one that perhaps you've heard of or are familiar with is an example in another document called 1 Clement. 1 Clement 1:7 refers to the scarlet thread of Rahab. You remember the Old Testament story of the spies, that Rahab is to keep the spies from danger and she's to hang out a scarlet thread in her window. 1 Cement is the book that took this scarlet thread of Rahab mentioned in the Old Testament as a type of the blood of Christ, the scarlet or red blood of Christ. So he saw, the author of 1 Clement, saw the scarlet thread that Rahab hung in her window as actually a type of or foreshadowing of the salvation that would come through the blood of Jesus Christ. So there other types of examples especially in those two books of a typological type of interpretation where many of them to us seem rather extreme where some little detail in the Old Testament is seen as foreshadowing some detail in the life of Christ.

A more common way of interpreting biblical text that begin to become popular all the way through the Reformation period in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and with Martin Luther and John Calvin and their approach to interpretation. The method that dominated until then was the allegorical method. It was a very popular way of interpreting the Old Testament particularly and what happened is some person or something in the Old Testament a person or event, an object or institution was given a deeper level of meaning, a deeper spiritual meaning. So usually a physical person, object or event was then given a deeper spiritual meaning, which was often seen as its true meaning.

So, for example, without giving any specific examples, the Epistle of Barnabas that I already mentioned with the outstretched arms of Moses, finds detailed allegorical meaning in a number of details from the Old Testament law in particular. It's also important to recall that during this time church tradition begin to play an important role in hermeneutics, and again it wasn't until Martin Luther and John Calvin and the Reformation, especially Luther, that would react to that. Church tradition will begin to play an important role and appeal to what the church believed.

Allegorical Method: Origen and Augustine

One dominant approach to biblical interpretation in the early centuries of the church, during the first few centuries of Christianity's existence was associated with Alexandria of Egypt and that was the allegorical method. One of the most well-known practitioners of that was Philo. Philo was well known for interpreting the Old Testament text especially narrative, allegorically, probably demonstrating how it actually supports Greek philosophical ideals. He would go through and interpret the Old Testament allegorically. In references to physical, literal, events and persons and he found a deeper, allegorical second level of meaning behind that.

The most well-known allegorizer, I guess that's a word, is Origen, from 185-254 A.D so that is the second century to early third century. Origen was most well known for interpreting the Old Testament allegorically and you can read more about his hermeneutical method in his First Principals. You can Google that and find translations of

that online, but it is very interesting and instructive in his approach to hermeneutics and interpretation. Origen started with the ideas especially found in Pauline works, that just as the human consists of body, soul, and spirit, and you can find that phraseology in Paul's letter in a couple of places, and just as a human being consisting of three parts, body, soul, and spirit, so does, does Scripture. Scriptures have a threefold part meaning that corresponds to body, soul, and spirit, that is Scripture has a literal meaning, a physical/literal meaning that would correspond to the physical body. It also has a moral meaning that would correspond to the soul, and then it also has a theological meaning that would correspond to the spirit.

Now this was important for Origen, it's interesting that Origen isn't just concocting this out of thin air. Number one it was an important methodology in the day and in some senses he might just be a child of his day. On the other hand, he also tied allegory into inspiration. If the biblical text is inspired there's certainly more than just the surface physical meaning, there must be more to it. So he saw allegory as a natural corollary of the text of Scripture being inspired.

Furthermore, Origen also, intriguingly, saw allegory as a sign of one's intellectual and spiritual maturity. So, one who was spiritually mature but also intellectually astute was able to allegorize the text. It's interesting today we often think the opposite. Someone who allegorizes the text today we think is a dolt whose lost their mind and frequently that is the case. There all kind of crazy things that can take place, and the one who can interpret it literally or exegetically correctly is one who is spiritually and intellectually mature. Origen saw it the other way around interestingly.

So, for example, an example from Genesis 19:30-38, the story of Lot having sexual relations with his daughters, I believe, allegorically interestingly to make sense of this text because again for Origen this seems to be rather crass, what value can there be in a story of Lot's sexual exploits, what value can there be spiritually and theologically in that? So, according to Origen, Lot allegorically represented the human mind, Lot's wife, the reference here is to Lot's sexual relations to his wife. Lot's wife represented the flesh and pleasure and Lot's daughters represented pride. So he took each of the persons and

allegorized them to give them some spiritual meaning to basically give the text value. Probably, and again I don't want to go into any more details as to why he does that or how he does that, but just to demonstrate what Origen was trying to do and what allegory entails in the story of Lot and his wife and daughters in Genesis 19.

The classic example of allegory probably comes later from St. Augustine (ca AD 400). St. Augustine's interpretation of the parables proved to be very ripe for this sort of allegorical explanation and continued on for quite some time. Here's the parable of the Good Samaritan where a person is on the road and is jumped by robbers and beaten and left half dead and a priest comes by and a Levite comes by, two Jewish leaders and significant persons, yet they fail to stop for various reasons to help the person who is beaten. Lo and behold, the Samaritan comes by, a most unlikely hero, and takes this person and bandages him up and takes him to an inn and pays for his stay and his upkeep. And St. Augustine read this allegorically and gives us one of the more classical examples of an allegorical interpretation.

So here it is. Basically when the parable says, "a man was going down from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho where he gets beaten." This man is Adam. Jerusalem then allegorically stands for the heavenly city of peace. So Jerusalem isn't the physical city Jerusalem. It now stands for the heavenly city from which Adam fell. Jericho allegorically stands for the moon and therefore signifies Adam's mortality. The robbers that beat this man allegorically stand for the devil and his angels. The fact that they stripped him means they stripped him of his immortality. They beat him means they persuaded the man to sin, again the man is allegorized to be Adam. So you can see this parable starting out is kind of a commentary on the creation narrative. "They left him half dead" means allegorically that he died spiritually; therefore he's half dead. The priest and the Levites stand for the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament. Interestingly, this is one point that most people would dispute today. The Samaritan is said to mean "guardian." Therefore the Samaritan is meant to be Christ himself. That would have been rather shocking to a Jewish reader who despised Samaritans. The Samaritan stands for Christ himself, the fact that he bandages his wounds means the binding and restraining of

sin. The oil symbolizes the comfort of hope. The wine symbolizes the exhortation to work with a fervent spirit. The donkey symbolizes the flesh of Jesus' incarnation interestingly. The inn symbolizes the church. The next day, after he takes him to the inn, the very next day refers to the resurrection. The two silver coins allegorically stand for the promise of this life and of the life to come, and the inn keeper is the apostle Paul.

So that's how St. Augustine made sense of this parable by taking the different elements of the parable and actually finding a deeper level of meaning, an allegorical meaning that he finds elsewhere in the Old and New Testament. We'll talk about the parables later on but I'm simply giving you an example of the allegorical approach, which became the dominant approach in early biblical interpretation.

Now let me say that it's important to understand, though this approach certainly is susceptible to a lot of subjectivity and is certainly susceptible to abuse and while we may look at what the early church fathers and early interpreters did and want to rightly avoid that and especially excesses and extremes, it's still important to understand that we do something very similar to what they were doing when we attempt to make the text relevant. The allegorical method was not just some arbitrary playing with the text of Scripture and trying to extract all kinds of strange meanings, but was an attempt to make the text relevant. How was one going to make a story of Lot and his relationships with his wife and daughters, how was one going to make that relevant spiritually and theologically. How does one make a story like the Good Samaritan relevant to today. Allegory, whatever we may think of it at the very least is instructive since it reminds us that interpretation has always been aimed at demonstrating the relevance of God's words for modern readers, however much it may have been overdone by early interpreters of scriptures.

We can look at other examples of interpretation by the early church fathers in the Patristic era, but the two points I want to make is number one: the dominant approach became allegorical interpretation, allegorizing the biblical text. As we're going to see later there's actually a difference between allegorizing and interpreting an allegory. Allegorizing is something that is not intended to be treated that way as opposed to

interpreting a text that is meant to be taken allegorically. But early interpretation was characterized by what became kind of the dominant approach up until the Reformation of treating an Old Testament text especially, allegorically finding a hidden level of meaning, finding a deeper meaning within the text. The second feature of early interpretation that begin to get steam and begins to get rolling was focused on early church tradition interpreting in light of the tradition of the Church and theological belief of the church and the interpretations that supported and reflected the church's theology. So, allegorical interpretation and also giving preference to church tradition now become a dominant hermeneutical or interpretive approaches to the Old and New Testament.

Reformation and Interpretation Methods

To skip ahead, and again there's a lot we could say about other periods of church history and other important individuals in interpretation, but again we'll skip ahead and touch on some of the major movements in the history of Church interpretation. So I want to skip ahead to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Again previously as we've said, interpretation focused on church tradition, and then the allegorical method of interpretation. In a sense, the hermeneutics or the interpretative approach of the Reformation grew out of a dissatisfaction and with and reaction to both of these tendencies. We'll see that the Reformation could generally, before we look just very briefly at two individuals Martin Luther and John Calvin, the Reformation could be characterized as an interest in studying the Bible itself in the original languages, both Hebrew and Greek and also even an awareness of the literary types of the texts, the desire to understand the text in light of its original historical contexts. Those seem to begin and characterize the approach of the reformers to biblical interpretation again in reaction to, and with dissatisfaction to the previous approach of focusing on simply church tradition and allegorizing of biblical text.

One thing that obviously lies behind this approach too is, now with the Reformation the Bible now no is longer only in the hands of the church leaders but now is in the hands of the common person, so it can be understood. One of the important implications and focuses of the Reformation was the perspicuity of the Scriptures

meaning that it can be understood by the common person. One does not need Church tradition or authority to interpret it. One can understand it in the light of the original languages such as Hebrew and Greek, one can understand the text as it should be understood not in light of church tradition but in light of its own original context et cetera et cetera.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (ca 1517 AD) one of the more well known of the Reformation Movement was known for interpreting both the Old and New Testament. Again, he did not see church tradition as the locus of interpretation or as the locus of biblical authority, but the Old and New Testament text itself. So this was a direct challenge to how hermeneutics or how biblical interpretation had gone on until this time. Also, Luther advocated for a single literal meaning or literal sense of the biblical text again in a direct contrast to the allegorical approach where we find multiple meanings. You remember Origen's body, soul, and spirit that were even expanded to four meanings not just three but four possible allegorical meanings. But now Calvin and Luther react to that and so there is a single literal approach to the biblical text.

Luther also emphasizes grammar and history and the role they play in interpretation. Interpretation must take into account the historical context of the biblical text. It must also be consistent with the grammar though it's interesting when you read Luther he did not completely divest himself of allegorical tendencies. He still at times did follow allegorical and typological responses that resemble early approaches to interpretation.

In fact, it's interesting Luther had such a impact that some of his commentaries, especially his commentaries on Romans and particularly in Galatians, are still seen as valuable contributions to our understanding today. In fact modern understanding of Paul, modern interpretation of Paul can basically be dived between Luther and what is known as the new perspective, and where we fall in relationship to that. So Martin Luther had a profound impact on biblical interpretation and how the text is approached. As I said, his commentary, particularly in Galatians, is still seen, even where one might disagree with

some of the details, as a model of exegesis and interpretation of a biblical text in light of its historical and grammatical context.

John Calvin and Interpretation

The other person to emphasizes that I want to just point you to very briefly is John Calvin. John Calvin also rejected allegory and instead sought to ground his interpretation in the biblical text. You know John Calvin more for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but within that we find Calvin discussing principles of interpretation. We'll see in just a moment John Calvin also wrote commentaries on biblical texts but he did so seeking to ground meaning and interpretation in the biblical text and rejected, therefore, allegorical interpretations that were finding multiple spiritual meanings underneath and behind these texts. Calvin also championed a more grammatical and historical approach to interpretation that is taking a text and putting it in its historical context as far as: who is the author, what is the situation of the reader, what is the author intending to communicate, examining the grammatical elements, the grammatical structure of the text in order to arrive at the meaning of the text.

Calvin also understood and advocated that the Bible itself is its own best interpreter and perhaps in response to giving preference to the early church tradition and to the authority of the church. Now Calvin says, the Bible is its own best interpreter where Scripture interprets Scripture. We still see that today, I still think we see the influence of that today in some of our Bibles that have in the margins or in the footnotes parallel passages that would point you to other texts that would be paralleled and help you understand the text that you're reading or dealing with. So Calvin was very clear that Scripture is its own best interpreter. Scripture interprets Scripture, and primarily what he meant by that is that the correct meaning resides in the text itself and that the final arbitrator of meaning is the biblical text itself, not church authority or church tradition.

In fact, Calvin also wrote commentaries that are still highly valued today. Not too long ago, actually it was a little bit ago at least from our perspective, I was reading a textbook from a well-known scholar on the New Testament and surveying commentaries on the New Testament and in most of them he mentioned along with contemporary

commentaries, he mention commentaries by both Calvin and Luther as still necessary for both the preacher and scholars library. So John Calvin also wrote commentaries on virtually every book of the Bible except the book of Revelation which he didn't know what to do with. Given some of the things I've read from some people a lot of people should have followed his lead by not writing on Revelation. He still wrote commentaries that are still valued today for the contribution they made to exegesis, not only what they reveal about Calvin but also even for insight into the biblical text.

So Luther and Calvin are examples of a reaction to the standard approach to hermeneutics that focused on church tradition and church authority as the arbitrator of meaning and an allegorical approach. Luther and Calvin focused on the text itself as the locus of meaning, Scripture interpreting Scripture abandoning the allegorical method of interpretation even if they didn't do so completely all the time. Instead they focused on the historical, grammatical meaning of the text. Both of them wrote commentaries that still make a valuable contribution to exegesis and to interpretation today.

Summary of Reformation Hermeneutics

In summary then, and in response to the current of interpretation of their day of the contributions of the Reformation to hermeneutics of their day and even to our day I think could be summarized in the following. Number one is the priority of Scripture as the primarily locus of meaning and interpretation. The primary locus of meaning or the primary contribution to meaning is not the authority of the church or merely church tradition. Our theological or ecclesiastical traditions are to be subservient to the meaning of the biblical text. So the priority of the text as the true place where hermeneutics and interpretation takes place is one of the contributions of the Reformation.

A second one is the stress on the grammatical and historical meaning of the text. Again, a number of hermeneutical textbooks still argue for what is called the grammatical-historical meaning, or a grammatical-historical interpretation and again that goes back to the Reformation. Studying a text in light of its grammatical context, the Hebrew and Greek grammar, also studying a text by placing it in its historical context by understanding the author, the readers and the situation that the author was addressing also

goes back to the Reformation as well. The emphasis on Scripture being its own best interpreter, that is, our interpretation of Scripture must have a consistency, it must have a coherency so that we don't come up with a interpretation that contradicts what Scripture says elsewhere, that again what I think is a vestige of the Reformation.

Then, finally, the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture, the fact that any one can read it and understand it, anyone can interpret it again owes itself to the legacy of the Reformation. Although sometimes we hear interpretations and we might have not wished for, but nonetheless the Reformation has taken the Bible and put it back in the hands of the people so that they can understand it and read it. All of these I think still affect the way that we interpret and approach Scripture today by emphasizing its clarity and its understandability. By emphasizing that it should be understood in its grammatical and historical context by understanding that it should be interpreted consistently with other Scripture and by making the scriptural text, the biblical text, giving it priority in our hermeneutics and our interpretation and making the locus of meaning the biblical text.

So this rather brief survey of history of the interpretation of the Bible to this point has primarily been to demonstrate that again when you pick up the biblical text and read it and interpret it you are part of the long story, a long tradition, of encountering the biblical text. No one does it simply out of the air, no one comes as we'll see later, as a blank slate, no one comes at it the first time. Whether you recognize it or not, you are influence by others who have wrestled with the text and interpreted the text and tried to make it relevant. This has gone on before you stretching all the way back to the Old Testament.

What I want to do next, in the next section, is take another quantum leap forward a couple hundred years and kind of switch gears and we'll begin to branch out and start to look at influences on interpretation that go outside of biblical interpreters. As I've said before, one of the features of recent study and thinking about hermeneutics and how we understand has demonstrated that hermeneutics is no longer the province only of biblical interpreters but other disciplines as well. So we're going to branch out and look at some non-biblical influences on how we read and interpret biblical text. I think we'll see the

influences are many and we'll examine what those are and the main persons associated with that and again how that might influence the way we read and interpret a biblical passage.

Transcribed by Elspeth Currie
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 7

Early Interpretation: Bacon to Kant

History of Interpretation: Introduction

We have been discussing the influences historically on hermeneutics of biblical interpretation and the last session or so we went all the way back to the Old Testament itself to demonstrate that interpretation is not something new with twentieth or twenty-first century scholars who sit down and interpret the Bible but interpretation goes all the way back to the Old Testament itself. Even within the Old Testament we find later writers picking up and interpreting and utilizing earlier texts and reasserting them for their audience. We looked at the New Testament authors who interpret Old Testament texts. We also looked at Rabbinic Judaism and we looked at early church fathers in the Patristic era and very briefly jumped forward to the Reformation. In all those instances we saw that one of the key features was that interpreters looked at the text as relevant and were attempting to make the text relevant to the modern day readers, not necessarily that we want to repeat all their methods but at the same time it's important to realize they are looking at God's word and were not treating it as an artifact to simply be exegeted and understood in its historical context but they were also wrestling with how the Word of God continues to be relevant.

What I want to do in this session is jump forward a little bit further and look at some influences on interpretation that do not necessarily arise from an attempt to interpret biblical texts. Some of them do. But it's important to understand as we've already said that interpretation does not arise in a vacuum. You don't just sit down and read the text or read a text in isolation. But when you do sit down to interpret a biblical text you do so as part of a long string of history and a long string of individuals who have sat down and wrestled with the text. But, you are also influenced by the thinking of many other individuals and many other movements that influence the way we understand, the way we read, and the way we interpret. Again, some of those influences that still affect us today are not necessarily aimed at biblical text nor were they necessarily aimed at

interpreting any text or books at all. Some of them were just wrestling with how to understand data, how to understand the meaning of anything. So what I want to do is look at some key influences. We will just kind of sketch in the broad picture and look at some of the major individuals and the influences they had. Especially during the time known as the Enlightenment when reason and the ability to think and reason was valued highly as the way to understand something, as the way to interpret something whether it was scientific data or whether it was text.

Francis Bacon

The first person that I want to look at briefly is an individual named Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon, an early scientific thinker, was part of an inductive scientific movement. Francis Bacon was a product of rationalism, that is the emphasis on the ability of the human mind to think and to reason and therefore to deduce meaning from the text. Bacon argued for a rigorous detailed study of the scientific data comparatively. What that meant was the interpreter is an observer that studies the data and studies the information without letting his or her personal biases or other influences affect the interpretation and the ability to understand the data. The observer looked at the data and studied it without letting those biases get in the way. By examining the physical and the historical evidence and the historical facts the laws that govern those facts would naturally emerge and reveal themselves, if one applies the correct and the rigorous method. What Bacon did is suggest that we should break with tradition and instead we should doubt tradition and return to the data itself and again by a rigorous method of look at the facts empirically. Then one could understand the laws that govern those facts and the meaning of those facts and how they fit together.

Today I think we see a similar influence in certain movements within biblical studies, popular as well as sometimes in the academy that emphasizes inductive study of the Bible so that by a rigorous application of proper methods of interpretation, by rigorously examining the data, one can reveal its true meaning. Once we understand its true meaning the text will reveal its meaning. So again you find an emphasis on the fact that the interpreter of the Bible is an objective observer and we look at that data in the

text by simply looking at the facts and empirically observing what is there and by applying the rigorous methods of using human reason thinking we can deduce its meaning and we can determine what the text is actually saying. Therefore, by doing this we are able to distance ourselves from our biases, our predispositions, our past traditions, and things like that in order to arrive at the true meaning of the text. Again, a number of hermeneutical texts will talk about an inductive method of interpretation and again there are even more popular Bible studies that are labeled "inductive Bible studies" or something like that. The assumption is "I am an objective observer. I am like a dry sponge just waiting to soak up data. And by applying the correct methods of interpretation to the biblical text then I can derive it's true meaning unencumbered by and uninfluenced by my biases.

So Francis Bacon was an important thinker, not so much in directly influencing biblical hermeneutics but as part of this whole approach. An exemplar of this approach is that one could by applying a rigorous method of interpretation transcend or overcome one's biases and understand the data, by an empirical/inductive type of method.

Rene Descartes

The next thinker that I want to introduce you too is an individual named Rene Descartes. Rene Descartes is from the later part of the sixteenth century into about the middle of the seventeenth century, 1596-1650. Descartes, like Bacon was also a product of rationalism and emphasized that knowledge comes from logical reasoning. That is, the human mind is able to derive meaning. Descartes said that I am a rational thinking self. Therefore, I can look at the data, I can look out at the material world, and I can understand things logically. Descartes also operated from the position of doubt. That is, that scientists or philosophers must rid themselves from preconceived notions and preconceived ideas and tradition. They must strip away tradition and set aside their biases and their assumptions and they must start afresh as they interpret the data.

Now, Bacon and Descartes then operated with the assumption that there is a correlation between knowing and the reality itself. That is, the rational, empirical, scientific method could understand something as it actually is. So there is a correlation

between my knowing and my interpreting something and what it actually is. So, for example, when I observe this book, when I look at this book, what I observe and see there is a correspondence between my knowing and my observing, and what is actually there, the actual reality itself. So again, by applying the rigorous scientific method we can become neutral observers. By applying an inductive approach to data, by approaching understanding with a rational inductive method, we can approach it in a pure manner and we can understand something as it actually is.

It's not too hard to see the possible influence on approaches to hermeneutics. When it comes to interpreting the Bible one can then approach it according to this method and under this influence one can approach it as an objective observer. One can approach it in a neutral manner. And also then, through a rigorous application of correct methods of interpretation, through a rigorous method of hermeneutics, one then can arrive at an interpretation that actually corresponds to the text, the Scripture itself. That is, I can arrive at an interpretation. I can arrive at an understanding. I can arrive at the meaning of the text which correlates directly with what is actually in the text separated from my own biases, my own viewpoint, my own tradition, and my own perspectives. By applying a rigorous method I can become a neutral observer. Again, sort of like a sponge just waiting to soak up data.

So, when it comes to hermeneutics, at least the method and approach of the rationalism exemplified by Bacon and Decartes have been influential in interpretation. So if you've heard or you've been taught or you've read that the correct approach to hermeneutics is to divest oneself of your presuppositions and your biases, to approach the text objectively, and by applying the correct methods of interpretation you can overcome your biases, you can understand the true meaning of the text, much of that kind of approach stems from this period of time of rationalism. It is exemplified by the approaches of Bacon and Descartes. And there is much more we could say about the two individuals but I'm primarily emphasizing the legacy that they've left when it comes to hermeneutics.

There are a couple of other things to say about Descartes as well as far as the legacy that he's left and the influence that he's had on biblical interpretation is. Descartes also introduced a dualism that's going to become very important later on in hermeneutics, interpretation, and theology. Basically, he said the dualism went like this, on the one hand Descartes understood that there is a material world that is mechanistic, it runs by natural laws. It's deterministic, but on the other hand, Descartes held to the freedom and autonomy of the thinker, of the rational thinker. What that means is, if I am a rational thinking self, an autonomist thinking self this raises the question to what extent is my understanding dependent on my own interpretation of it or my own perspective, or my own viewpoint. To what extent does the human mind determine how I'm going to understand the data itself? So, Descartes is already raising that question. One thing we're going to see from this approach, in Immanuel Kant, one of the figures we'll look at in just a moment, Immanuel Kant will develop this even further and start to pave the way for modern approaches to interpretation that now focus mainly on the reader. They maintain it's the reader who determines meaning. There is no correct meaning in the text itself. But we're so influenced by our understanding, our thinking, our biases, our traditions, and our perspectives that we will no doubt read that into the text. So Descartes has already paved the way for that by his dualism between the mechanistic universe and the autonomist thinking self. That again raises the question to what extent then does my mind determine what I see and my approach determines what I see and perceive in the data.

David Hume and John Locke

One other figure to emphasize during this period, and there are a number of other individuals we could look at that perhaps who have influenced hermeneutics, one that we'll mention very briefly is skepticism. The skepticism of David Hume, that one could not know anything. We often find statements in even biblical interpretation or hermeneutics textbooks that reflect this type of thinking.

One individual to mention very briefly is John Locke. John Locke, 1632-1704. Locke is one that argued that the mind is a blank tablet and it receives sensations then

from the external world. So my mind is a blank slate waiting to simply to receive sensations and data from the empirical world and the external world. And once again I've seen countless hermeneutical textbooks especially earlier on that said the interpreter, much like Bacon said, could come to the text as a purely objective observer with a blank mind, the mind that is a blank slate or like a sponge just waiting to soak up data in a purely inductive and purely objective manner.

We will see though that one of the difficulties with Locke's position is and we'll see this later on in some other interpreters and other hermeneuts, which is a term used for one who applies or thinks about or writes about hermeneutics, but one of the criticisms is if my mind is a blank slate and if it is simply a blank tablet how can I understand anything at all? One must have some categories or some perspective from which to view and to understand.

Immanuel Kant

But, moving beyond Locke, the next important and significant individual, perhaps the most significant of all of this group of persons we are looking at is an individual named Immanuel Kant. Immanuel Kant living from 1724-1804 basically was responding in some respects to the skepticism of his day. Again, one of the skeptics he responded to was David Hume who doubted the certainty of any human knowledge at all. In response to that Kant sought to escape the skepticism and what he did is say basically the human mind is the ultimate source of knowing. In other words, objective reality according to Kant, could only be known and perceived as it conforms to the knowing structures of the mind. So therefore, he goes even further than Descartes. Remember Descartes introduced a dualism between the autonomist thinking self that was able to rationally understand or perceive data. Now Kant goes further and says objective reality, what is out there, can only be known because of the categories that already exist in the mind because of the structures that are already in the mind. In other words, the way things are in and of themselves, the way things are objectively can never be known. Instead, all my knowing is filtered through the structures of the mind and the categories of understanding in the

human mind such as categories of time that allow us to distinguish time, categories of space. All of these determine how we view the empirical world.

So again, according to Bacon and Descartes perhaps, one could look at an object and know how we perceive it and how we understand it. There would be a direct correlation between my understanding and knowing and the nature of the object itself. Now Kant says that instead the structures of the mind determine what I see. So how I perceive and understand this book I cannot be certain that I understand it objectively or as it really is because it's the categories and structures of the thinking and rational mind that determine how I perceive it. So my understanding of it is filtered through the patterns of understanding the categories already in the human mind. Earlier, according to Bacon especially and Descartes, the mind could objectively perceive data as it actually was, as it objectively was. But now Kant says that the mind, the structures of the mind, can determine how I perceive the world. How the world is seen the structures of the mind determine how the world is interpreted. There is no direct correlation between my knowing and what is actually out there. I can't be certain that what I know necessarily corresponds objectively to what is out there.

There is also one other important influence of Immanuel Kant and that is, Immanuel Kant said that there were two poles, perhaps again taking Descartes' thinking a little further. There was a dualism between freedom and causality or again the freedom of the thinking mind and causality, that is the determinism that governed the way the world worked. For Kant the pole of freedom included things like faith, and religion, and God. Whereas with the pole of causality, the opposite side of the pole, there was the scientific world of time, space, and history. According to Kant neither could influence each other. That one did not understand faith, God, and religion according to the methods of scientific inquiry when it comes to the sciences, history, and the external world. So, there's this dualism between history, this deterministic world and the pole of freedom, which includes God, faith, and religion. Actually, we see this influence today in a number of fronts, for example, the notion that faith by faith or religion is a very personal thing. My faith and my belief in God is transcendent and is even independent of the facts,

whereas history and science then are simply the realm of cause and effect. For most that would mean no miracles, no divine intervention in history. Again, Kant kept those two poles separate. One could not mix scientific fact and historical fact with the realm of religious ideas, God, and faith. Again we see that today when faith and belief in God is something's that's personal, something not dependent on facts, and something that cannot be proved.

Furthermore, we also see this, I think, we still see the legacy of this type of thinking in both Old Testament and New Testament studies and the dichotomy that you still frequently see between faith and history. That especially characterized the liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that even further that the theology and history disjunction. So, for example, Old Testament authors are writing what is religious literature, what is theological literature, and not what is historical. So things like God parting the Red Sea so that an entire nation could walk across certainly can't really be true and certainly could not have happened. But that doesn't matter because the author is interested in theology, not in history. Or the synoptic Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke when they are writing theology they are necessarily not writing history. So you see the ongoing influence in a sense of Kant in this dichotomy between faith and history or again in Gospel criticism or in Old Testament criticism, the dichotomy between theology and history. If the authors are writing theological documents then certainly their not interested in historical facts or in writing history. So for Kant, knowledge then is composed of experience based on sensory impressions and texts which second then are understood through the categories of the mind that enable me to organize the data and interpret the world.

Again, the main point to stress with Kant, unlike Bacon and Descartes, he suggested that we can never know a thing independently. We can never know a thing as it actually is. Again, I cannot know this as it actually is but instead I can only know it through the grid of my mind, through the structures that are already present in the mind. All meaning and understanding is filtered through this grid. But it is this grid that enables me to understand. This is the result of being an autonomist thinking self, an autonomist

thinker. So, I, the thinking self, determine how I see things. We know how they appear to us not necessarily how they are objectively and in reality in and of themselves.

Therefore, in one respect, considering it this way, Kant never entirely escaped the skepticism that he was responding to. Because if I cannot know something as it really is, if my perception and knowledge of something is independent of the way the thing actually is, if there's no direct correlation between my knowing and the way something actually is, I can't be certain then that I know something as it actually is. So in that respect Kant did not entirely escape the skepticism that he was responding to. Then also when it comes to nature, the world, history, scientific knowledge there can be no supernatural. Again, religion, God, et cetera belong to a different pole, the pole of freedom. Whereas science, history, et cetera, belong to a closed mechanistic universe.

So much like Bacon and Descartes though, Kant still emphasized the human mind as the primary source of meaning and knowledge. It's through the autonomist thinking self. The autonomist thinking self is able to know and understand. Though again as we said, with Kant one can only know through the grid of the mind, via categories that are already in the mind. Therefore, I can't know something as it really is but only as I understand and perceive it. So the legacy of Immanuel Kant then is that the interpreter is the center of meaning. The interpreter, the knowing self, is the center of meaning. I already said, Kant begins to anticipate, the more modern approaches to hermeneutics that emphasize reader center approaches.

Author, Text and Reader

At the very beginning of this course I think we mentioned that hermeneutics seems to flow through and to center around the three primary components of interpretation that is the author, the text, and the reader. Author-centered approach is the focus on the author's intention. Text-centered focus is on the text as the locus the place of meaning. The reader-centered approach is the focus on the reader as the one who makes the text have sense. So, already, Kant is anticipating more post-modern approaches to interpretation and more reader-centered approaches that focus on the reader as the one who makes sense of the text. That is, meaning is in the eye of the beholder. There is no

correct objective meaning in the text that we simply extract. But instead the only meaning is what the reader understands through the categories of the mind, through presuppositions, biases, and viewpoints that we bring to the text that will influence the way we understand and interpret the text. That seems to already be anticipated by Immanuel Kant.

Then the second legacy as we already suggested is the disjunction between first of all, the exclusion of the supernatural when it comes to the sciences, history, et cetera. The exclusion of the supernatural, the exclusion of divine intervention into the affairs of history means again no resurrection, no parting of the Red Sea for a whole nation to cross over and no other miraculous events.

Then furthermore, in relationship to this, the legacy of Kant is the theology-history disjunction. That if New Testament authors are writing theology then they are necessarily not concerned with writing history. Part of that thinking goes back to Kant which drew this, worked with this, dualism between what was true history and science and what was true in the realm of the religion, belief, and God.

Response and Observations about Bacon, Descartes, Locke and Kant

In response, to Kant when we think about hermeneutics, and then we'll summarize the contribution of these individuals that we've looked at, Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, John Locke, and then finally Immanuel Kant. I said there are other persons and other individuals during this time that made equally important contributions to hermeneutics. Again, not consciously thinking about hermeneutics but simply because they are dealing with how we understand, how we know, whether scientific data or written text, how do know something. Because of that these individuals do make important contributions to hermeneutics and hermeneutical theory there are a couple further observations especially about Kant but also about the others, Bacon, and Descartes as well, and John Locke. First of all, particularly Kant, has reminded us, I think, that there's no such thing as pure induction. There's no such thing as a purely objective interpreter. That by a rigorous methodology, a rigorous application of correct techniques, can somehow interpret the biblical text in a way that you're simply a blank

slate just waiting to soak up information so that you can be absolutely certain that there's a one to one correlation between your interpretation and the meaning of the text itself. So I think we have to come to grips with, and we'll talk about this more. What we have to come to grips with is there's no such thing as a completely objective observer, an objective interpreter. We all come with our own understanding, our own predispositions, our own biases, our own backgrounds and traditions, which all influence the way we read the text.

Now one of the questions we'll deal with later on in this course is, does that inevitably distort the way we read the biblical text. Is there no hope at all of understanding the biblical text? Are we inevitably doomed to meaning being simply in the eye of the beholder? There's no correct meaning of the text that we can ever hope to get at. We'll talk about that later, but certainly, and we'll see this will become even more prominent in hermeneutical thinking, that there's no such thing as a pure deduction where I am an objective observer with a blank slate just waiting to soak up, a dry sponge waiting to soak up the data or that I can perfectly and purely perceive something exactly the way it is.

A second response is, in light of Kant's argument, I think Christians would want to argue that God has created us in his image, Genesis chapter one. God has created us in his image and therefore he has implanted the structures and the categories in the human mind that enable us to perceive things the way God has created them. So God is the creator of the universe and the creator of human beings in his image and he has placed those structures and those categories that Kant described, again, we can't come to anything with a blank mind. If you did you could not understand anything. But God himself has created the structures and categories and the grid in the human mind that enable us to perceive things the way he has created them. But also, as a Christian interpreter we would want to admit that we do not do this perfectly and exhaustively because of the fall and because of human sinfulness that affects the way we perceive things that affects the way we understand things. Now again, that still raises the question does that mean that we are inevitably due to failure? Does that mean we cannot

understand anything at all? We'll deal with that later but as part of the response I think most Christian interpreters, would suggest and recognize that even if we can't understand something perfectly and exhaustively that does not prevent us from understanding something adequately and substantially.

So, in summary, summarizing the contribution of these individuals is first of all the legacy of Kant, Descartes, Bacon and John Locke is to emphasize empiricism and human reason. We are able to objectively interpret something the way it is. We are able to objectively, through using human reason, through applying a rigorous methodology, one is able to understand something, one is able to know something. According to Bacon and Descartes, there was a correlation between my knowing basically and the way something was. Again, according to John Locke one could approach something with a blank mind free of all biases and able to understand something the way it really was by the application of a rigorous method or methodology. This kind of approach is often called "common sense realism" as well. It is another term or phrase that you might find.

A second is Immanuel Kant distanced himself slightly in that while he still emphasized rationalism and reason, he emphasized more the autonomist knowing self, the autonomist thinking self as the center of meaning. He pushed even further and said therefore we cannot know something as it really is. Now again, for Kant he didn't go as far as to say therefore we cannot know anything at all or everyone comes up with something completely different. But he simply emphasized that human beings are already equipped with the categories and structures of the mind. The mind is a grid that filters the data and determines how we put it together and how we understand it. There's structure already present in the mind. So, there's no direct correlation between my knowing something and the way it really is. Again, there is no direct correlation between my perceiving this and knowing this and how it objectively actually is in reality. Therefore from that perspective Kant did not quite escape the skepticism that he argued against.

The third thing then is simply to mention that therefore Kant has had an enormous impact on subsequent hermeneutical thinking both in the division between the thinking self and the object of interpretation and that now the way is paved for the emphasis on the

focus on the thinking self as the center of meaning. His thought anticipated later reader oriented approaches.

But also the last one is his faith and history disjunction or his theology-history disjunction. That again, if biblical authors are writing theology they are inevitably not writing history. So those individuals as kind of products of the enlightenment have left us a legacy of emphasizing the human reasoning, human rationality, human thinking as being able to understand and to know something.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

To move forward just a little bit, not a whole lot in time, but a little bit as far as perspective. I want to discuss another important individual and that is Friedrich Schleiermacher who lived from 1768-1834, the early part of the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher was a German philosopher and theologian and left his impact on theology on hermeneutics on biblical studies as well. He's known by some as the father of theology or the father of hermeneutics. We will return to Schleiermacher, I'll introduce him here briefly and talk about his thinking and contributions to hermeneuts. But we will return to him again when we discuss authorial intent. Schleiermacher is probably the key individual that discusses authorial intent. Remember author centered, text centered, and reader centered approaches to interpretation. Most go back to Schleiermacher as kind of a father of author's intent as the main goal of interpretation. Although many would not necessarily agree with or subscribe to how he approached it and how he explained it, most would still see him as the father of hermeneutics with his emphasis on author's intention. As I said, although a German philosopher and theologian he made a contribution to hermeneutics. Schleiermacher also wrote during the period of and as a child of the enlightenment era that emphasized the power of human reasoning, the power of thinking, and the ability of human reason to actually know something. In other words, faith was in reason, science, and technology as well. However, interestingly, Schleiermacher reacted to this emphasis, this emphasis on faith and reasoning in science. He suggested that we cannot be limited simply rational and by the scientific approaches

to knowledge. But instead, over against merely rational truth and theological dogma of the day, Schleiermacher emphasized creativity, experience, and piety in his pursuit of knowledge. In other words, for him hermeneutics is the application of general rules of understanding developed through close attention to the nature of human thought and language.

Now what that meant is, for Schleiermacher, for his emphasis on human thought, his emphasis on creativity, his emphasis on experience, he suggested that the main goal of understanding and interpretation was not so much understanding the biblical text or understanding the text as much as it was understanding an author, or understanding another person, that is, the human author. So the gap between the modern interpreter and the author that produced the text could be overcome by hermeneutics. It's hermeneutics that allowed us to overcome that distance between us and the human author. So the primary task, according to Schleiermacher was to reconstruct or reproduce as closely as possible the past act of the author. In other words, according to Schleiermacher, he said yes we look at the things like the grammar of the text, we look at the historical background of the text, we look at the words of the text, but for him interpretation was primarily psychological. Again, because of some of his philosophical understanding, for him the main goal was to even go beyond the text and to understand the author's thought process, to kind of put oneself in the place of the author because according to him we share a community with the human author. Therefore, we are able to lace ourselves within the shoes of the author, or in the mind of the author we are able to uncover the author's true intention in writing the biblical text. So because of that Schleiermacher then begins to emphasize that the correct approach to hermeneutics and to understanding something is not so much to simply observe the text and come up with the correct interpretation, but to move beyond that and psychologically to ask the question about the past of the act of the author and what the author was intending to do.

The legacy then of Friedrich Schleiermacher is: number one, the emphasis on author's intention and we'll see that hermeneutics begins with author centered approaches or approaches that go behind the text and recover the historical background of

the text, the author's intention that is, begin with Schleiermacher. A number of hermeneutic or a number of biblical interpretation textbooks that I've read have phrasing similar to this. The main goal of interpretation is to put yourself in the shoes of the author, which is actually close to an exact quote from one hermeneutics textbook that I'm aware of. So the text then simply becomes a window for understanding the author through reconstructing the author's intention. Today even, there's still, although we may do it differently than Schleiermacher, still most interpreters especially evangelical interpreters would continue to argue that the main goal of interpretation is to uncover the author's intention. The meaning of the text is the meaning that the author intended. We will return to that later when we begin to talk about author, text, and reader centered approaches to interpretation. But already Friedrich Schleiermacher has championed the view that the goal of interpretation is to recover the author's intention.

One other facet of Schleiermacher's thinking that has influenced hermeneutics is what is often known as the hermeneutical circle. Schleiermacher said that when reading a text one tries to understand the whole by understanding the individual parts. Likewise by understanding the individual parts one could understand the entirety or one could understand the whole. Another way of putting that is, according to Schleiermacher, understanding would come in stages, not all at once, as one works through the circle going back and forth between the whole and the parts. Understanding comes in stages, understanding the author's intention context comes in stages, and not all at once.

Summary

So we have looked at particularly, not all of them, but particularly non-biblical approaches to knowing and understandings that have influenced hermeneutics in going back to Francis Bacon and his inductive scientific method; Rene Descartes and his rationalism and scientific method and emphasis on the ability to know something through rational thinking, the autonomist thinking self. John Locke, who suggested we can approach something as a blank slate, that simply observing things and the blank slate being filled up by sensory perception and experience with the data.

Then it was Immanuel Kant who emphasized the rational thinking self, the autonomist thinking self, all of these the children of enlightenment. Yet at the same time Kant introduces the autonomist thinking self, now with the effect that our knowing of something is filtered through and dependent on the categories and the structures already present in the human mind.

Then Friedrich Schleiermacher, who now begins to emphasize reacting to just human reason and scientific method now emphasizes experience, piety, and creativity. So that the goal of interpretation, the goal of hermeneutics, is now to recover the author's intention behind the text, and to psychologically understand the author's thought process and the author's thinking.

All of these, again, still influence the way we approach and the way we think about hermeneutics today. It's important to understand our approach to hermeneutics is influenced not just by biblical interpreters but more generally, currents and historical movements and how they have wrestled with how do we know something and how do we understand how do we perceive, the external world? How do we perceive something like a text? All of that has influenced our hermeneutical textbooks and the way we think about biblical interpretation.

In the next sessions we'll move beyond these figures as part of the Enlightenment in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and we'll jump forward and start to look at some more recent thinkers in regard to theology, philosophy and hermeneutics and how that affects the way we approach a biblical text. In the next session we'll start by examining an individual whose probably one of the most influential, Hans-Georg Gadamer. So next session we'll continue to look at, kind of, our hermeneutical roots and some of the influences that have shaped the way we think about biblical interpretation of the Old and New Testament today.

Transcribed by Alex Beckvermit
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Hermeneutics, Lecture 8

Gadamer and Bultmann

Review

Last session we discussed some of the influences on hermeneutics and interpretation by looking at several individuals around the period of the Enlightenment, from Francis Bacon to Schleiermacher and their contribution to hermeneutics and their contribution to thinking. We saw that much of our thinking about hermeneutics is influenced not only by biblical interpreters but more broadly by methods of thinking, and thinking about understanding, and knowing more generally. We considered the legacy of some of those individuals and their contributions, even to modern day hermeneutics, and even in biblical studies.

Twentieth Century Hermeneutics: Gadamer

What I want to do is jump forward to the twentieth century and examine a number of twentieth, and even into the twenty-first century perhaps, and examine a handful of individuals who have influenced our understanding of hermeneutics.

The first one is a person that perhaps more than any other has been influential in our understanding of interpretation and hermeneutics. This individual was a German philosopher by the name of Hans-Georg Gadamer who lived from 1900 to 2002. It's interesting as you listen to some of the dates of theses thinkers how long most of them live. The lesson I guess is to become a hermeneutical thinker or a philosopher and you're guaranteed a long life. Obviously, that's probably not true but it's interesting how many of them lived into their 80's and even 90's and even longer in the case of Hans-Georg Gadamer. But this German philosopher Gadamer introduced what has often been labeled as "the New Hermeneutic."

Gadamer's most famous work that articulated his position was a work that was translated into English with the title *Truth in Method.* In this book Gadamer developed his understanding of philosophical hermeneutics. Sometimes you'll hear that term philosophical hermeneutics. It's often seems to go back to Gadamer's work *Truth in*

Method and the development of his understanding of hermeneutics. Gadamer was also reacting to the scientific method and the pursuit of knowledge of objective truth by human reasoning and rational thinking. What he said is: understanding is far greater than just objective truth achieved through scientific experimentation. Instead, Gadamer's reacting to previous attempts to see understating as simply the result of scientific technique and the scientific method or to see hermeneutics in terms of a subject, an interpreting subject, who dominates over an object, for our purposes to the biblical text. A subject dominates over the object so that the subject gains mastery over it as the analyzer analyzes it so as to master it. That's what Gadamer is sort of reacting to.

It's also important to add that for Gadamer hermeneutics were beginning to see that hermeneutics is not just understanding texts but for him and for us with the biblical text, it's understanding life. Hermeneutics for him embraces all of life. It is cross disciplinary and we'll see that for a number of these thinkers it is beginning to become that. So for him we do not dominate a text but, according to Gadamer, it also dominates us. What Gadamer said is we are so entangled and enmeshed in the world in which we live that whenever we try to understand something, whenever we try to come to an understanding of something else, our interests, our beliefs, our situation in life, our biases, our predispositions all color our understanding.

But he also argued they are also necessary in some ways in direct contrast to Locke, John Locke as we said, could approach something as a blank slate waiting to be written upon by sensory impressions from the external world. Now Gadamer said we are so enmeshed in our culture, our surroundings, we are so enmeshed in our own understanding, our predispositions, our biases that these necessarily color the way we look at things. But this was a good thing because this is necessary if we are going to understand something. If one has a blank mind, how can we ever understand something? Apart from categories of understanding, apart from previous understanding, how can we hope to grasp or understand anything? So for Gadamer the pre-understanding and the fact that we are enmeshed in this world with our own interests, our own beliefs, and our own situation in life was necessary.

Therefore, there's no such thing as an objective, neutral observer or interpreter. We don't experience things as detached observers. It's not as some isolated detached observer or a subject that I observe and gain mastery over it and understand it in a purely objective way. Instead, my understanding of this is colored by my own interests, my own beliefs, my own predispositions and presuppositions, my own biases. All of that influences how I understand this. But, again, that's a good thing for Gadamer, not necessarily a negative thing. Therefore, instead of understanding someone as a neutral, detached observer, the process of understanding for Gadamer was far more dynamic. His solution to hermeneutics and his solution to the fact that we come to a text with all our biases, presuppositions, interests, and our beliefs, the solution to that is that we actually enter into a dialogue with the text itself. We enter into a conversation with what it is we're trying to understand. So we bring all our baggage all our background and our presuppositions to the object we're trying to understand. But we enter into a dialogue with it. We enter into a conversation with what we are trying to understand. So the process of interpretation is far more dynamic than just some objective observer sitting back and soaking up the data.

Gadamer, then, in light of his understanding of hermeneutics as kind of a conversation or a dialogue with what one is trying to understand, championed this idea of the fusion of horizons. This is one of the things that he is well-known for. The fact is that the interpreter comes to a text or comes to it as something to be understood. An interpreter comes from his or her own situation. They begin with their own assumptions, their own presuppositions, their own beliefs and they begin with an assumption of what they expect to find in the text. Then they enter into a dialogue with the text, a give and take with the text so that their expectations of what they hope to find in the text might be affirmed or it might need to be modified, or their expectations might me thwarted. In turn then, Gadamer understands it as kind of a back and forth dialogue. So I come to the text with my understanding. I come with all my background, my assumptions, what I hope to find and I find those assumptions confirmed or thwarted, by reading the text. In turn, the text itself questions the interpreter. As I read the text, it begins to enlarge my

understanding, it begins to enlarge what I expect to find. Then it focuses on revising our assumptions and the questions we ask of the text. So again, when I come to the text, I bring my questions, my assumptions and then the text itself challenges or confirms those and causes me to revise my understanding, the kinds of questions that I ask of the text. So the goal then for Gadamer is to arrive at what he called "a fusion of the horizons." The horizons of the text and the horizon of the interpreter come kind of to a mutual consent, a mutual understanding, and a common understanding between the text and the interpreter. So, as I enlarge the horizons of my own thinking, I also enlarge the horizons of the text from my own situation and my own historical perspective. Likewise the text enlarges my horizon and understanding from its world and its perspective. It reveals something new, it reveals something challenging to my understanding.

It's important to understand though that for Gadamer this did not mean that the result of this process somehow was a correct, final interpretation of a text or a specific single correct meaning that came from the text. Rather, the result was it simply opened up possibilities where the horizons of both were enlarged, that they came to a kind of a mutual relationship. So, Gadamer was not quite saying that somehow the horizons merge into a correct meaning or correct understanding of the true meaning of the text.

So Gadamer championed what could be called sort of a hermeneutics of dialogue, where the interpreter enters into a dialogue with the text. So one way to look at Gadamer's contribution then is to look at both the contributions to hermeneutics but also some of the questions that his approach raises. So, for example, as far as contribution, I think Gadamer has poignantly reminded us that there's no such thing as objective, neutral observer, that as an interpreter somehow we can approach a biblical text in a completely unbiased way uninfluenced by our background and our theological beliefs, our culture and our perspectives, et cetera. No one can approach a text as a neutral observer but those things inevitably reflect and sometimes hinder our understanding of a text. There's no such thing as purely inductive approaches to the text where we simply soak up data and observe something in a neutral manner. Instead, we're influenced by what we bring to the text that will necessarily color the way we look at it.

I think also, in some respects, that it's inevitable and it's necessary. How can we hope to understand something such as a text if we don't have any prior knowledge, if we don't have any prior experience, if we don't have any prior categories to help us to perceive that? So, one of the contributions of Gadamer then has been to further draw our attention away from the mythical completely neutral, unbiased observer just waiting to soak up data and make sense of it in an objective, neutral way.

Second, Gadamer has helpfully emphasized that interpretation is a dialogue in some respects. Interpretation is a dialogue that enables us to be challenged, it enables our preconceived notions to be challenged, it enables our own horizons, and our understanding to be challenged and to be changed. So that meaning is often surprising. Meaning often challenges our own understanding and the pre-understanding that we bring to the text. Again, Gadamer did not go as far necessarily to say that somehow therefore that the text has priority and the interpreter can't arrive at a correct meaning of the text. But at the same time I think he's helpful in emphasizing that dialogical nature of interpretation. It's not just me as an objective observer gaining mastery over an object, but instead, we come to the text with our questions, assumptions, and what we expect to find. The text challenges that, and can overturn that, can challenge and change that. So that sometimes meaning is surprising and challenges our preconceived notions of what we're going to find in the text.

A corollary to that, a third contribution I think is that interpretation is not a one-time event. It's sometimes an ongoing process that often opens up new insights. I don't open my Bible to Jeremiah chapter thirty-one and read it and arrive at the correct meaning and I'm done and there's no more work to be done, there's no more interpretation to take place. But instead, Gadamer reminds us that sometimes interpretation is not a one-time event, but it is often ongoing and continues to open up new insights into the text as our understanding is challenged by the text.

But, at the same time, Gadamer's hermeneutical approach raises some questions. For example, two questions, that again I don't hope to answer necessarily right now but just to raise from Gadamer's thinking. Number one, are there limits to understanding?

When I enter into a dialogue with the text are there limits to my understanding of the text? Even when you talk about the fusing of the horizons, are there limits to how those horizons are fused? Are there limits to how I understand another text?

And second, is the dialogue a vicious circle? I mean, is the dialogue something that just goes back and forth and goes back and forth and is ongoing? For example, some have even raised the question how do I know, if I come to a text with my pre-understanding, and my own biases, and assumptions, of what I'm going to find, how do I know when the text speaks back to me, when the text challenges me, how do I know that I'm understanding that correctly if I'm already influenced by my background and my biases? So, for example, considering the contribution of Gadamer, when I read a biblical text again if I choose to read one of Jesus' parables, for example, or if I choose to read one of Paul's letters, the biblical text may challenge my own, preconceived notions of individualism. I might come to a biblical text and from a very individualistic perspective, especially in twenty-first century, as a twenty-first century middle class American. I might come to the text with my individualistic assumptions and I might try to understand the text from that perspective. But the text then may challenge my own preconceived notions, it may frustrate me as a reader because I'm finding something now that challenges my belief. At least as a Christian then, I allow the text as the Word of God to overturn that, and challenge that, and conform my horizon, or my perspective, and my understanding to that of the biblical text.

One example in my own interpretation that may or may not exactly reflect what is going on with Gadamer's approach, but for the longest time I read a text like Ephesians 5:18, I read this from a purely individualistic, personal, and pietistic perspective. When the author says, "Do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery instead be filled with the Spirit" I was prone to read this in purely individualistic terms. This was about an individual Christian, that God's Spirit is filling me and therefore producing the kind of characteristics that Paul sees as further indicating a life that is controlled by or filled by the Holy Spirit. So I read this in personal, pietistic, and individualistic terms, that God's Spirit would fill me as an individual and produce the kind of life he wanted.

However, as I have read this text again in a broader context of Ephesians, I wondered whether my perspective was too narrow and I began to consider the fact that perhaps the perspective of chapter five verse eighteen of Ephesians is more corporate and communal, so that the command to be filled with the Spirit is a command to the entire community, the church to be God's temple where God dwells and is present with them through his Holy Spirit. So that this, while it may not necessarily rule out individual experience and individual filling, on the other hand, Paul's emphasis may be far more communal, as he envisions the entire church, the entire body of Christ, the entire corporate community as the locust of God's filling. He's looking at the entire community as a temple that God will fill, and God's presence will be in the midst of his people. So at times, again, the biblical text may function to challenge our preconceived notions and function to make us uncomfortable and see something surprising that challenges what we thought we would find in the biblical text.

Rudolf Bultmann

This brings me to another individual who was influential on hermeneutics, though to some degree though, probably more so in his broader theological and biblical understanding of the New Testament. But the next individual that I want to talk about is Rudolf Bultmann, another German New Testament scholar particularly, who lived from 1884 to 1976. Rudolf Bultmann was a German scholar that is often associated with what is known as existential hermeneutics. I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about Bultmann, but in some ways Bultmann also contributed to our understanding of hermeneutics. Bultmann is better known as the author of one of the most important books, as the author of *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* where he expounded his views of the Synoptic Gospels in relationship to the historicity and how he understood the development of the Gospel tradition. Rudolf Bultmann is probably one of the most important New Testament interpreters in the twentieth century. Both in Europe and North America as well, his influence, both through his students but also through his writing, his thinking is still widely felt. He's also known for writing a New Testament theology

where he developed his approach to New Testament theology from an anthropological perspective. But he also wrote on and contributed as I've already said to hermeneutics.

There are several important features in his writing that we want to focus on. First of all Rudolf Bultmann emphasized pre-understanding. Similar to what we saw in Gadamer's work, Bultmann emphasized that our understanding of a biblical text is conditioned by our prior understanding. In other words, there's no such thing as an objective, neutral observer of the text but instead we come to the text influenced by our prior understanding. This was spelled out particularly in an article that Bultmann wrote entitled "Is Presuppositionalist Exegesis Possible?" Try that out on your congregation. "Is Presuppositionalist Exegesis Possible?" And, of course, to that question Bultmann answered, "No."

A second thing that Bultmann's hermeneutics seem to emphasize is that hermeneutics is circular. The process of understanding an interpretation is circular. We begin with our pre-understanding, again, much like what we find in Gadamer. We begin with our pre-understanding and that is either confirmed, rejected, or modified in dialogue with the text. So again, in some respect, Bultmann's understanding of hermeneutics, is similar to Gadamer in some respects. It is a dialogue between the interpreter and the text. We come to the text with our pre-understanding, we then find the text modifying or challenging or rejecting that and that dialogue continues.

A third feature of Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutics is existential. Rudolf Bultmann is often seen as and identified with existential hermeneutics. According to Bultmann, the goal of hermeneutics is an existential encounter with the text. Here Bultmann is usually seen to be influenced by the existential thinker Martin Heidegger. But he saw that an existential encounter with the text was the main goal of interpretation. So one would read a text and the goal was to be open to what the text says about the possibilities for authentic human existence. The goal of reading the text then was to experience a call to decision and authentic existence. So, for that reason, Bultmann's hermeneutic could be characterized as existential, the goal is to have an encounter with the text and a call to decision and authentic human existence.

The fourth and last feature that I'll mention about Bultmann's hermeneutic is the process of demythologization. That is, Bultmann underwent a program of demythologizing of the New Testament text. What that meant is, for him the Bible held to, especially the New Testament, an outmoded prescientific view of the world where there were things like demons, angels, miraculous healings, and resurrections. But in the modern world we no longer believe in such a world, we no longer live in and experience such a world. Again, for him, there is a kind of almost Bultmannic in his operating with this distinction between faith, religion, and God and seeing history and the world within the realm of cause and effect and science which leaves out anything supernatural. So if that's the case we don't experience angels, and we don't experience resurrections, and miraculous things. That was for a prescientific, outmoded worldview but in our scientific, technological world we no longer experience those things.

So what do we do with the Bible? Again, according to Bultmann, we interpret the New Testament existentially. What we do is we have to strip away all the myth related to this outmoded worldview dominated by the miraculous, resurrections, angels, demons, and things like that. We strip away the myth to get at the true meaning of the biblical text. Some have compared it to stripping away all the husks until you get down to the kernel of truth which according to Bultmann was simply an existential call to authentic existence.

So again, for example, when one reads in the Gospels about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we're not to understand this as an actual literal resurrection of Christ from the dead as that's part of an outmoded worldview that we no longer participate in and experience. Instead, because those things just don't happen, but rather now we read the resurrection account by stripping away the mythical husks. The kernel is that this is simply a call for faith in the Christian.

Summary of the History of Interpretation

So to summarize, again there are other persons that we could no doubt talk about but I've tried to simply sample some of the more important influences in hermeneutics and interpretation. So to summarize our survey to this point on historical roots and historical influences on interpretation going all the way back to Francis Bacon, again, and

his purely scientific inductive reasoning, looking at Descartes and his emphasis on the human, autonomist thinker, and human reasoning, and rationality as capable of knowing and on the emphasis by John Locke on the mind as a blank slate that receives sensory impressions from the external world. Then, Immanuel Kant emphasized the autonomist thinking self and that it was through categories we perceive everything and know things through the grid and categories already in mind. On to Friedrich Schleiermacher who, in reacting to pure rationality, suggested that the goal of hermeneutics is to uncover the author's thought and the intention of the author, to Hans Georg Gadamer who suggested that interpretation is the result of a fusion of horizons, we enter into a dialogue with the text, we come with our presuppositions, our predispositions, our beliefs, and biases and we enter into a dialogical relationship with the text. Then we moved on to Rudolf Bultmann who also emphasized the importance of pre-understanding and presuppositions. No understanding can take place apart from prior understanding. The goal of interpretation was an existential encounter with the text. Bultmann is associated with an existential hermeneutic and in the New Testament since we can no longer buy into this world of angels, demons, the supernatural, miracles, and resurrections the goal is to demythologize, the goal is to strip this all away and to uncover the main kernel of meaning which is a call to authentic existence and an existential encounter with the text.

So what do we learn in summary? What is the contribution of these individuals and their historical roots and the historical influences on hermeneutics? Some of this obviously we've already mentioned but let's recap and summarize. I'll mention five things briefly, number one is one of the legacies of this approach then is seen in hermeneutical textbooks, or interpretive movements, and Bible studies that emphasize an inductive approach. Movements that emphasize the correct application of correct methods of interpretation so that the meaning of the text can be arrived at, and the correct meaning of the text may be extracted. Furthermore, there's a direct correlation between the interpretation and my knowing and understanding of the meaning of the text. There's a direct correlation between that and the text itself. So human reason, logical thinking, the correct application of methods, the ability to approach the text as a neutral objective

observer are the legacies of these individuals that still in many respects have influenced our hermeneutics today. It has certainly influenced countless, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interpreters of the biblical text and countless hermeneutical textbooks.

A second legacy of these individuals historically was an emphasis on the author's intention. That the goal of interpretation is to uncover the author's intent and meaning even to the extent that we're told that we're to attempt as much as possible to empathize with the author, to put ourselves in the author's shoes, to try to put ourselves into the biblical author's situation so that we understand what the author was intending to communicate. It's an attempt to understand the author and the meaning the author was trying to convey. We're going to see while most discussions of author's intent have moved away from the more psychological approach of Schleiermacher, it is one of the legacies of Schleiermacher still to emphasize the goal of interpretation as recovering the author's intention.

A third influence of this historical survey of some of the roots and influences of these individuals on hermeneutics is an emphasis on the reader as the autonomist self. That is starting especially with Kant and going to back to Descartes. There's now a division between the ability of the self to think, which raises the question to what extent then is meaning determined by the perspective that the reader brings to the text? As we said, in some respect this has anticipated modern reader oriented approaches such as reader response criticism, that we'll talk about in a later session, where the reader creates meaning. The reader is the one that perceives and even determines and creates meaning in the text rather than the author.

Fourth, related to this is that several of these approaches have left us with the legacy that no one comes to the text without biases. In contrast to the first two points that I just mentioned, especially the first one, that emphasized a purely inductive approach, that one could stand as a neutral, objective observer and gain mastery over the text. In contrast, several of these individuals have emphasized that no one comes to the text as a completely neutral or objective observer. We all come with our biases, our prejudices,

our backgrounds, our predispositions, our prior understandings, our own beliefs and experiences that influence and affect the way we read the text. But there's also an assumption that this is not necessarily a bad thing or it doesn't have to be. In fact, to some extent it's necessary. How can you understand anything without a prior understanding? If you have a blank mind, a blank slate, how in the world can you hope to understand anything? So there's a recognition that no one comes to the text without biases, prejudices, pre-understandings, and prior influences. But all of those influence the way we read a text. This does raise the question of whether we will therefore inevitably distort the text, or whether this means that there is no correct meaning, or that no one can ever hope to arrive at the correct meaning of the text. We'll deal with those issues later. But at the very least, we have now come to grips with the fact that no one is a completely objective, neutral observer. But we'll bring our own so called baggage to the text that influences the way that we read it.

Finally, a fifth result of this approach is to recognize that interpretation to some extent is a dialogue. Even in many evangelical interpreters you'll find will talk about an interpretive spiral or hermeneutical spiral where we enter into a dialogue with the text. We come to the text with our questions and assumptions allowing the text to challenge that. Then we continue to approach the text and question it and allow it to challenge us. You even see some evangelical interpreters, although they may use it very differently using Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons. But at the very least, interpretation is not so much a one-time event where we gain mastery over a text and just extract its meaning, but at times may be an ongoing dialogue where we continue to discover new things about the text.

Different Methods of Approach: Criticism Definition

What I want to do now is shift gears and start to discuss methods of interpretation or hermeneutical approaches to the text in the form of different methods, but also different criticisms, as they're labeled. Let me start with a side note here; when we talk about criticism and throughout the rest of this course we will talk about different criticisms. We've already introduced you to one criticism known as textual criticism, but

we'll introduce you to some other criticisms such as genre criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism, and historical criticism that we'll just begin to touch on at the end of this session right now.

But we'll introduce you to several different criticisms, it's important to stop and note what we mean by "criticism." When we talk about criticism we are not using the term necessarily in a negative way, in terms of being critical or judgmental about at text, or about a theological belief. Instead, we're using criticism in a more positive sense of providing valid justification and sound reason for the position we hold. That is, many of these methods indeed did arise within the context of rather negative critical judgments and negative assumptions but at the same time, when they are divorced from these judgments, and these negative assumptions, and predispositions, many of these critical methodologies are indeed still valuable. So that again, when we use the word "criticism" we are talking primarily about providing justification for our beliefs, providing reasons for why we interpret a text the way it is, providing reasons why we think the text means this as opposed to that. So that the opposite of criticism is not piety, but the opposite of criticism in this since is gullibility or naivety, that does not provide reasons for why one believes the way one does. So just a side note as to how we're using criticism. Don't be shocked by it or turned off by it but recognize that criticism is a good thing, and simply refers to providing justification for, and analysis of why we interpret a text and read it in the way we do.

Author Oriented Approaches

So having said that, let's begin by looking at historical and author centered approaches to hermeneutics or to biblical interpretation. Another way at looking at this is, let's look at approaches that primarily go behind the text, that is, we have already suggested that interpretation focuses on three aspects of the production of text. That is, the author and the circumstances surrounding the author that are behind the text. The second is the text itself, that is, interpretation is within the text. Then the third one is focusing on the reader as the person receiving the text or looking in front of the text. So

those are the main foci of interpretation. Again both historically and logically hermeneutics seems to have moved through these three approaches.

So we're going to begin with the first one, that is, author and historical oriented approaches to biblical interpretation that on the whole primarily seek to go behind the text, that is, asking questions about the author, primarily about the author's intention, asking questions about the historical circumstances that produces the text, asking questions about the historical readers and their circumstances and how the author was trying to address them by producing this text. So, historical approaches focus, behind the text, they look, in many respects, at the forces that produce the text historically.

Historical Critical Method

So what I wanted to begin to discuss then initially is what is known as the historical critical method or historical critical approaches to interpretation that it often largely focuses on the author's intention. In one sense, historical critical approaches to the New Testament or Old Testament are nothing different than what often goes on in interpretation, in hermeneutics. That is, often it's nothing more than examining the background of a biblical book, examining who the author is, examining the situation, examining who the readers were, the date of the book, and the location. It is the kinds of things that one finds in the introduction of most commentaries or in Old or New Testament surveys and introductions, those types of books deal with these kinds of questions. Again, date, authorship, etc. So if I'm dealing with, I'm trying to understand, or I want to interpret and try to understand the book of Jeremiah I ask questions about who the author was and what his circumstances were. I ask questions about the times and situations politically, and religiously that transpired that would have created the environment for the book of Jeremiah to be written. I ask questions about the date of the book, when it was written, the situation of the readers, etc., etc. All of that is to reconstruct what most likely was the background in the situation that engendered the book in the first place. It's taking the book and simply placing it within its broader historical context. We've been doing that for a longtime and most commentaries begin

with those kind of questions to place biblical books in their settings. Again, Old and New Testament surveys often have extensive treatments of these types of issues.

However, more than just a summary of traditional approaches to interpretation of biblical books that you find in commentaries and New and Old Testament introductions and surveys and things like that, is that the historical critical method represents an approach to interpreting the Bible that is a product of the Enlightenment in a sense with its emphasis on human reasoning, and emphasizing human rational thinking, and an approach to interpreting the Bible historically that carries with it a number of assumptions and ideas. Often, sometimes in earlier treatments of the historical critical method it was often called "higher criticism." You very seldom find that terminology any more but if you do, if you run across some older work and they talk about higher criticism, they're usually talking about the historical critical methodology that address some of these types of questions of background, history, and authorship, etc., etc. But again, the historical critical method as it developed was seen as a historically oriented approach to interpreting the Bible that carried with it a number of assumptions and beliefs as it was applied to the biblical text. We'll look at some of those. The historical critical method though was seen as a result of some of the earlier more dogmatic approaches to interpreting Biblical text, more dogmatic theological readings of biblical text that were simply reinforcing and reasserting theological traditions and beliefs. Now, instead, the historical critical approach asks the interpreter to examine the Old and New Testament books as products of very historical processes. So historical criticism then, developed as a way of interpreting Old and New Testament biblical text. What does it mean to say then that the Bible is historical? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? How is that historical? Did a group of Israelites really cross a sea that was parted so that they could walk through on dry land? How is that historical? So in one respect then, it studies the biblical text like it would any other document.

There are several principles then I want to discuss that guided the historical investigation of the Old and New Testament text. What were some of the assumptions and principles that governed and guided historical critical approaches to the Old and New

Testament? First of all, and much of this will sound like some of the thinkers that we just examined previously. The first assumption or principle that guided the historical critical approach was the priority of human reason and the priority of common sense. Historical examination of the biblical text progressed and proceeded according to human reason. That is, the human reasoning and the process of common sense was able to account for and to understand and interpret biblical text in their historical context. So, for example, when one approaches a text like Matthew chapter one, where Jesus is seen as his birth being the product of a virginal conception and birth, human reasoning and thinking tells me that that kind of thing does not happen. Virgins don't conceive and give birth to children. So human logic, human reasoning is significant and important and has a priority in historical critical approaches to the biblical text.

A second one that also sounds like and owes much to some of the thinkers that we examined in the previous session, is the principle of cause and effect. This is one of the primary presuppositions of the original historical critical approach to the Old and New Testament. Everything happens within a closed continuum of cause and effect. That is, the world and history operate according to a natural system, a mechanistic system of cause and effect. Every event is seen within the context of that which occurs before it and seen in the context of its relationship to all these other events. That is, every event must have a natural explanation. So what that means is obviously there can be no supernatural interruptions into the course of events, there can be no intervention by an outside being, by a God, into those events but instead all events must have a natural explanation. Events don't just occur but instead they have an explanation, a cause and effect relationship, they have a cause historically that gave rise to those events. So once again, a Red Sea doesn't just part so that an entire nation can cross over. Water does not just turn into wine. People don't just rise from the dead. People that are sick are not just healed at a spoken word or with a touch. So that according to this method then, one must find other explanations for those types of things. One method of approaching this, although there are others, was known as the religious-historical approach where basically the Old and New Testament were simply read as variations or versions of other religious beliefs and similar religious

phenomenon in the ancient world. So first of all there is the priority of human reasoning and thinking. Second, primary presupposition was cause and effect. Every event had a historical cause. Everything happened within a closed continuum of cause and effect so that miracles had to be explained in another way. There can be no supernatural intervention into the affairs of history.

A final one, was the principle or assumption of analogy. That was, historical knowledge proceeds from the known to the unknown. Or another way of putting it is simply, history repeats itself, it's constant. When I study a historical event, the assumption is that things in the past that took place must have an analogy to things that are taking place in the present. Therefore, only events that are analogous to my own experience, presumably then in my technological, scientific era, only events that are analogous to my present experience are true. So again, when I'm examining an account of historical events, only those that have an analogy to my present experience can be relied upon as true. Now for most this doesn't completely rule out some unique events. For example, to use an example from the history of the United States, the battle of Gettysburg is one of the more famous battles. It transpired in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and was one of the more famous battles of the civil war. It was only a single battle it wasn't repeated and fought over and over again. Yet at the same time we do know of other well-known battles in history and we experience warfare and battles today. So we can know then that this battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania that happened in the mid-1800's can be accepted as true because we have analogies of that today. But today we don't see things like people rising from the dead and we don't see seas being parted so that entire nations can cross over. So the principle of analogy is an important assumption or principle within the application of the historical critical approach.

Now the difficulty with this is this still raises questions about unique events. Much of the historical critical approach did not allow for unique unparalleled events. As one interpreter suggested, someone who lives in an environment where there is no snow and where they experience no ice would have the right to doubt and to deny the existence of things like icebergs because there's no precise analogy. So the historical critical method

did not allow, there was no room for, unique events that had no parallel or analogy with any other in history.

When we resume our discussion of historical criticism in the next session we will examine a little bit more of the historical critical method and then ask the question of how that can be harnessed and utilized in interpreting Scripture and interpreting the Old and New Testament as the Word of God to his people today.

Transcribed by Alex Beckvermit
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 9

Historical Criticism

Historical Criticism

We've been looking at hermeneutics, now, we are beginning to look at it from the standpoint of the three aspects of communication: the author, the text, and then the reader. Beginning with author and historical center of approaches we looked at meaning as residing primarily behind the text or the focus of interpretation could be a better way to put it. The focus of interpretation is looking behind the text, that is, at the author, and the historical circumstances that produced the text. In introducing historical criticism, by the way remember that criticism or is not in terms of destructive judgmental, in a negative sense, but instead more positively, criticism as opposed to being gullible, criticism in terms of providing sound reasoning, sound justification for one's beliefs.

When we looked at historical criticisms in the last session, we considered the fact that historical criticism developed as a specific way of interpreting the biblical text. In contrast to more theological tradition bound approaches to interpreting the Bible, a historical approach simply looked at the bible as a part of a historically conditioned text, in a sense. We saw that at least three principles or assumptions underlie the historical critical approach of interpreting the Bible. Number one, we saw the priority of human reasoning, the ability of reasoning and common sense in examining biblical text in their historical context. Second is the fact that the historical critical approach proceeds from the assumption that historical events and historical documents have to be understood in a closed continuum of cause and effect. Then finally, the principle or the assumption of analogy that history repeats itself. That for that which happens historically to be accepted as true it must have an analogy to what we experience in the modern day.

So the examination of Old Testament and New Testament documents under the historical critical method proceeded from these above assumptions. So, again, one of the options of this is therefore there is no supernatural, no room for unique events. No room

for resurrection, crossing seas, raising dead people and things like that. They must haves explanations that are consistent with these principles operating under historical criticisms.

I would suggest, however, that when bracketed for these negative and anti-supernatural assumptions historical approaches to the Old and New Testament are valid and play an important role in biblical interpretation. In fact, if you go back to our understanding of the character of the Bible and our understanding of interpretation, in some sense historical critical approaches to the New Testament are indeed necessary because we saw that the Old and New Testament claim to reveal, claim to witness to and be a revelation of God's redemptive acts in history. Since the Bible claims to record God's activities in history and his relationship with his people in history in certain times and places; therefore it's necessary to understand the Old and New Testament within its original historical context.

However, it's also important to recognize along with that, that although they are not less than historical documents the Old and New Testament are more than just historical documents. They are both historical and theological. So I am rejecting the history/theology dichotomy that goes back to the dualism in Kant, for example. The Old and New Testament documents are more than just records of historical acts, but it is religious literature. Literature that continues to evoke a response of faith, but a faith that is rooted in history and can be defended and demonstrated. It's faith not contrary to history or at odds with history, but instead faith that is not against historical reasoning but a faith that is rooted in and consistent with that. So I am advocating an approach that places the New and Old Testament documents in their historical environments and in their historical contexts and uses the method of historical inquiry but does not stop there. It's more than that, the documents claim to be theological documents. They're documents that claim to attest to the mighty acts of God in history, and continue to function as the revelation of God's will to his people.

Now when we think about the historical approach in relationship to the Old and New Testament it might be helpful to divide the historical approach to the Old and New Testaments documents into two parts, that is, examining the history of the texts and also

secondly, examining the history in the texts. So, examining the history of the text would ask questions related to the production of the text, who is the author, and what we know about the readers, and the historical circumstances that produced the text. The history in the text would refer to specific references within the text to historical persons or events, or cultural references or customs or things like that that need to be examined.

For example, let's look at examples in the Old Testament very briefly but again I have to confess that most of my examples and the ones that I spend the most time on will come from the New Testament as that is my primary area of interest, research, writing and teaching. But I do want to illustrate with the Old Testament examples as well. So, looking at the history of the text, we ask questions, some of the traditional questions, that we often find treated in introductions, commentaries, biblical introductions or surveys related to what is the historical setting of a New or Old Testament book, who is the author, who are the readers, what problems are they encountering, what environments do they find themselves in, all of that with the hope of placing the documents within its historical context, and understanding how it grows out of that and addresses that.

So, for example, if one is considering the book of Isaiah, one wants to ask questions about the author and who the author was and his situation, one wants to ask the question of the situation of the Israelites as they found themselves facing exile because of idolatry and because of their sinfulness, facing a situation where they may be carted off to a foreign country as punishment for their refusal to keep the covenant that God had made with them, their refusal to keep the law, and to understand how the book of Isaiah is, for example, is a response to that situation.

Or, looking at the history in the text, we said examining the history in the text is to look at a biblical text and to note specific references to historical persons, historical places, historical examples, historical events, references to certain cultural values, or, references to certain historical personages or places that may have an impact, or an author's assumptions are going to be known, in order to understand the text.

For example, this is particularly in the Old Testament, prominent in narrative literature, where you frequently find references to individuals and historical events,

customs, values, or places. One cannot read through the book of Ruth, for example, and try and understand it without coming to grips with some of the unique history in the text, references to historical or cultural events, values, and things like that. Again my intention here is not to give a detailed explanation for all of this, but simply to raise issues and questions.

For example, how is one to understand the reference in chapter three, verse four of Ruth, "uncovering Boaz's feet," what is meant by that idiom, "to uncover one's feet." Some think that has sexual connotations, others do not, but certainly to understand the text, one must understand what is meant by that reference. Or what is a kinsman-redeemer, to use the common, English translation of a term found throughout Ruth, chapter four. What is a kinsman-redeemer? What is the significance of that? What role does one play in the history and culture of the Israelite people, and how does that shed light on our interpretation of Ruth chapter four.

We can give numerous examples from other Old Testament texts, especially narrative texts, that again refer to historical persons, events, places, even geographical references can sometimes be included, or references to cultural values, or ways of doing things that may be very foreign to us, or very different from us, but which we need to consider in order to place the text within its historical context.

Historical Setting of Colossians

To give a couple examples in the New Testament, one interesting text, when we consider the history of the text, that is, when we start asking questions about authorship and historical background, and who the readers were, what the situation was that gave rise to a text, is the book of Colossians in the New Testament throws up a number of intriguing examples. For instance, Colossians is one of the books where the authorship of the book is indeed questioned. While I don't want to spend a lot of time on the issue of pseudonymity, that is, writing in someone else's name, some who approach the New Testament documents from a historical, critical perspective would suggest that pseudonymity was a valid phenomenon in biblical text. That is, pseudonymity was simply a common approach to writing in the first century, and that biblical authors may

even choose to follow that approach. Some have argued that Colossians was not written by Paul himself, but perhaps a later disciple of Paul who is simply passing on the Pauline traditions, who is writing perhaps what Paul would have written, if he would have been present, and therefore writing in Paul's name. However, others have, I think, mounted a convincing case that Paul indeed was the author, that there is nothing in the Colossians, however different some of it may be from Paul's other books. There is really nothing in the book of Colossians that Paul could not have written. So, most evangelical scholars would accept the attribution of authorship in Colossians, to Paul as the author.

More difficult to determine is the background situation, or crisis, that precipitated the writing of the book of Colossians by Paul. Who were the readers, and what circumstances surrounded them? We know a little bit about the city of Colossae, and it's situated in the Lycos valley in the western part of Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. One of the things that we know about the city, is that is was one of the least significant cities that Paul probably wrote a letter to, but we also know that Paul apparently did not establish this church in Colossae himself. But this is one of the rare examples of Paul writing to a church that he did not have a direct knowledge of, as far as actually establishing the church in the city.

But more difficult is to determine is why Paul writing a letter to the city. What difficulty or situation prompted him to do so? It is recognized that most letters were not simply written out of thin air, but were what scholars often call, occasional. We'll talk more about this when we look at genre criticism, and the literary genre of an epistle. Most letters were called occasional, they were produced in response to very specific occasions, or very specific circumstances. So in understanding a letter like Colossians, not only do we have to understand something about the author, and maybe a little bit about the city and the region, but we also need to understand who are the readers. What most likely was the situation, problem, or issue, that caused Paul to sit down and write this letter? With Colossians, there's quite a bit of debate as to what that situation might have been.

One of the main issues is like some of Paul's other letters, like Galatians, for example, and perhaps a couple of his other letters and some of the other New Testament

documents such as 2 Peter or Jude or again Paul's letter of 1 Timothy, which were all apparently written in response to some kind of a deviant or false teaching that had either infiltrated or was beginning to infiltrate the church, or was in danger of infiltrating the church. Should we include Colossians within the that group of letters? Should we see Colossians as a response to some type of a false teaching, is the first question.

Early on, there were a handful of interpreters New Testament that thought that Colossians was not written in response to any specific crisis. There was not a specific false teaching that was behind Paul in the letter to the Colossians that engendered the writing of the book. But instead, Paul may just be addressing some of the general pressures and general circumstances that Christians in Colossae faced.

However, it is more popular, I think, today among New Testament scholars and students of the New Testament, to see that Colossians was indeed written in response to some type of a false teaching, and the reason that this is usually thought to be the case is based primarily on some of the things that Paul says in the second chapter of the book. For example, in chapter two, verse eight, Paul says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world, rather than on Christ." So this would seem to suggest that Paul is warning against the possibility that some will be, or maybe some already have been led astray and deceived, taken captive, by this hollow and deceptive philosophy.

But even more specifically, when you get over starting with verse sixteen of chapter two, you find the section that many are convinced reveals a definite deviant or false teaching that Paul may be responding to, that he is concerned that some of his readers have already, or have perhaps, may be tempted to give into. So starting with verse sixteen, "Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to religious festival or new moon celebration, or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things that are to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you from the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind props him up with notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body

supported and held together, by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, why as though you still belong to it, do you still submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings such regulations indeed out the appearance of wisdom, with their self imposed worship, with their false humility and harsh treatment of the body, but they lack value in restraining essential indulgences." The question that I would simply ask is does that sound to you that Paul is addressing a specific problem? Namely, a specific teaching, some kind of deviant teaching from the Gospel that had been proclaimed to the Colossians, that now he fears might supplant that, or might begin to push that aside. At least as I read it, I would conclude in the affirmative, that I think this text particularly reveals that Paul is responding to a specific problem. Maybe it is not as dire of a problem, as for example in Galatians. Maybe it has not yet impacted a large group of people, maybe the teaching is not even trying to evangelize or infiltrate the church. But maybe it's very existence poses a threat or temptation Paul suspects to some of the Colossians. I'm not sure, but as I read chapter two, I would side with those New Testament students that think that Paul is responding to a rather specific false teaching.

The question that perhaps is even more difficult to answer is what is the nature of this teaching? What was this teaching that Paul was responding to? And what is interesting, even today this question has not yet been settled, when you look at all the proposals, one scholar at one period of time, it is probably more than that now, but one New Testament scholar early on said that there were at least forty-some proposals for who these teachers were. That might suggest to us that we might have no hope in determining the nature of the teaching, if no one else can agree. But, for example, very early on some thought that Paul was responding to Gnosticism. However, because Gnosticism did not become a full blown system of thinking in religion until the second century, many have abandoned that, or at the very least some would say Paul was responding to issues and beliefs that later on emerged and crystallized into full blown Gnosticism. Others have suggested other religious beliefs or movements like Stoicism

was the main problem in teaching that Paul is addressing, or other pagan religious beliefs. But some have shied away from that because of some of the clear Jewish references. Notice one of the verses I read in verse 16, "therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to religious festivals, a new moon celebration or Sabbaths." Especially that reference to Sabbath, and the fact that earlier on in chapter two, Paul refers to circumcision. That would suggest that whatever this movement is, it has some Jewish element in it.

So some have actually come up with, one of the more common explanations for the teaching that lies behind Colossians, again when we are trying to reconstruct the historical situation by the book, one of the most common proposals is that Paul is responding to some kind of synchronistic religious belief, that is, that this is a combination of Jewish elements along with other pagan religious beliefs, or folk religious beliefs perhaps. In addition to that the strong emphasis on Jesus Christ throughout this, for example, the section where the author said, "this person has lost connection with the head, which is Jesus Christ, from whom the whole body support and hold together grows as God causes it to grow." So the other corollary is it is often suggested that this is a Jewish/pagan religious belief or a combination of syncretism of Jewish and Greco-Roman belief, or folk religious beliefs that are actually devaluing and denigrating the person of Jesus Christ, and so that's why Paul emphasizes the sufficiency or Jesus Christ, throughout this book.

So those are some of the proposals with the most common being kind of a synchronism or combo between Jewish and Greco-Roman religious beliefs, again in trying to reconstruct the historical background, the history behind the text of Colossians.

However, another possible proposal that I would suggest, and one that I have actually seen catching on in a number of recent studies on the background of Colossians, is that the Jewish references throughout this book, the reference to circumcision earlier in chapter two and the Jewish references throughout this book, the references to the new moons and Sabbaths, and by the way, interestingly, the reference to the festivals, new moon and Sabbaths, that three-fold categorization or phrase is found in other Old

Testament texts, especially the reference of the Sabbath is a dead giveaway to the Jewish nature, I think, to this teaching. All of this suggests that probably, this teaching is a Judaism of some type, and there's no need, to look outside of the Judaism of the first century, as providing the background for this teaching that Paul is addressing. But, its important to realize that Judaism in the first century was quite diverse, so that we don't need out think that the Judaism, the Jewish teaching, that Paul is addressing in Colossians is necessarily of the exact same type as the Judaism that he is addressing in the book of Galatians. In fact, we see a number of features that seem to stand outside of that. Especially, the reference in verse eighteen, "don't let anyone who delights in the false humility and worship of angels disqualify you from the prize." Such a person goes in to great detail about what he has seen, suggesting some sort of a visionary experience, or some kind of a mystical experience. You don't find that kind of language in Galatians characterizing the Judaism that Paul is addressing. But, the first thing to recognize is that Judaism was diverse so that we don't necessarily need to see Paul addressing the same kind of Judaism here as he may have been in Galatians or Romans or even in Philippians chapter three, where he addresses Judaism as well.

Instead, is it possible that Paul is addressing the Judaism that might fit with a more apocalyptic type of Judaism, for example. That is, the type of Judaism that produced apocalypses with books similar to Daniel and to Revelation. We have a whole host of apocalypses available, we have English translations of those apocalypses, outside of the Old and New Testament, that basically record a visionary experience of someone and often that visionary experience included strict observance of the Old Testament Law, avoiding, for example, certain food, fasting in preparation for the visionary experience. As I've already mentioned in verse sixteen, this mention of new festivals and new moons and Sabbaths occurs throughout the Old Testament several times so there's really no need to look outside of Judaism. Perhaps it is a mystical or a apocalyptic type of Judaism, that would account for the reference in verse eighteen of worship of angels, a particular Judaism often labeled Merkabah Judaism, is known for visionary experience, where the visionary ascends throughout heavens and often the goal is to get to the final heaven and

often there are angelic beings in the different heavens, and the goal is to worship with the angels, or often sometimes angels may be the objects of worship, but It is possible that this type of Judaism accounts for the teaching that Paul is addressing, or even to be more specific, that phrase "new moon festivals and Sabbaths," is also found a couple of times in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Furthermore, interestingly, verse sixteen says, "therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink," most people assume that this is probably referring to Old Testament prohibitions about food and drink, although it is very difficult to find specific prohibitions against drink. However, what is interesting, is in the Dead Sea Scrolls, when one wanted to become a member, one was often required to abstain from certain food and drink, as they underwent a period of judgment. They were judged "according to food and drink may reflect something like that. Iniates into the Qumran community, which we talked about earlier, often underwent a period of judgment where they had to abstain from food and drink. Only when they passed that period, were they allowed to participate in the food and drink.

Furthermore, it is interesting we have a number of texts that may account for what we find in verse eighteen, "don't let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify," such a person who goes into detail about what they have seen. We have a number of texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls called the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. What they were is they were accounts of worship that would take place on successive Sabbaths. What is interesting is in a couple of them, there are rather detailed descriptions of the heavenly temple. It appears that one of the goals of reading these texts was that the congregation would almost undergo a mystical experience of joining the angels in worshipping God in his heavenly throne room.

Another interesting text is one that is called 4Q491, and the 4Q basically means it was found in the 4th cave. You remember the story of the Dead Sea scrolls found in various caves, and the caves were numbered. And cave number four, and the 491 is just the number of the fragment or document to distinguish it from the others. In one of the documents called 4Q491, there's an account of a human being apparently, perhaps, a

priest, who has ascended to heaven, witnessed the heavenly realms and angels, and now he comes back to earth and boasts about what he has experienced, and what he has seen. So, whether the Dead Sea Scrolls lie behind what is going on in Colossians is impossible to say, but is it possible that Paul has in mind a similar type of Judaism, that is found in apocalyptic types of Judaism that produced apocalypses based on their visionary experiences to heaven? Or perhaps Paul is addressing a Judaism that is similar, or maybe an offshoot or identical to the Dead Sea community, the Qumran community. That would account for what Paul is addressing.

It is interesting, too, that asceticism, some have said they notice the asceticism in "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch," and they attribute that to some gnostic, or ascetic, or Greco-Roman type religion. But interestingly, the Dead Sea Scroll, the Qumran community for them the Pharisees weren't even strict enough in their observance of the law. So in terms of the law, certain Jewish groups, such as the Qumran community, could be seen as highly ascetic. So is it possible that the false teaching, the deviant teaching that Paul has in mind behind the book of Colossians that Paul is addressing. It is a Judaism, perhaps an apocalyptic type of Judaism, or another mystical type of Judaism such as one finds in the Qumran community.

This by itself provides the background, the historical context and background, for Paul's writing of Colossians. If this is the case too, most likely this false teaching did not devalue Christ, this false teaching of Judaism, unlike Galatians, this Judaism was not a messianic or claimed to be a Christian Judaism, but instead the Christological emphasis throughout Colossians is Paul's own response. It is not his response to the false teaching, it is Paul's own correction in order to combat this Judaism that emphasizes ascetic keeping of the law, visionary experience, and worship of angels, in response of that, the correction is Paul's emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ. Perhaps Paul saw this Judaism, this teaching, as in danger supplementing or supplanting Christ, life in Christ, and Paul wanted to demonstrate, "No, this Judaism cannot provide an alternative to life in Christ. The only way to restrain sensual indulgences," chapter two ends, "is not by what this Judaism has to offer, but only life in Christ." Chapter three goes on, "since you have

been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, seek the things above, not the things on earth," is Paul's response. Life in Christ is the only alternative, is the only response to what this Judaism is probably offering the readers of Colossians.

So, again, given all of the variety of proposals, absolute certainty, most likely will evade us. But at the same time, it is necessary to come up with some understanding of what the teaching was that Paul may have been addressing in a book like Colossians, and how that affects the way that we read and understand the text.

Historical References in the Text: Samaritan woman in John 4

To give just a couple of examples from the second facet of historical criticism and historical approaches that is the history in the text, that is, examining historical and cultural references within the text. Those references often refer to a shared understanding between the author and the readers, and we need to examine those and unpack those to understand how that might contribute to interpreting the biblical text. Just to give a couple of very brief examples, from two sections of the New Testament that we've already referred to, one of them finds it's significance in at least two places, but also other places, but two in particular that we've touched on: Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We've already mentioned that a failure to understand the background for this reference to a Samaritan can actually result in misunderstanding, in that we have, at least in the twentieth and twenty-first century American culture, we have domesticated this Samaritan so that I am afraid that when we read the label "Samaritan," we may fail to grasp the biblical text as the author intended, and as the original readers may have understood it's historical context.

It is important to recognize that when Israel was taken off into exile, that the result was that some of the Israelites were actually allowed to remain in Samaria which was the capital of Israel at the time. You remember the nation of Israel, the kingdom of Israel, was divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom had its capital in Samaria, the Southern Kingdom, Judah had its capital Jerusalem. Some of the Israelites were allowed to remain in Samaria, and the foreigners

that took them into exile actually took over the city and interbred with the Israelites remaining there. The product being, what was seen by most Jews, as half breeds, or of those who were not purely Jewish.

Furthermore, not only that but there was a long history of conflict, even beyond that event, there was a history of conflict between most Jews and the Samaritans that resulted in a number of bad relationships and no love being lost between Samaritans and other Jews. So, when Jesus sits down with the Samaritan women, not only the fact that she was a woman, but primarily a Samaritan, would have been rather shocking.

When the hero of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a Samaritan, this history going back to the days of the exile, and this history of conflict and bad relationships between other Jews and Samaritans would have informed the way that this parable would have been read. It would have been shocking to have a Samaritan, perhaps today the closest analogy would be a homosexual with AIDS being the hero of the parable, and the story. Historically that analogy will probably change.

Prodigal Son in Luke 11

Another example is found in Luke 11, again the parable of the prodigal son, we've already referred to this, but first of all, a couple of historical references that might be overlooked is it's intriguing that the parable begins by the son asking for his share of the inheritance from the father. A number of commentators have suggested that, given the historical background, this would have been tantamount to the son wishing his father were dead, because it would have only been upon the death of the father that the son would have received the inheritance. So this at the very least, this would have been an extreme insult to the father who was probably a wealthy and respected individual within the community.

A second interesting reference is the fact that the father runs out and greets the son. That simply was not done in the first century. For a father to run, perhaps, but especially to run out and greet a son who had insulted him in the way that he had, was extremely undignified, and was extremely humiliating. To add to that as I have already mentioned when I discussed this parable before, perhaps we should not see this as taking

place out in the middle of nowhere on some ranch where there were no neighbors around, and they were simply isolated from family or a community. Instead, what if this is taking place within a typical rural village, Middle Eastern rural village, so that everyone not only knew what the son did to the father, how the son treated the father, but now everyone is watching, everyone knew the son was approaching, and everyone is watching, and sees the father in an undignified, humiliating manner run out to meet the son.

All of a sudden this becomes a parable, not just about the prodigal son, but about the humility of the father, the undignified and humiliating depths to which this father would stoop to accept the son. Now, one might read the parable and say, well that doesn't happen, no father in their right mind would do this, and that was probably true. But perhaps that is some of the shock value of the parable, maybe a human father wouldn't do that, but that's exactly what God did.

So the point of the parable is not only about the prodigal son and his repentance and return to seek the father's forgiveness, but it's also about the humility and the humiliation of God, the father, whenever he stoops down to receive someone who has insulted him, and treated him with indignity by sinfulness and by rejection. Whenever someone returns, someone who has been insulting, someone who has sinned against God the father, whenever they return for repentance, the father much like the human father in this parable, God the Father humiliates himself and acts with indignity when he stoops down to accept back the one who comes to him in repentance.

Final Thoughts on Historical Criticism

So, often the historical, critical approach to interpreting the New Testament and the Old Testament texts often reveals insight that might be missed, at best will be missed, at worst might be misconstrued or misunderstood when we fail to grasp the historical background of the biblical text. Two final notes on the historical, critical method, although the next couple sections will continue to examine methodologies and criticisms that still come under the umbrella of historical approaches and author-centered approaches to biblical text going behind the text. Two other observations related to

historical critical approaches: First, we've already said, historical approaches to interpreting the Old and New Testaments are indeed necessary because God has acted in history to redeem his people. The Old and New Testament claim to witness to, and to be revelations of God's activities within history, God's historical acts of redemption on behalf of his people, that ultimately climax in the human person of Jesus Christ. He enters history to redeem his people in the political and historical context of the world that God comes to redeem. So, therefore, historical evaluation is indeed necessary to do justice ultimately to the biblical text.

But my second observation, by way of qualification, one of the dangers is we need to be careful about not making our historical reconstruction the primary object of our interpretation. We've seen that what is inspired is the biblical text itself. The text itself is the product of God speaking. The text itself is the word of God. So the primary locus of my interpretive activity, my interpretation, is the biblical text itself, not the reconstruction of historical background. But, having said that, though, as we've seen the historical background in the biblical documents assume and depend on knowledge of historical events, historical reconstruction of events, and historical references is necessary for illumining the biblical text. But as I understand, the interpreter is always walking, in a sense, a tightrope between only interpreting the biblical text in finding in the text the primary place of our interpretive activity. Yet, at the same time, not ignoring the historical background that helps illuminate that. But on the other hand, the danger is that my interpretation will primarily be about my historical reconstruction and the background. So it is simply a call for a balance that the biblical text itself is the primary focus of our interpretation, it is the biblical text itself that is Gods word to his people, and is the place of our interpretive activity. However, at the same time, because Gods word is rooted in Gods act, rooted in history, it is necessary to understand the historical context, to reconstruct the history of the text, and the history in the text, to help illimun and help us to understand the meaning of the text that we interpret.

Introduction to Source, Form and Redaction Criticism

What I want to do is just briefly introduce another method specifically, a series of methods, that all fall within the broader umbrella of historical criticism. The three criticisms that I have in mind that we'll examine in the next couple of sessions, are source, form, and redaction criticism. Again, these are part of the broader discipline of historical criticism in that they all, in some respect, an attempt to go behind the text and ask historical questions about the historical influences on the production of the text. They ask questions about the author, and the author's intention in writing the biblical text. These three, we're going to see, develop historically and logically from source and form criticism, which both, basically look at the sources or the oral forms that lie behind the Old and New Testament that basically end up and make their way, into the final form or the New Testament or Old Testament itself. Again they all ask questions about the author and redaction criticism then goes a little bit further, and ask, "how has the author taken these sources or these individual forms and woven them together into a biblical text? How is the author responsible for bringing the sources and forms that lie behind the text, into the final form of the text?" So, because of that, source, form, and redaction criticism are part of the historical criticism, more generally.

Also, it's important to say, while all three of these are alive and well in Old and New Testament interpretation today, they've generally taken a back seat to other newer and more modern methods of intereptiation. So, in some textbooks on hermeneutics, or discussions of interpretation, these are often overlooked or given a very short treatment, because again they've basically been eclipsed by newer and more recent methods.

Source Criticism

Let me begin to introduce you to the first one, that usually historically and logically takes place first, and that is source criticism. Basically, source criticism, in both the Old and New Testament, although it works out slightly differently in the Old and New Testament, as far as which book it covers and how it is utilized, but source criticism in both the Old and New Testament is basically an attempt to get behind the written text, whether it is Genesis, or 1 and 2 Chronicles, or Matthew, Mark and Luke, or one of Paul's letters for example. Perhaps it is an an attempt to get behind the written text as we

have it, to uncover particularly the written sources that the author may have utilized that lie behind the text. So the assumption is that biblical authors relied on written sources and these can be uncovered or reconstructed from the text itself.

So, in the heyday of source criticism, but also today, you'll often find interest in discussing the so called written sources that the author, in the Old Testament or the New Testament, may have utilized, sometimes reconstructing those sources, and perhaps sometimes even going further and asking where did those sources come from? What community or situation does it reflect? What situation or issue did it originally address, what situation originally gave rise to it? But on the whole, source criticism is simply an attempt to go behind the written text, and ask the question of the sources used that may have influenced it.

Again, we've already looked at two pieces of evidence from the Old and New Testament that would suggest that source criticism is indeed a valid enterprise. The New Testament and Old Testament authors did rely at times, on earlier sources, however that is difficult and speculative to reconstruct those sources. We saw in reference to 1 and 2 Kings, frequent reference to the author saying, concluding his survey of Israel's history of the monarchy, will often say, "were these things not written in the annals of the kings," or something like that. The author seems to be relying on a source, a historical source, that he's drawn on for his own composition. Or, Luke:1 1-4, where Luke says, "others have taken up, or have written an account of the life of Christ," and in fact, there are other eyewitness of the accounts of Christ of the events surrounding the life of Christ that Luke himself now has drawn upon, to produce his own account. So, even Luke admits that he is relying on both oral and written sources related to the life of Christ that he is incorporating in his own work. He doesn't tell us what those are, or where those are, when he refers to others who have drawn up a written account of the life of Christ. Is he referring to one or more of the other Gospels, Matthew or Mark, or perhaps other possible accounts of the life of Christ? In any case, Luke appears to be aware of those, and now drawing on those in his own composition. So source criticism attempts to, based

on texts like that, reconstruct and ask what the written sources were that the New and Old Testament authors utilized in producing their own composition.

In our next session, we'll look in more detail at source criticism in the Old and New Testament, and how it works, and what the value might be in it's contribution to hermeneutics. Then we'll also move onto the next stage of criticism, that is form criticism and how that has influenced Old and New Testament interpretation.

Transcribed by Joe Iriana
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 10

Source and Form Criticism

Historical Criticism Continued

We've been looking at hermeneutics in biblical interpretation in the last session. We will look today at issues related to historical criticism. We said that hermeneutics both logically and historically moves through the three major phases of communication, that is: focusing on the author and historical matters and background matters that produce the text; then moving on to text centered approaches where meaning is found within the text and finally, on to reader center approaches where the reader is the primary one responsible for meaning and text and making sense of text.

But we have been looking at the first phase, that is, historical approaches, or historical criticism, and under that we said historical criticism is sort of an umbrella where under that is included a number of types of studies such as looking at the author, and the historical background of a book, the original readers and their circumstances, and specific historical references within the text.

But we also want to consider and just begin to consider the three other approaches that fall under the historical type approaches. The first one is source criticism that we introduced very briefly in the last session. We said source criticism is a methodology that attempts to get behind the text and uncover the written sources or documents that authors utilize in their own compositions. We looked at one text in particular Luke chapter 1 verses 1-4 where the author clearly seems to be reliant on previous written sources. To some degree we know the examples in the Old Testament where the narrators rely on and even explicitly indicate their reliance on sources of written sources, even if those sources are no longer available. But because of that source criticism developed as an attempt to uncover or reconstruct the possible sources that lie behind the Old and New Testament documents as we have them.

So the assumption is that biblical authors rely on historical sources and on different written sources for their own composition. We will utilize or to give a couple of

examples from the Old and New Testament of source criticism and how it developed and how it work and perhaps give an evaluation of the method.

Old Testament Source Criticism: Kings/Chronicles

First of all in the Old Testament we have considered already and mentioned already the book of Chronicles when we discussed the fact that later Old Testament authors sometimes pick up on earlier Old Testament writings and re-interpret them and re-assert them for their own readership. 1 and 2 Chronicles seems them to take up material from 1 and 2 Kings as a source and the author uses it for his own purposes. But 1 and 2 Kings seems to be a source that the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles draws upon for his own writings.

For example, one you have compared one text that we'll talk about later as well but when you note 1 and 2 Chronicles and the relationship also to another document or another, especially 1 Chronicles in chapter 17 starting with verse 10 "I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you when your days are over and you go to be with your fathers I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he will be my son. I will never take my love from him as I took it away from his predecessor from my house and my kingdom forever his throne will be established forever." Then verse 15 concludes by saying "Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation" you probably recognize that language that I just read from another text and that is 2 Samuel 7. In 2 Samuel 7:14 in the verses that precede that 2 Samuel 7:14 is part of the covenant that God makes with David speaking through the prophet Nathan.

But if you go back and read both texts together, the 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17, you will note that the words in many places are virtually identical and very similar. So that most likely means one of the books functions as a source for the other one. One of the authors has drawn on the other as a source for his own composition, but we will pick this text up again to demonstrate and this gets into one of the other methods known as redaction criticism. The authors though when they utilize the sources they use them for

their own purposes and their own intentions. A later method, redaction criticism, asks the question how has the author taken up the source? How has the author of Chronicles taken up his sources and now use them for his own purposes and for his own intentions? The point here is to demonstrate that because of the similarity of wording and even content obviously biblical authors take up and utilize earlier sources, even earlier biblical sources, in their own composition.

Genesis 1 and 2 and the JEDP theory

Perhaps the classic example in Old Testament studies comes from the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 and could be extended to include the entire Pentateuch the first five books of the Old Testament. Genesis 1 and 2 is an account of two different creation narratives, two different creation stories and what is intriguing in the back to back stories that are very similar yet they also reveal distinct differences. For example, in chapters 1 and 2 some scholars have noted the difference in style or the difference in order in the way that the different parts of creation are recorded. They have also noted the different names used for God in chapter 1 and 2 and because of that earlier on when in the hay-day of source criticism and still today you sometimes find this going on is Old Testament scholars are convinced that they can isolate two separate sources behind Genesis 1 and 2 and the different accounts of the creation narratives and then a later author has taken these two sources and has put them together into his own account. Again this insight has been extended over the entire Pentateuch.

You may have heard the well-know JEPD theory. Those letters JEDP are letters meant to kind of label four separate sources that existed behind the entire Pentateuch. For example, Jehovah being the first name of Yahweh and their was presumably an author that wrote especially using the name of Yahweh who wrote a source from a certain perspective. The letter D stands for Deuteronomic perspective that someone writing developed the book of Deuteronomy composed parts of the Pentateuch. The point is historically you have four separate sources that were written by authors and scholars have labeled those the J [Jehovah] source, the D source, the E [Elohim] source and the P source. The P source expressed a priestly perspective for example. Scholars have been

convinced that they can isolate four separates sources and have even gone further and dated them and provided a setting for the original composition of the sources but now much later an author has taken these four separate sources and welded them together into what we have is the final form that we called the Pentateuch.

Although I don't subscribe to this necessarily, my purpose is not to evaluate this but obviously you can begin to see the questions that might arise. By what criteria do we isolate sources and interestingly some of the criteria that previously scholars used to isolate sources are used by others to demonstrate the unity of the text. Also sometimes it appears to border speculation to begin to reconstruct a hypothetical date and hypothetical community or situation that gave rise to the source. My main purpose is just to demonstrate how source criticism has been used in trying to isolate underlying written sources that a later author has now picked up again sometimes in a book like Chronicles, and Kings and Samuel, there does seem to be a definite relationship between the documents. One seems to have functioned as source of the editor. When it comes to the Pentateuch though this is more hypothetical no one has access to the existence of JED or P unlike the fact that we have 1 and 2 Kings and Samuel and Chronicles or we have references within kings of the author explicitly appealing to "the annals of the Kings of Judah" or something like that.

Source criticism played a significant role in Old Testament scholarship in isolating and analyzing and reconstructing the underlying sources of the Old Testament text. You can also begin to see that however much value this may have had this source criticism did give way to the method that we mentioned a little bit earlier, redaction criticism that focuses more on, not so much reconstruction sources, but the fact that we must deal with the text as we have it. What we have is the entire Pentateuch so one must ultimately deal with that text rather than the hypothetical sources that can be isolated or analyzed that seem to now be included in the final composition.

New Testament Source Criticism

In the New Testament the classic example of source criticism is probably the Synoptic Gospels, the first three Gospels; Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The reason for that

is very similar to Kings, Chronicles, and Samuel. The first three gospels in particular, though John is very different in some of the material it contains, than the wording and the language that is used at the first three gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to indicate some type of relationship between the three, however we explain that, so when you look at Matthew, Mark, and Luke you notice that there is not only a similarity in content as far as the events of the life of Christ and the sayings and teachings of Jesus but they occur in a roughly similar order, sometimes in an identical order.

But even beyond that when you start comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke the wording is virtually identical in places and to such a degree that if any of my students produced papers, research papers that agreed in order and wording to the same extent that the Synoptic Gospels do I would suspect some type of collaboration and some type of borrowing. One of the students must have borrowed from another or perhaps they both borrowed from a similar document or similar prior research paper.

To give you but one example in the Synoptic Gospels are full of these. In Matthew chapter 3 and 7 and 9 we will compare a text from Matthew chapter 3 and Luke chapter 3 as well. In Matthew chapter 3 and I wanted to read verses 7 through 10. Matthew 3:7-10: "But when he saw rabbi's and Sadducees coming to him, coming to where he was, he [that is, John the Baptist] said to them, "You brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the coming wrath. Produce fruit in keeping from repentance and do not think you can say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees and every tree that does produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Now listen to Luke chapter 3:7-9: "John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized, 'You brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the coming wrath. Produce fruit in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you that out of these stone God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the tree. For every tree that is not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'" In both of those you have John the Baptist speaking to the Pharisees.

Note that assuming that the English translation that I just read captures the Greek text in both cases note that the wording was identical. Not only in the words quoted but in even some of the narrative itself. Now when scholars have read something like that it raises the question: How do we explain that, how do we explain the similarities of between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Again John is very different but in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how do we explain the difference? It is not by the fact they just record the same events and in the same order at the times but the wording is nearly identical. How is that supposed to be explained?

Most New Testament students have tried to explain that it is due to some kind of relationship that either, for example, one explanation is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke probably had access to the same source or the same oral tradition. That is, they are all three relying on the same body of information that has been passed down to them. That's one possibility however the fact that the wording is so close has led scholars to posit a literary relationship between the three. Sometimes we talked about the Fundamentalists view of inspiration of several sessions ago. Some would say it's only because they were inspired that they all three write similarly. The problem is that does not account some of the differences that one finds between Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

So how do we explain this? The most popular view is a source critical one. That is, the one of the Synoptics--Matthew, Mark, or Luke--function as the source for the other two. Two of the Gospel writers are borrowing for the other one.

That has given rise to a number of theories that I don't intend to go into a lot of detail. But a very popular one early on that goes all the way back to Augustine and is still argued for by some today is that Matthew was written first and then Luke and Mark borrowed from Matthew or utilized Matthew as their source. Now obviously especially Luke has a lot of material that is not in Matthew and Mark has a little bit of material that is not in Matthew. Luke has a lot of material that you don't find in Mark. So, obviously, Luke added in a lot of information. If you go back to Luke 1:1-4 where he is aware of eyewitness accounts and other documents, Luke obviously includes some of his own

material that is not in Matthew or Mark, but that was very common explanation. Matthew wrote first, Mark and Luke utilized Matthew.

There have been some other theories as well but what I want to focus on just briefly is the most common explanation that probably most New Testament scholars and students hold to that is what is known as "Markan priority." That is the Gospel of Mark would have been the first one written and Matthew and Luke would have both utilized Mark independently of each other. One would picture Mathew and Luke sitting together utilizing Mark. Matthew and Luke would have had a copy of Mark and would have used that Gospel as the basis for their own. Again, you find Matthew and Luke including a lot of information not in Mark, Matthew has a lot of parables that you don't find anywhere in Mark, Luke has a lot of number of parables that you don't find in Mark or Matthew. Both Matthew and Luke have the Sermon on the Mount, but you don't find that anywhere in Mark. So the theory is that Matthew and Luke both used Mark but also included other material that according to Luke may have come from other written documents and sources and probably came from eyewitness testimonies as well. If the author of Matthew was Matthew, Jesus' disciple, then no doubt Matthew would have seen many of these events himself and witnessed them himself. So, most agree then that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke utilized Mark.

A couple of the reasons for that is that when you compare the three most of Gospel of Mark, almost all of it, appears in both Matthew and Luke. If you assume that Matthew is written first, then Mark would have ended up deleting material out of Matthew because Matthew is quite a bit longer and includes a lot more material. So do you see if Matthew was written first and Mark utilized Matthew or Luke, then he must have left out a lot of material. If Mark was written first then it stands to reason that most of Mark, not all of it, but most of it, would be picked up in Matthew and Luke. That is one of the arguments for the priority of Mark.

A couple of other arguments is Matthew and Luke at times appear to be smoother than Mark, where Mark might be a little shorter or rougher in grammar or in the way he records things. Matthew and Luke appear to be smoother. The suggestion is that it is

more likely that Matthew and Luke would have smoothed out places in Mark that they thought were rough. Sometimes it appears that Matthew and Luke are clearer theologically, that is, some areas where Mark might say something could be misunderstood theologically regarding Christ's deity or the person of Christ; Matthew and Luke appear to smooth that out. Matthew and Luke almost never when they're both referring to Mark, or when they both parallel Mark never seem to deviate from that or from each other, in the way they refer to Mark. Again my purpose is not to mount an argument, but simply demonstrate why some scholars think that has emerged as probably the most common view as the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke is a source critical view that posits Mark as the original source. Mark is the first Gospel written and functioned as a source for Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke would have then had access to Mark and utilized most of Mark in the production of their own Gospels. Again they both had access to other material and other sources through eye witness accounts. Tradition has it Mathew, the Gospel of Matthew, was indeed written by Matthew the disciple of Jesus. Just one important side: the titles given to the Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, and Gospel of Luke; those were not originally part of the documents, those were added later on by the church as an attempt to identify who the authors of those Gospels were. If those were reliable and you can make a good case that they are, then again Matthew would have drawn his own eyewitness experience of Jesus life and Jesus teachings. They would have access to other material that they would have included.

Q Source

One other interesting point to say just to fill out the picture so if you see this terminology you know what it's doing is, you will often find New Testament students referring to Q, the Q source. Q is simply the first letter of the German word for "source," and it is a word used to describe the material used by Matthew and Luke have in common with each other but not in Mark. For example, both Matthew and Luke have an account of Jesus' birth but you don't find it in Mark. Mark jumps right into John the Baptist and into Jesus' early ministry. Both Matthew and Luke have an account of the birth and very

early childhood of Christ. Luke has a little more than Matthew does Jesus' very early childhood. Both Matthew and Luke have an account of the Sermon on the Mount, Mark does not and sometimes that material is very close in wording. So many New Testament scholars think that Matthew and Luke also had access to another source that they have labeled Q. So Matthew and Luke used Mark but they also had access, according to this theory, to another document. Some would say it's a document others would say we don't know if it is a document or not but still the letter Q stands for the material that Mathew and Luke have such as the Sermon on the Mount that you don't find in Mark. So Q would be a more hypothetical source that they think Matthew and Luke had access to.

But based on all of this again most would conclude that Mark was the first Gospel written and then Matthew and Luke utilize Mark, but also other material, perhaps this Q whatever it is, whether it is a specific document or a body of teaching. It is information that both Matthew and Luke had access to and then utilized in their own teaching.

Again, sometimes scholars get a little creative by suggesting a community that created Q and a situation is even located geographically where it may have even come from and the theology of Q and the situation it was addressing, which kind of piles speculation upon speculation. We are not even sure that Q was an actual document or not so that sometimes this kind of thing can run rampant. But the Synoptic Gospels as I just explained, seems to have been the primary beginning point and entry point of source criticism into the New Testament and that's again because of the similarity between the Synoptic Gospels. It required an explanation and most are convinced that there is a literally relationship with one of them providing the source for the others. The most common explanation is that Mark was written first and was the source for the other gospels.

Source Criticism outside the Synoptics

Source criticism though has actually, spread outside of just the Synoptic Gospels, although sometimes when you read treatments of New Testament source criticism that is the only place that can happen is in the Synoptic Gospels. I have read a number of articles on source criticism that don't talk about source criticism outside of the Synoptics,

Mathew, Mark, and Luke; but others have ranged more broadly and suggested that other New Testament authors may be reliant on sources. So, for example, some have examples that in Paul's epistles at times he may also be using pre-existing sources or material.

Two of the most prominent and well know examples, though debated, occur in two of Paul's letters, one of them Colossians and the other Philippians. I will read the more common one perhaps from Philippians 2. Philippians 2 right in the middle of the chapter contains this well know Christ hymn, where Paul says "where being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in the appearance of a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father." Now interestingly even in the English translation that I am looking at, although not all translations do this, but the English translation I am looking at, sets these verses up in sort of poetic fashion. In verse form and some perhaps reflecting the fact that some think Paul may the quoting a pre-existing hymn. Some are convinced that Paul wrote this himself, but others think that Paul may be utilizing a hymn that was already circulating as a hymn in the early church.

The other text the other classical text is Colossians 1:15-20, that I will not read now. It is the other well-known Christ hymn, that some speculate may be an early hymn that Paul himself is quoting, one that was utilized by the church and circulated in the early church and now Paul uses it as a source for his own composition. Again it is difficult to tell and scholars debate whether or not that is indeed the case.

The other possible source or another example of a possible source critical issue in the New Testament is the relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. When you read 2 Peter and Jude it becomes clear that they contain material that is very similar almost to the same extent that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are similar in both order and content but also wording. So there's been debate as to what might be the relationship, for example,

between 2 Peter and Jude. One common theory is that Jude was written first and the author of 2 Peter then utilized the material in Jude in his own composition, but it also included other material. Again most think that because most of Jude is consumed in and taken up in 2 Peter. So they think that it is more likely that 2 Peter would use Jude as he uses almost all of it than that Jude would use 2 Peter and leave a lot of it out. So source criticism goes beyond merely the Synoptics but other scholars have explored the possibility of written sources behind other parts of New Testament text.

1 Peter 3

One final example in the New Testament that might be fruitful for source criticism as far as its ability to reveal interpretive insight is one of the more difficult passages in the New Testament, and again my purpose is not to solve it or provide a detailed explanation. The one passage in 1 Peter chapter 3, at the very end of chapter 3, starting in verse 18: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water." And I will stop right there. That passage has caused a number of New Testament students to pull their hair and try to explain what is going on and exactly what Peter is doing. One explanation that has been given is that the author of 1 Peter is drawing on the apocalyptic works like Revelation and Daniel but one apocalyptic work in particular that seems to have been well known, though it is not included in Scripture, and again an apocalyptic work being a visionary a narrative account of someone's vision, someone ascends to heaven and sees heavenly visions, a prediction of the future in highly symbolic language; one of the well-known apocalypses that is not in the Old or New Testaments was the book of the 1 Enoch. In the Enoch literature you find a number of references to the story of Genesis chapter 6; the story of the flood that begins describing the "sons of God" that cohabit with "the daughters of men." In 1 Enoch that is understood to be angelic beings that left their place of authority and now they are pictured, because of what the angelic beings did in Genesis 6 in the

days of Noah, they are now pictured as being imprisoned in darkness and awaiting the day of judgment. Some would say that that is the source or the background for what we read in this text that I read from 1 Peter chapter 3. Some would suggest that Peter had access to 1 Enoch in his telling and interpretation of the story of Genesis 6. So what that means then interpretively is we wouldn't have to worry to much as to what is going on in this text and where all these things are taking place but according to this explanation Peter may just be drawing on a common apocalyptic account or story in order to demonstrate Jesus victory over the power of evil.

Again my purpose is not to adjudicate an interpretation but simply to give an example of how source criticism in how one reads the text and to demonstrate how source criticism is used in the New Testament outside of only the Synoptic Gospels.

Source Criticism: an evaluation

Again, two observations by way of evaluation is one I have already mentioned. One of the dangers in source criticism is the way some interpreters use it. At times the approach can be speculative, especially when we don't have the sources available, especially when we are trying to reconstruct it. It might be a little bit easier in writings like the Synoptic Gospels although even there we have to be careful as far as placing to much weight on any theory of relationship. It appears certain that one of the Gospels functioned as a source for the others. On the other hand, when we don't have the sources available sometimes it can be speculative to suggest that the writer was drawing on as a source and made this or that change or even to go into details as to where that source may have come from, the date, the setting, the theology of that source.

That is related to my second observation. At the end of the day we still have to deal with the text as we have it. Even if New Testament and Old Testament authors were reliant on previous sources which they were and however much an understanding and reconstruction of those sources may help us understand what is going on, such as I think the 1 Peter 3 text is a good example of that. At the same time we still have to deal with the final text. An author has taken those sources and put them in the form of a text to communicate his purpose that now starts to get us into another criticism, that is, redaction

criticism that begins to focus more on the final text rather than the sources and what the author has done in putting them together. So sometimes source criticism can be a great help in identifying the sources that may have contributed to the author's own composition and understand how the author has used those. On the other hand, we must avoid speculation and we must ultimately focus on the text as it stands.

Form Criticism: Introduction

Now source criticism historically especially in New Testament studies, historically and logically source criticism gave way to or gave a place to the emergence of another form of criticism known as "Form Criticism." Basically, form criticism is like source criticism, an attempt to at least partially to get behind the written documents of the New and Old Testaments, to recover and uncover the individual forms, especially oral forms, that have made their way into the final composition. So what form criticism often does is it looks at the documents and looks at forms and tries to isolate, based on oral history, where did this form develop? Looking at individual units in the text individual forms given what I find I can determine of the setting of that form and how that form developed that now results in what I find in the Old and New Testament texts. So you can see form criticism often has different facets. It can study the individual forms and the texts of individual units and their form and their shape and their function. It can study the original setting of that form and its oral tradition and its development up until the time it was written and it was included in the text. That's why I say form criticism also is in some respects a historical endeavor and it often tries to uncover the oral period of the forms transmission up until the time it was included in the written text, as we are going to see though probably the most fruitful aspect of form criticism is to isolate, not isolate, but to identify the individual units and forms within texts and what they are. How do they function? How do they make a difference in interpretation? But let me give you some examples again from both the Old and New Testaments as far as form criticism and how it works. My goal is not always to necessarily that I agree with these examples or to evaluate them but just to demonstrate how form criticism can work.

Old Testament Form Criticism

In the Old Testament form criticism developed most prominently in the Psalms, where a German scholar called Herman Gunkel was able to identify certain forms of the psalms, and classify them and discuss their setting and their function and things like that. One common approach to form criticism in the old testament and actually there is a number of interesting and, in fact, helpful commentaries called the Form of Old Testament Literature that follow an approach of identifying forms, that is, looking at the structure of the form how it is put together and how it is structured. It looks at the genre that can label the form, what kind of form is this? Then looking at the possible settings of the form, what setting would have given rise to a form like this? We will give an example in just a moment. What is the function or intention of this form?

For example, a common form that we use in the United States, and I'm sure this is true elsewhere also, is the grocery list. I will look at four features. If I take a grocery list, what is the structure of it? The grocery list has a unique structure; it doesn't include narrative or explanation. It usually is simply just a list of items that may have very limited explanation. It is just a list of items with very little grammar with no prose or narratives. It is just a simple list with not very long items. The genre then of such a structure would be a grocery list. That would be the label, the genre label that we give to this kind of form. That simply gives a list of items that one would purchase at a grocery store, especially food items. The third thing is the setting of a grocery list. It seems to me its setting is preparation for going to the grocery store. As I am going to the grocery store I will create a list, so the setting is a trip to the grocery store to purchase groceries for the coming week or month or whatever. Finally, the intention is simply to remind me what to purchase when I get to the store. So similarly forms can be treated like are examined like that even in the Old and New Testaments.

Psalms and Form Criticism

So, for example, for the psalms it's nothing new that there are different types of psalms even at the very basic level you learn that there are psalms of praise, psalms of lament etc. etc. These psalms all emerge within the worship life of the nation of Israel

and are utilized in various settings. A common psalm is a lament. A psalm of lament has a very common structure. Most of them have a common structure, beginning with 1) an invocation to God, 2) the lament itself which is basically a description of how bad things are or have gotten, then 3) is an expression of confidence of the psalmist, 4) a petition and then 5) often ending in a vow where the psalmist, makes a promise to God for answering his prayer.

Another interesting type of Psalm is what is known as the entrance psalms, there is an example of that in Psalm 15. Again, there are a number of those. Psalm 15 provides and interesting example it begins "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary, who may live in your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless, and he who does what is righteous, and speaks the truth from his heart, and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong, and casts no slur on his fellow man, who despises a vile man, but honors those who fears the Lord, who keeps an oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury, and does not accept bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken." Notice how this psalm is structured, begins with a question by the worshiper in number one: "Lord who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live in your holy hill?" And then the rest of the Psalm 15:2-5 is an answer to that question in the form of stipulations for entrance into the sanctuary and entrance onto God's holy hill. The setting for this then may be the actual arrival at the temple as they came to worship God. So the intention then would be to stipulate the requirements for those who would approach the temple in order to participate in worship.

Call Narratives

Another common form you find in order to move outside of the Psalms but you find this particularly in prophetic literature is what is known as an Old Testament "Call Narratives," which you find particularly at the beginning of some of the prophets. There is another intriguing example in the early chapters of Exodus in the life of Moses. A prophetic call narrative basically was an account of God appearing to and confronting an individual in Israel's history, a prophet or someone like Moses, commissioning them and calling them for service. It took on an interesting and there seems to be a common,

structure when you start comparing the call narratives. When you start comparing Isaiah chapter 6, you find another one in Ezekiel chapter 1 and 3 and you also find one in the first three chapter of the book of Exodus as well. God appears to individuals and calls and commissions them for service.

Now this structure of the Old Testament call narratives seems to include most of the following. Number one: a confrontation with God, where God would confront and God would appear to the person. The second one would be the commission of God where God actually commissions or calls the prophet or person for a certain activity or service. This is followed by number 3: the objection of the prophet. So, you remember Isaiah, "Woe to me, I am a person of unclean lips." There is an even more extensive one in the Exodus account when God commissions Moses. He comes up with a series of responses, a series of objections, not just one. The objections then are followed by an assurance by God, which is number 4, that over comes the objection. Then number 5 is a sign is given.

Especially Moses' call in Exodus 1-3 includes all of those. What is interesting then, this suggests Moses commission is the commission of a prophet. Moses is being seen as a prophet who is now being called and commissioned by God. The setting then perhaps would be the ancient requirement for messengers to show their credentials. Then the intention of the prophetic call narrative would be authenticate the prophetic message and activities, everything that Moses does and says, everything the Isaiah says, or everything the Ezekiel does, now receives the validation or now receives authenticity because it goes back to a call narrative and a commission by God.

So those are examples of how form criticism can work in a number of Old Testament texts by identifying the discrete forms and looking at their structure, what the genre or the form, what their original setting might have been that might have given rise to such a form, and then the function or intention of those forms can be illuminating when we look at or try to understand biblical text.

New Testament Form Criticism

In the new testament form criticism seems to have developed a little bit differently than it did in the Old Testament but also form criticism in the New Testament usually

was associated or had three facets. Form criticism in the New Testament, much like source criticism developed first of all in the Gospels, especially in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in the Synoptic Gospels. Form criticism was often more closely tied with issues of historicity, the historicity of the Gospels, the historicity of saying of Jesus, and the things that he did.

But in the Gospels form criticism included especially it started three different facets. Number one form criticism focused on the forms, the discrete forms, that one finds in the Gospels and scholars would then label the different forms. They would create labels such as a pronouncement story, a story told about something that Jesus did or said that climax with a saying or pronouncement. Miracle stories, or sayings of Jesus, or prophecies, or proverbial sayings, or discourses, those were all typical labels given to different forms found throughout the Gospels. The first stage of form criticism was to locate and identify and label the different forms found in the Gospels.

For example, in Mark chapter 2 verse 15-17 "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating him with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' On hearing this Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners.'" The scholars usually classify this as an example of a pronouncement story. Notice this brief story that ends with a pronouncement or a saying or Jesus. Usually with this form the focus becomes on the saying that climaxes the story. So the first goal of form criticism in the New Testament, especially in the gospels was to identify and label the different forms.

The second feature of form criticism was to identify the *sitz im leben*, which is the German term meaning "the setting in life." The setting that gave rise to the form and usually the setting was something in the life of the early church. What situation in the life of the early church would have given rise to this form, would have created this form? The assumption is this form was useful for something; the assumption is the authors were not

just writing bear history. But the forms demonstrate that this literature was useful for something in the life of the early church. So the attempt was to not only identify and label the form but also to identify the setting, that it is something in the life of the early church whether its form of worship or whether its conflict with false teaching or with Judaism, or with some setting with the church or the teaching of the church that gave rise to this form.

Then, finally, the third or final element was the history of transmission. That is, the oral stage of this form would have risen in some setting of the early church, but then it would have been passed along orally, up until the time that it gets included in the biblical text. So then form criticism studies this oral stage. It studies the changes that are made in the development of this form up until the inclusion in the biblical text. It traces the transmission of these forms. Out of these three for biblical interpretation and hermeneutics the most fruitful of these three has been number one: the ability to identify the form and to not just label for the sake of labeling, but to identify the form in a way that is helpful for interpretation and for understanding the biblical text. For example, if I identify something as a pronouncement story, the focus of my interpretation will be on the climactic saying that will be the punch line or the main point.

Another interesting facet of identifying form criticism is it helps us to make sense of larger sections of biblical text. For example, in Matthew chapters 8 and 9, it seems to be a lengthy section that has been arranged not so much chronologically according to the order in which the events occur but chapter 8 and 9 seem to be arranged based on a common form that is miracle stories. All of Matthew chapter 8 and 9 is simply a series of miracle stories so that form criticism seems to provide the rational of how Matthew 8 and 9 have been arranged.

In the next session I will continue to discuss form criticism just briefly as we will wrap that up and look at an example of the parables and the Gospels and how that form criticism might help us come to grips with how the parables function and how we could read them. Then we will move on to the third form of criticism in this triad that has historically and logically developed and that is redaction criticism.

Transcribed by Roger Evans
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 11

Redaction Criticism

Form Criticism Methodology

In the last session we were discussing Form Criticism in both the Old and New Testament and we ended by discussing Form Criticism in the New Testament and especially its development in Gospels studies. We said that Form Criticism's emerging Gospel studies focused on had three facts. Number one: identifying and labeling the form such as pronouncement word or saying or something like that. Second is isolating or analyzing these settings in life or the *sitz im leben,* to use the German term for the "setting in life" used in the early church that may have given rise to the form. For example, some think that miracle stories may have been given or have arisen in the early church in the setting or context where it was necessary to defend the faith or in an apologetic context. But isolating or recovering this setting in life, or this setting in the early church gave rise to the form. Finally, examine the oral transmission of the form before the period of its actual inclusion in the biblical text. To look at another example of the form within the Gospels themselves and in one area that has in some respects has been rather fruitful when it comes to Form Criticism and there is a lot we can say about this but I will just boil it down to just a couple of points.

Parables

The parables of Jesus seem to be a fruitful area of study when it comes to form criticism. Especially focusing, as we said, that probably is the most fruitful aspect of critical form is in the New Testament. The first aspect is identifying the form itself in the text and labeling that form. But parables I think are a fruitful example of how Form Criticism can work and especially how it affects the way we interpret it. In the past Form Criticism the parables have been dominated by an approach that says that we should focus on or look for the one main point that the parable teaches. The parables are seen as a simile or as a metaphor sometimes or labeled as a story that only communicates one single point. So the goal of the interpreter is to figure out at what point Jesus was going

to get across when he taught in parables. What is intriguing about that approach is that it generally goes back to a German scholar Adolf Julicher who was responding to the ways parables were treated up until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before that time parables were frequently allegorized. We read an extreme example from a few sessions ago from Saint Augustine's treatment of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Where he found an allegorical meaning behind virtually anything in the parable, in reaction to that kind of interpretation Adolf Julicher the German scholar who's work unfortunately has not yet been translated into English, but he argued that parables only communicate one main point.

So in a lot of books on biblical interpretation or books on biblical hermeneutics that treat parables with follow this advice and will suggest that the goal of the interpreter is based on the historical context and based on Jesus teaching is to figure out what is the one main point that the parable is trying to teach. However, recently not so much as a result of classical form criticism that we have been discussing but recently the form the parables has been revisited and many have suggested that the parables could be classified actually as limited allegories, that is, the parables are allegories in the sense that only the main features or the main characters get a second level of meaning or an allegorical meaning, not everything. For example, most of the details are there just to make the story work. But at the same time it seems that the main characters in the story get a second level of meaning or an allegorical meaning and in many respects this is the way that Jesus treated the parables when he interpreted them.

For example, I think of the parable of the Sower where Jesus tells the parable and then he goes on and explains it for his disciples. He explains the sower is the one who sows the seed of the word of God. The seed is the word of God, the Gospel of the kingdom is the different grounds that the seeds fall on are different responses to the word. So it even seems that, that is how Jesus treated the parables. Although not everything is treated allegorically it seems that the main points and the main characters of the parable are meant to have a deeper level of meaning, an allegorical meaning. But again it is one that is consistent with the context and with the teaching of Jesus not necessarily one that

reflects later New Testament teaching etc. But meanings that are suitable for the stage of salvation history in which Jesus arrives and brings about the kingdom of God.

Types of Parables

So, for example, one way of analyzing has been to see, that it will return to this later on, but to see parables according to three main types. One kind of parable is known as a "monadic parable" that is a parable that does have only one main point. For example, there is the well-known parable of the mustard seed. The main feature of that parable is the mustard seed, that is what is communicating the point and that's the feature that gets the allegorical level of meaning. Everything else in the parables is just there to make the story work.

The other type of parable then would be what could be called a "dyadic parable." That is a parable that has two main points that corresponds to two main persons of characters or features within the parable such as the parable that Jesus tells us about a woman and she goes to a judge. Basically, she bothers the judge until the judge responds to her and gives her what she asks for. Those are the two main things features of the parable, the two main characters will receive an allegorical treatment. The meaning and everything else that is in the parable is just there for a color to make the parable work.

And then finally, to move up the scale parable could be labeled a triadic parable. As this label applies to these parables would have three main points. A classic example would be where you would have a master with a good and a bad servant under that master. The master will interact with both of them. So sometimes the good or the bad servant so there could be more than one and you could have several good servants with one bad servant or something like that. But in this case again, you will have three main points corresponding with three main allegorical meanings corresponding to the three main characters in the parable. Again everything else is there just for color just to make the parable and the story work.

Prodigal Son Parable: Triadic

Let me give you an example from a parable that we have already referred to a couple of times and that is, the parable of the prodigal son. You know the story well. A

son goes to his father and asks for his share of the inheritance. The father gives him his inheritance and the son goes off and squanders it in all kinds of loose living. And when he runs out of money he comes to his senses, then he comes back to his father hoping that he will at least be receiving as a servant or as if not a son, but we said that the father sees the son a long way off and runs off to greet him and hugs him and brings him back. He then throws this elaborate party for his son.

The parable interestingly ends though with one future character that is the older son who responds and questions what the father is doing. He responds in jealously because the father is treating the son in a way he does not deserve and then the parable ends there!

This is a classic example of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. This is an example of how this is a triadic parable, that is, there are three main characters in this parable: the so called prodigal son, the father, and then the older son. So with this method of looking at the parables there will be an allegorical meaning associated with each of the three main characters in the parable again a meaning that Jesus intended and is consistent with the history in the context of Jesus' teaching and Jesus' life.

First of all then the father in the parable obviously stands for God who forgives those who come to him in repentance. We talked a little bit about the historical references in the parable in an earlier session. Also it is possible that the point is that God humiliates himself when he is willing to risk his dignity when he stoops so low to accept a sinner back who has offended him. Second, the so called prodigal son would then stand for the sinner who comes to God in repentance and receives God's gracious acceptance. Finally, the older son probably stands for the Pharisees who are jealous because God extends his forgiveness to people who don't deserve it.

One of the key features is to again, put this parable in its context, if you go back to the beginning of chapter 15 Jesus is responding to the Pharisees who are accusing Jesus for associating with tax collectors and sinners. So now this parable is told in response to that, so that the older son who is jealous after the younger son is treated by the father in the way he hasn't gone off and blown his inheritance on all kinds of wild living. The

older son cannot understand why the father would treat him and accept him the way he is. The older son then clearly represents the Pharisee who is jealous because now God extends his forgiveness to those who do not deserve it. Indeed, the older son probably represents anyone who responds in jealousy or anyone that does not respond in joy and praise whenever God extends his grace to anyone that does not deserve it.

It is kind of interesting, just as an aside, to look at this in a little more detail. It is intriguing that the parable never tells us exactly what the older son did. The parable leaves you hanging with a third character where the father ends by inviting the older son to join in the celebration and to join in the party. Though again we are never told what the older son did. Did he come in, or did he go back in the fields and reject and ignore his father's provision, perhaps his father's innovation? Perhaps the parable is open ended intentionally and that Jesus is continually calling his readers to examine to deal with the Pharisee in them and to respond in rejoicing when God extends his grace and forgiveness to someone that does not deserve it. Everything else in the parable the fattened calf, the ring, the purple robe, the pigs, and the food, the young son fed the pigs when he came to the end of himself, that he was in such a desperate situation that he wanted to eat the food that the pigs were eating, the inheritance, the wild living, most of that is simply there to make the story work. Those are not to be given an allegorical level of meaning.

But it seems to me that form criticism might help us to interpret the parables of by understanding what kind of literature we are dealing with especially if the parables are limited allegories. That is where the main persons, the main characters in the story receive and allegorical meaning. That is because that is the way Jesus intended it in that case and that is we should based on the context and the historical connotation and the life teaching of Jesus and the attempt to understand what the meaning of the parable might be or what meanings might be associated with the three main characters, or the one main character or the two main characters depending on what kind of parable it is.

Form Criticism outside the Gospels

Outside of the Gospels form criticism has been applied not quite as much as it has been in the Gospel literature itself. Form Criticism has been effectively applied to other

sections of the New Testament. For example, in much of Paul one of the main things you often find happening in Paul's letters and you find this in some of the other New Testament epistles as well is that in the exhortation or hortatory sections of the letters you will often find a list of virtues. Paul will say something such as he does in Colossians chapter three: "Therefore the dearly beloved is chosen by God put on" and he will list a series of goods, or put off and avoid sexual morality et cetera. and he will give a list of things to be avoided. A classic example is Galatians chapter 5 the works of the flesh and the works of the spirit. Here Paul simply gives a list, and running list of vices to be avoided. "The works of the flesh are these" and he lists a number. "But the fruit of the spirit are these, love, joy, and peace et cetera. He lists them and again you find a similar thing in Ephesians and Colossians. A couple of places elsewhere, most likely Paul is drawing on a common form that is found sometimes elsewhere in Greek and Roman literature there are what are known as a vice and virtue lists. These simply catalogue vices to be avoided because of their destructive behavior especially to those in the community and to virtues to be embraced. Paul obviously tailors those for his own purposes but he maybe relying on a very early form.

Another interesting form that one finds is in 1 Peter, but ones finds it also in Ephesians chapter 5 and Colossians chapter 4 where Paul addresses the relationships between husbands and wives, children, and parents and then slaves and masters. In both of these sections in Ephesians and Colossians and you find something similar in 1 Peter as well. But most likely this and Paul's instructions may reflect a form what is a well-known form in the first century that some have labeled the household codes. That is, this could be an early form found in Greek or Roman literature that stipulated the proper relationships between primary persons within the typical Greek or Roman household because the household was seen to be the core unit within the Greek or Roman society that brought stability to society. So this form addressed reciprocally the relationship between the three main units of a typical house hold husbands and wives, children, and parents and then slaves and masters.

Paul then may pick up on this form that we call the household code in order to instruct Christians. Obviously, the language Paul used of the form and the basis for the behavior would be very different than in the Greek or Roman world. But there have been suggestions that perhaps Paul is using this form for missionary purposes or Paul is only using this form just to instruct the Christian household or is it possible he is using this form because he wants to demonstrate that Christianity is not subversive it does not destroy the relationships the Greek or Roman society deemed valuable. Instead, Christianity offers that again, although Paul's basis for and his instructions are in some respects very unique and very different from the use of that form the way those relationships would have worked out in Greek or Roman literature. For example, the fact that Paul tells husbands to love her wives in Ephesians 5, would have been rather unique in the Greek or Roman world.

So Form Criticism, I think is a valuable historical approach and provides hermeneutical or interpretive insight if we avoid the more speculative conclusions and sometimes the even more destructive conclusions of form criticism. Second, when we focus on the classification and the structure and the function of the various forms in the Old and New Testament, when we do that I think form criticism can still be of very valuable tool in biblical interpretation.

Redaction Criticism Introduction

What I want to do now and again is move to the historically and logically sort of the next criticism in this triad that all fall under the broader umbrella of Historical Criticism, and that would be Redaction Criticism. Redaction Criticism builds on both form and source criticism that we just looked at. Form and Source Criticisms as we said tends to go behind the texts, the written texts, to uncover the oral forms or the written sources that are now merged in the written texts. So primarily, form and source criticism behind the texts and attempted to reconstruct the prior forms and the sources.

Now Redaction Criticism goes further, although it is based on source and form criticism. It actually assumes Form and Source Criticism. Redaction Criticism assumes there were sources used and there were individual forms that the Old Testament authors

or the New Testament authors utilized but it goes further and it asks how have these sources and forms now been combined and brought together by an author into the finished texts and what does this say about he author's intention, and the author's theological intention.

So, putting that all together, basically Redaction Criticism can be described as this: Redaction criticism is a study of the author's theological intention by examining the way he has arranged and edited his sources, or arranged and edited his material especially in comparison with others who have written on the same topic. So by examining an author, especially in comparison with others who have written on the same topic or by examining the way the author has arranged his material and has edited and utilized his sources then Redaction Criticism asks, what does that say about the theological intention of the author?

Again, but more broadly one could again simply utilize Redaction Criticism as I said by simply comparing it to what others to have written on the same topic to see how they differ and how they treat that topic. For example, many of us probably use a really basic kind of crude saying of Redaction Criticism. Whenever we look at the Christmas story, for example, in Luke and Matthew and we ask why they are different? Why does Matthew include the account of the Magi coming to visit Jesus and why does Luke instead include the shepherds? When we start asking those types of questions we are kind of asking the initial questions of Redaction Criticism. Redaction Criticism asks the question as to how has the author arranged and edited his material that he has available to him in the final text and what does that reveal about the author's actual intention in writing the text? So, Redaction Criticism assumes two things, first of all it assumes that there is an author who as produced this text. But, second, it assumes the existence of sources and forms that the author has taken up and now arranged and edited in his final document.

Old Testament Examples of Redaction Criticism: 2 Sam 7/1 Chron 17

Once again, I will give a couple of examples from the Old and New Testament and as I have already said a number of times. My examples are weighted a little more to the

New Testament, but to give an example from the Old Testament. One we just mentioned again my purpose is not to give a thorough exposition of this. But just to show what kinds of questions Redaction Criticism might ask. We got to an example of how 1 Chronicles 17 and the account of God speaking through the prophet Nathan to David in the establishment of the Davidic covenant where God promises he will build a house for David. He makes the covenant with David that God will be his father, that David will be his son and that there will always be someone to sit on David's throne. A covenant formula that became very important later on in the Old Testament and into the New Testament as well.

But we also saw that 2 Samuel 7 includes the same covenant formula almost in identical wording and in the same account in the words of the prophet of Nathan and David. So, because we have two authors recording similar language we can ask the question of how do they differ from each other or how have the authors utilized that account and how does that function with their theological intentions? So by comparing the way that the author of 2 Samuel has recorded the account of Nathan's prophecy to David and the Davidic covenant with the way that the author of 1 Chronicles 17 has recorded those same words by looking at how they do that and how they have incorporated that, edited that, and included that in their own composition; one might be able to discern the theological intention of the author.

One of the interesting points has to do with, in 2 Samuel 7 in the author of 2 Samuel 7's account of the Davidic covenant we find this interesting phrase and God is speaking about the King, the King who would sit on David's throne. He says, "when he does wrong I will punish him" is one of the interesting phrases found in 2 Samuel 7 but it is missing in 1 Chronicles 17. So Redaction Criticism asks what might be the theological intention of this change for the author? Why might the author of 1 Chronicles 17, if we assume 1 Chronicles 17 or if we assume that second Samuel is a source for first chronicles 17. One might ask, why might the author have dropped this, or what does this change suggest about the theological intent of the author of 1 Chronicle 17?

Some have suggested that this is because the author of 1 Chronicles is addressing a specific situation is trying to portray the Davidic monarchy in the most positive light possible to demonstrate that the hay-day of Israel's existence, the Golden day of Israel's existence, was under the Davidic monarchy. So this phrase was intentionally left out, according to some, for that reason. But the main point is to look at those texts and to ask how the authors have adapted those stories and what that might suggest about the theological intention of the author.

New Testament Redaction Criticism

Again in the New Testament the Gospels have dominated the redaction critical scene. The Gospels have become a fruitful field for Redaction Criticism because there is a literal relationship between the three. So one can specifically ask them when you compare Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how have they edited their sources? The way they have told the story and how it differs from each other, what might that reveal about their theological intentions?

Palm Sunday

One very interesting example, when you compare Matthew 21 and Mark 11 and Luke 19 all three of these texts record the events around Palm Sunday; that is, the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem. All three of these record that event. But it is interesting when you compare them, Matthew has two significant changes although, again, they are recording the same event and it occurs in the same order in the narrative and the same actors and participants. There is very similar wording, yet there is some significant differences when you compare the three accounts. When you look at them Matthew has the most interesting differences and I might not talk about some of the differences Mark and Luke have and what that might say about their intention. I want to focus on Matthew.

Matthew has two things the interesting features that you do not find in Mark or Luke. First of all Matthew mentions and again this is the story of Jesus riding in on a colt on the so called Palm Sunday that we celebrate into Jerusalem. But Mathew unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew mentions both a donkey and a colt. Where as Mark and Luke

only mention a colt, Jesus riding on a colt. Matthew mentions both the donkey and the colt.

Second, along with that, Matthew also quotes and Old Testament prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 which also does not occur in the Luke or Marks accounts. So in Matthew 21:4-5 Matthew says, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet." Now he quotes Zechariah 9:9 "say to the daughter of Zion, see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt the foal of a donkey." Notice Zechariah 9:9 seems to suggest the occurrence of two animals; a donkey and its colt. So what Matthew seems to have done is Matthew mentions both the donkey and the colt? Unlike Luke and Mark, it is not that Luke and Mark didn't know if there was a donkey or didn't know or think there was one, or that Matthew is making this up; it is simply that Matthew is emphasizing the donkey and the colt to demonstrate and to make this account consistent with the Old Testament prophecy. One of Matthews major themes, although Matthew and Mark and Luke are interested in fulfillment of the Old Testament as well, Matthew more than the others demonstrates the key features going all the way back to chapters one and two where over and over again at key movements in the life of Jesus of his early childhood starting with his birth were seen as fulfilling Old Testament texts.

Now Matthew does that over and over again. In here where Mark and Luke do not include a quotation, Matthew wants to make clear that this event was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic texts as he has done throughout his gospel. For that reason Matthew includes both the colt and the donkey in the story because he is trying to make clear that this event is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy.

So by comparing Mark, Matthew, and Luke's account of similar story and by looking at this difference in the way Matthew has edited it and how he has arranged it and utilized it in his own narrative one can begin to see Matthews theological intent that even more than Luke and Mark wanting to stress the Old Testament prophetic fulfillment of this event including the colt and the donkey. Shows that this narrative aligns with and is a fulfillment of the Zechariah 9:9 text.

Birth Narratives and Redaction Criticism

One other example that we have already referred to, although it is not clear that Matthew or Luke necessarily depend on each other, but they may be depended on a common story that lies behind this especially since neither of them would have been present I don't think during these events, is Matthew and Luke's record of the Christmas story. This account, as we have said, does not occur anywhere in Mark. Mark jumps right into the emergence of John the Baptist and the life and early ministry of Jesus.

Matthew and Luke both include the account of Jesus birth a well-known account of the Christmas story. As we have already mentioned it is interesting when you compare these stories to note the differences. A couple of key differences: first, one of the things you find in Matthew that you don't as much in Luke although in the earlier chapters especially Luke 1 you do find a specific illusions to and references to the Old Testament, but Matthew as we have already seen in chapters one and two wants to make clear that Jesus's birth and early childhood, the events and movements surrounding that are all seen as fulfillments of Old Testament texts. A second difference is that Matthew records the visit of the Magi to Jesus probably a year or almost two years after his birth. By the time the so called Wiseman or Magi come to visit Jesus he is clearly not in the stable anymore. Now Jesus is actually called a boy in Matthew and the Magi find him in this house. He is no longer in the stable so the events of Matthew 2 probably happened a year or two after the birth of the events of Luke 2. It is interesting Matthew has the Magi coming to visit Jesus while Luke has the shepherds coming to visit Jesus. Matthew seems to know nothing about or say anything about the shepherds coming to see Jesus and Luke says nothing about any Magi coming to see Jesus.

One suggestion is that perhaps Matthew invented the story of the magi to replace the shepherds. It is it possible though that both events did occur, but Matthew and Luke are simply being selective in what they record and how they record the event to be in line with their main theological intention. So, for example, Matthew is very interested in emphasizing Jesus as the Christ the Messiah, emphasizing the royal status of Jesus which he does in the first chapter with that long genealogy linking Jesus back to both Abraham and David. So Matthew is interested particularly in the Jesus royal status as the messiah,

the king of the Jews, and so he portrays Jesus as having a very royal reception although the royalty in Jerusalem, King Herod does not bother to go out his back door to see Jesus. You have other wealthy dignitaries coming from quite a long ways to visit Jesus and to bring him rather expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; typical gifts that one would give important people such as royalty. So Matthew has crafted his story to emphasize the royal reception of Jesus as King and as messiah.

Furthermore, Matthew seems to be interested more than any of the other Gospels in the Gentile reception of the Gospel. We will return to this later, but actually by having the magi come and visit Jesus, Matthew is emphasizing that the Gospel is not just for Jews, but for Gentiles. Remember Matthew 1:1 begins by saying, "this is the genealogy of Jesus, the son of Abraham and the son of David." But by calling Jesus "the son of Abraham," it was through Abraham in Genesis 12 that God would eventually bless all the nations of the earth. Now as the son of Abraham Jesus now is received at the very beginning of the narrative by Gentiles so Matthew has crafted his story and there are some other things Matthew is doing. We will return to this text later on when we talk about the use of the Old Testament in the New, there are some other things going on in the story, but Matthew is crafting his story radically to emphasis the Gentile reception of Jesus, but also the royal reception that Jesus received as the King of the Jews and as the Messiah.

Luke has more of a humble being, Luke has Jesus being born and raised in a very humiliating and very humble environment. So, it's fitting for Luke when you read the rest of the Gospel this is an important feature of Redaction Criticism to examine when I look at how an author uses a source to look at patterns throughout the entire book. One of the patterns you see in Luke is that Jesus ends up being the savor and often goes out to the outcasts of society. He is caught hanging around with the people like tax collectors that although very wealthy. Most people were hostile to them. You have for various reasons, Jesus associating with disgusting Samaritans. You have Jesus touching and healing people like lepers with a disease like leprosy. You have Jesus associating with all kinds of people in all parts of the margins that were disgusting to that society. Luke's

version of the Christmas story fits this perfectly. By having Jesus born in a disgusting stable which would have or could have been like a lean-to on a house. That is where you would have kept animals, but also other things like feed troughs and a manger, by having Jesus born in that kind of environment and by having shepherds coming to visit Jesus probably one of the lowest social economic totem pole Luke is trying to portray Jesus with the rest of his story as coming to those who are of a very humble origin, who are the outcasts of society. So Matthew and Luke have clearly structured their Gospels, but also the Christmas story they have edited and arranged and recorded it in a way that clearly gets across their theological intent. So by examining these two gospels that refer to the same story and give an account of the same story it is instructive to see the changes they make and how that might differ and what that might say about the theological intent of the two authors. It is possible though that both events did occur, but Matthew and Luke are simply being selective in what they record and how they record the event to be in line with their main theological intention.

So in both the Old and New Testament when an author does rely on demonstrable sources or forms that he has taken up into his own work or when two authors write on the same topic its constructive to ask how they differ from each other and how they have arranged and utilized there material and what that might say about the theological intention of the authors. Again, at the end of the day, that must be a Redaction Criticism tested by looking at the entire Gospel to make sure that the conclusions one draws with how the author may be editing certain sections is concerned with what seems to be going on in the entire Gospel.

Evaluating Redaction Criticism

What is intriguing because of that Redaction Criticism is actually giving way to another criticism that I am not going to spend a lot of time on. But known as Composition Criticism which looks at the entirety of the Gospels and how they were put together. For example, Redaction Criticism can be a valuable tool in helping us uncover the author's theological intention by looking at the way the author has adapted and arranged his material and edited his material to communicate his theological point. So

again Redaction Criticism is another method of criticism that when shown of its negative presuppositions earlier some practitioners of Redaction Criticism said any time that the author was introducing to his sources or trying to communicate theologically the author or must have not been interested in history. But when divorce from those negative assumptions, Redaction Criticism can help us come to grips with theological meaning and intention of the texts.

Now, in Redaction Criticism the author seems to play a more primary role, than he did with Form and Source Criticism. Here we are not so much interested in going behind the Old and New Testament texts and recovering the sources and forms, but we are assuming an author has taken those forms and sources and arranged them in a text. Redaction Criticism begins to focus more on the author. So it raises the question of the author's intention.

Author's Intention

I want next to move then still under the broader umbrella for historical Criticism examine the issue of the author's intention and look at the author centered approaches to interpretation. So part of historical Criticism is the author who produced the text, the author who wrote the text. So author's intention is an attempt to uncover what most likely was the intention of the author in producing and writing these texts as found in the study of the document itself.

One of the main persons that kind of sparked interest in intention that we already spend a little time discussing, but we will reintroduce him briefly is. **Friedrich Schleiermacher**, who as sort of a product of the enlightenment, but reacting to that. He reacted to the mere rationalistic approach to interpretation and emphasized the power of reason and scientific discovery. **Schleiermacher** emphasized empathy with the author in interpreting the biblical text, that is, according to **Schleiermacher** the goal of interpretation was to recover the actual past of the author and to actually put one's self in the mind of the author. One could actually empathize with and identify the author and to recover his true intention. So, according to **Schleiermacher** authors intended was primarily understood in psychological terms. Something or sometimes we hear something

similar today when we are told in course textbooks on biblical interpretation that the interpreter should attempt to put him or herself in the shoes of the author or try to put yourself in the place of the reader and understand what they were attempting to communicate.

Though most today would perhaps distance themselves from **Schleiermacher's** approach especially his more psychologizing approach to uncover the author's intent, most would still see the author's intention as an important step in interpretation. Indeed, for some time it was seen as the primary goal of interpretation in most hermeneutical and in most biblical interpretation like textbooks state that the goal is ultimately to recover the meaning that the author intended. The correct meaning of the text is the meaning that the author intended to communicate.

Quotes highlighting Authorial Intent

So, for example, these are just a series of quotes from a hand full of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation textbooks, I won't mention the author of the textbook. But I just surveyed a number of them to give you a flavor and most of these are fairly recent. These are not ancient works most of these have been written since or at least have been revised since the year 2000. So, for example, one textbook says: "The author or editor intended to communicate a message to a specific audience to accomplish some purpose. Our goal is to discover that meaning of the text in those terms. That is, in terms of what the author is trying to communicate to a readership in a certain historical context." Here is another one: "Exegesis is the attempt to hear the work as the original recipients were to have heard it, to find out what was the original intent of the words of the Bible." It's interesting this explanation doesn't mention the author, but again, it assumes that there is an intended meaning in the text that the author was trying to communicate and that is what we are to go after and to recover. Here is another one, the last one I will give is: "the meaning of the text is what the author consciously intended it to say." And again this is just representative of what a number of biblical interpretation or hermeneutic texts book suggest.

So a correct meaning of a text whether an Old Testament text or a New Testament text is the meaning that the human author would have intended to communicate and would convey to the original readers. So the goal of interpretation is to try and uncover this through a analysis study of the texts. One tries to determine what the author was trying to do in producing the texts. What was the author trying to communicate so the goal is not then so much to recover what the contemporary reader makes of this text, but historically what did the historical author try to communicate and in most of these hermeneutical text books by sound methods or rules of application. By the application of sound rules and methods and interpretation one can arrive at the intended meaning and that the meaning of the author is or what the author was trying or intending to communicate.

Reasons Authorial Intent is Important

One question, I want to arise a bunch of questions, but one of them is why is the author's intent is deemed necessary? Why does it seem to be such an important goal to achieve in interpretation? One question, what are some of the objections to the author's intent as the main goal of interpretation? Then, finally, I will try and put things together and draw conclusions. Is the author's intention still a valid goal in interpretation? How do we think about that?

So, first of all, why is the author's intention been seen as such an important goal? Why is there such an emphasis on the author's intention? I have simply listed a number of reasons. First of all it is simply the fact that texts are created by authors and even today authors write to communicate. Authors write to communicate something and they write to be understood. So the assumption is that the biblical authors and the Old and New Testaments as we have them are the product of authors attempting to communicate something that can understood by readers. Therefore it is a worthy, valid and necessary goal to uncover the authors intention. So texts do not just appear and they don't just emerge and usually authors do not write to confuse or to miscommunicate, although they might to so accidently, or sometimes you might have some authors intentionally write to

confuse and miscommunicate, but authors generally communicate to be understood. Therefore the goal of interpretation is what meaning was intent by the author.

A second reason why some deem hermeneutic of the author's intention is considered to be so important in coming to a biblical interpretation is that the authors intention is what arbitrates between conflicting interpretations. So the correct interpretation of the text is that which the author intends to communicate. So when out of all the proposed meanings there is a short list of conflicting meanings to interpretations, the one that fits the author's intention is the interpretation to be preferred.

Number three, the author's intention grounds meeting, that is, meaning is not open ended meaning is not a free-for-all. But it's the author's intention that keeps interpretation from running amuck, from becoming a free-for-all where everything is up for grabs. Interpretation is limited to what the author could have intended. It is grounded in the author's intention. So when I read the book of Ezekiel about the battle of Gog and Magog and how we understand that battle. Those terms we must be grounded in how the author was trying to communicate.

A fourth one is the author's intention then, and this kind of relates to interpretation more broadly, and the author's intention in interpretation is seen as a good foundation for theology. The correct interpretation of the text is grounded in the author's intention and that is foundational for theological reflection and formulation. In other words, theology depends of good exegesis which depends on the stable meaning of the texts grounded in the author's intention.

A fifth fact is the fact that we are dealing with inspired Scripture. If the Old and New Testament texts as we have them are the inspired word of God, then it's necessary to uncover the meaning that the author's intended, both the human author and the divine author. If this is God's communication to humanity and if this is the inspired word of God there must be some meaning and some intention in the text that I can get at and I can recover. So the fact that these scriptures are inspired seems to suggest the validity of author's intention as the goal. The fact is that the human author's intention is the only way we have access to God's intention to communicate to us.

Then, finally, related to the first one, finally, arguments to the contrary are self-sustaining, meaning that those who would argue that one cannot know an author's intention or that the author's intention is unnecessary or irrelevant intend for their articles and books to be understood. So to try and argue one can't understand an author's intention assumes that others who read my article will understand my intention to communicate that.

So based of that the conclusion the goal of interpretation then is to recover the author's intended meaning. What was the author trying to communicate? And usually through the application of sound principles of interpretation looking at the historical background, the broader context, the meaning of the words et cetera in that period of time, all of what we could know about the author and his readers, all of this will help to arrive at the reasonable reconstruction of the author's intention.

But having said this, the next question to ask is…Why have some rejected the author's intention? And is the author's intention still a valid goal of the interpretation? We will look at those questions in the next session.

Transcribed by Mary-Beth Gray
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 12

Text Centered Approaches

Historical Critical Approach

We've been discussing author's intention as a one of the facets of a historical approach to interpreting Scripture, that is, looking at the author's intended meaning is the primary goal of the interpretation. A couple of the historical persons, one in particular that you need to know related author's intent we talked a little bit about the Friederick Schleiermacher as one of the important figures in the quest for author's intention as the primary goal of interpretation.

Hirsch: Meaning and Significance

Outside of biblical studies completely, but interestingly, an individual that has played an important role in biblical scholars exposition of their understanding of the author's intention is an individual E. D. Hirsch. E. D. Hirsch in an early book called *Validity in Interpretation* suggested that one needs to distinguish between meaning and significance. Hirsch said that meaning was that which the author intend to communicate as inscribed in the text itself, that is, the meaning that was placed there by the author, the meaning that the author intended communicate by the language symbols, the structure of the text which reveal what the author was intending to communicate. So the original meaning of the text was tied with the author's intention as a distinguished from what Hirsch said was the significance of the text, that was the relationship of that meaning to virtually anything else and which most biblical theologians and scholars would label "applications." They would say meaning is what the author originally intended to communicate while significance was the application of a meaning to the modern-day context. So for Hirsch there is an important role in establishing the importance of author's intention especially as revealed in the text. The author's intended meaning that the author willed to communicate in the text is to be distinguished from the relationship of that meaning has to anything else and other situations which Hirsch labeled "significance." You will often see that distinction between meaning and significance

picked up especially by the biblical interpreters to distinguish between the meaning in the text and its ongoing relevance and application of the modern-day reader.

Objections to an Author's Intent Approach

So we said that although there are many reasons that have been used to argue for author's intent as a worthy and necessary goal in interpretation the other hand, some have rejected the author's intention for a variety of reasons as a valid or even a necessary or possible goal of interpretation. Before we look at that it is important to realize that most who would hold to the author's intention do not necessarily think it is easy, automatic, or straightforward or that one can capture the author's intention exhaustively or perfectly, although they still think it is possible and necessary. But there are some who reject author's intention as a possible or a necessary goal of interpretation. So why have some rejected author's intent as a goal of interpretation? Why are some convinced that it is not a valid or even possible objective of interpretation. Again my list is not meant to be exhaustive but simply to capture some of the possible objections.

First of all, some have rejected the author's intention because it is impossible to get in the mind of an author and determine what that author intended to communicate. Especially with authors that are no longer alive, it is impossible to consult with them to determine exactly what they meant.

Some early responses to author's intent formulated what is called "the intentional fallacy" that is, trying to reproduce or recover the author's thought process or the author's mind, the author's intention. The author's thinking is seen as inaccessible. I remember one time I was talking to a well-known New Testament scholar over in England and I was talking to him about his book, a book he had written and I quoted a section of a sentence and after I quoted it he said "I wonder what I meant by that." That got me thinking if even living authors sometimes don't know or forget what they meant, how much more authors who are no longer alive especially when a text was written two thousand years or more before the time of modern day interpreters. So for those kind of reasons some say because is impossible to get inside the mind of the author because it is impossible to understand what the author was thinking and intending especially authors

that are no longer alive to tell us. So the recovery of the author's intention is impossible. Again, this is often known as the intentional fallacy.

A second reason is that an author might fail to communicate adequately. That is, some authors might be incompetent, some authors may communicate poorly, may communicate something they didn't intend to say, they might not express clearly or adequately what they are trying to get across and what they want say. They may even mislead readers at times even unintentionally. So therefore the author's intent is unrecoverable or impossible or unnecessary.

Another objection is that at times authors might communicate better than they know. That is, an author might say something and you might go to that author and say "Did you mean this?" The author's response might be something like this and you may have heard this, "No, I did not intend that but that certainly makes sense and I would accept that as a valid reading or interpretation of what I said." A number of authors have written books, one in particular I'm thinking of, that record examples of students reading their texts and reading their work and coming up with interpretations that the author never intended to mean, but still considered a valid understanding and insight into that text. Again, maybe you have experienced that when you said something someone has interpreted and asked you: "Did you mean this?" You may have responded "No, I did not intend that but that is a valid understanding of what I said. I would accept that as a true understanding of what was said."

So because sometimes authors communicate better than they know and readers sometimes find things in texts that the authors don't intend but nevertheless would agree is a valid interpretation and meaning in the text. How much more is this true with dead authors, authors that are not here to tell us whether they intended this meaning or not or even if they did not that this meaning is still valid. So, because authors often communicate even today communicate sometimes better than they knew some suggested, therefore, author's intention is impossible to recover or at least unnecessary.

Another reason, and again not all of these are related although some of them are, but another reason that primarily owes its origin to more literary studies is: texts are seen

as free-floating. They have a life of their own. Once the author writes a text it now is cut off from the life of the author and it has a life of its own. That is, the author no longer has a say in determining its exact meaning the text now has a life of its own and readers then perhaps are allowed to make sense of the text and to find different meanings. So again, because texts are autonomous, are free floating entities with a life of their own, the author's intention, then is unrecoverable or least it is not valid to restrict ourselves to the author's intention. Some would think that the author's intention is still a valid goal but might suggest that we can't limit meaning only to the author's intention.

A fifth objection could be that interpreters often come up with different meanings and different interpretations of the same text. If the author's intention was truly the primary goal and truly a valid goal and a recoverable goal, then why is it that interpreters come up with different interpretations of the same texts. So why does someone read Genesis 1 and 2 and they are convinced and in a seven literal twenty-four hour day creation period. Why do others read the same texts and see it as referring to something that takes place over a much longer period of time? Why do some readers read Revelation 20, the millennial passage, and are convinced it is teaching pre-millennialism while other readers reading the same text and also going after the author's intention are convinced of amillennialism? Or why do some readers read Hebrews 6 the well-known warning in Hebrews 6 and are convinced that it fits an Arminian perspective and others read the same text and are convinced that it supports Calvinism. Why is it some read the well-known gender passages in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 and are convinced that it permits women to participate in any form of ministry including ordination or functioning as senior pastors, while others read those same texts going after the author's intention, and see it as limiting the roles that women should play in ministry.

So because interpreters come up with different meanings and interpretations of a text some would suggest that those readers who are seeking the author's intention, treating the Bible as the word of God, yet they come up with different interpretations. They would object to the author's intention as a legitimate goal of interpretation. Who has found the author's intent? Some would conclude the author's intent is unrecoverable.

A final one, again there could be other examples that we can point to, but New Testament authors themselves often seem to find new meanings in Old Testament texts. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 where Paul addresses one of the many problems he addresses in the Corinthian church, he compares his readers to the Old Testament generation of God's people as they came out of Egypt and went through the wilderness. Here's what Paul says, “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea. They all ate of the same spiritual food” — do you remember when God feeds the Israelites with manna and when God would cause water to come out of the rock. Now listen to this: “and they drank the same spiritual drink. They drink from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and rock was Christ.” I would challenge you to go back and read through the original narrative and find a clear reference to Jesus Christ as the Israelites wandered through the wilderness. So some would say because of examples like that the author’s intention is unknowable.

Or Matthew 1:23 where Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7 the promise of a virgin who will conceive and give birth to a son, Matthew quotes that as being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet if you go back to the original context in Isaiah at least at first glance it doesn't seem to be a Christological text or a prediction of the coming Messiah. So some would look at examples like that and others would say even New Testament authors did not seem interested in recovering the author’s intended meaning from the Old Testament.

So the conclusion is from this is that some would say that the author’s intention is unnecessary, or impossible to recover, or invalid, or, at the very least, we can't restrict interpretation and meaning only to the author's intention.

Support for the Author’s Intension as a Worthy Goal

So given these two perspectives, what should we say or what should we do with the author’s intention? What should we say about it? Is the author's intention still a valid

and necessary goal? Let me make several observations about the author's intention that would suggest, I think, that the author's intention still is a worthy, necessary, and valid goal.

First of all, even if we don't do it or pursue it in the same way that Schleiermacher did or in a way that it has been sometimes been treated in the past, but the first observation I would make is it seems to me that if the Bible is the God inspired word, if the text we have is nothing less than a human product but a divine product as well, that suggests to me that the author's intention is still a valid and necessary goal. If God stands behind his word, there must be some stable meaning that one can get at. That is, there must be a meaning that God has placed there that he intends to communicate to his people. He must have created us so that we can understand it.

Furthermore, when you read through the text of Scripture God clearly expects his people to obey and to respond to his word, so that complete skepticism about meaning and author's intention or agnosticism about recovering meaning seems to be incompatible with the inspiration of Scripture as God's word. As we're going to see that doesn't mean that it's easy, and that there is never any disagreement. It doesn't mean that meaning can be exhaustively or perfectly recovered, but certainly it still stands as a valid goal given the nature of God's word as Scripture, which God intends his people to obey. It suggests that there must be meaning he has placed within it that he wants his people to understand.

Second, I think when we understand the author's intention we need to understand that is not the goal to recover the author's psychological thought process and more recent explanations and expositions of author's intention have been careful to avoid that. The goal is not to uncover the author's thought process or psychological state or the intention of the mind as the only access we have to the author is the text that the author has written and that he or she has produced. So when we think of the author's intention I think we need to be a little bit more nuanced. It is the meaning of that the author has encoded in the text. The text is the only evidence that we have of what the author was trying to do and what the author was trying to communicate. The assumption is that the author was attempting to communicate something at a certain place and at a certain time. The text is

a record of a historical communicative act on the part of an author to a reader. So we can uncover that act, we can explore, explain, study, and uncover what it was that the author was trying to do by considering the text that the author has produced. We can uncover what the author most likely intended to mean as revealed in the grammar of the text and as revealed in the structure of the text. In other words, like other historical documents or like other historical events, the text is an account of an author's intention to do something, to communicate something, an account of an author's intentional communicative act. So the goal is to understand that act as much as possible, not to get in the mind of the author necessarily or to empathize with the author, but to understand what the text reveals about the author's intention to communicate something.

A third observation regarding author's intention is the goal is not to be exhaustive or be perfect in our understanding, that is, the goal of recovering the author's intention is not to suggest that we can exhaustively or perfectly understand the author 's intended meaning. But we can do so substantially and adequately in our interpretation. So we need to be aware of confusing, making an exhaustive explanation of the author's meaning with being able to do so substantially. Just because we can't perfectly and exhaustively uncover the author's meaning does not mean we can't do so to some degree. So once again we need to be more nuanced in our understanding of author's intention.

Number four, a hermeneutics of suspicion must be replaced, I think, by a hermeneutics of respect. That is, instead of approaching the text with suspicion that we cannot find the author's intention or outright rejecting it, that suspicion needs to be replaced by a hermeneutics of respect. Respect for the ancient authors, respect for the ancient texts, respect for the ancient context requires that we give it some priority in our interpretation. So there is merit, I think, to the meaning-significant distinction that we talked about in relationship to Hirsh. Meaning is letting the text speak, realizing that this text was produced by an author in a certain historical context for a certain purpose and that somehow we can substantially and adequately, though not perfectly and exhaustively recover that. That can be distinguished from its significance and how that has an ongoing relationship to different contexts and different readers and different situations. Again

Hirsch's significance is what evangelicals often called "application." So a hermeneutics of suspicion should be replaced by a hermeneutics of respect. Respect for the text, the author that produced it, the historical circumstances and context in which the text was produced.

Five, there is probably some merit in the arguments that the author's intention is invalid to argue such is logically self-defeating since again most people who communicate thoughts such as those, do argue a way that they expect to be understood and they argue in a way to communicate. In short, we write to be understood. Reading a biblical text and interpreting a biblical text should at least allow the author to attempt to speak and understand what the author was attempting to do with his text.

A final one, even when disagreement does take place, whether it's over the issue of the millennium or over the issue of women in ministry or over the issue of whether charismatic gifts such as whether speaking in tongues, prophecy and miracles are still valid today are not, even those that argue and disagree over those issues still attempt to ground their interpretation in the text and in what they think the author was intending as opposed to simply seeing the text and interpretation as a free-for-all and anything goes.

So the author's intention as the goal of interpretation is as one hermeneutics textbook explains it in a helpful way by asking what is the goal of interpretation, how do we understand the author's intention? One text answers like this: "The author's intention is the goal interpretation, that is, to arrive at the meaning of the text. The meaning of the text is that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of the author/editor and the probable understanding of that text by its intended readers." I'll read that again: "The meaning of the text is that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of the author/editor and the probable understanding of that text by the intended readers."

Let me just make a couple comments on this definition or description. First of all, notice that it is grounded in the text itself. Notice the goal is not to recover the author's intention as far as his thought process or what was in the mind of the author. The goal here is to determine what the text discloses about the author's intention, that is, through

the wording of the text, the grammatical constructions of the text, and I would also add what we can know about the historical circumstances of surrounding text. All of that discloses something about the intention of the author.

But furthermore, notice the language of probability. This definition avoids the language of exhaustiveness or somehow perfectly or with absolute certainty or that somehow we uncover the author's intention and we're done, since we can be certain that we've arrived at it. I like the language of probability. The goal is to uncover the probable intention of the author or editor as sometimes texts may have been brought together by an editor. But understanding the probable intention is tied to the text itself by looking at the grammatical structure of the text, the wording, and again the historical circumstances, and even what the original readers to whom the author was writing what they probably would've understood in light of what the author wrote within the horizons of the reader. From that one can arrive at the probable intention of the author. Again, that is not with absolute certainty as that escapes us without having the author here to tell us exactly what he meant and as the example I gave with my conversation with a well-known New Testament scholar just a bit ago. The example I gave reveals that sometimes even living authors are not quite sure what they meant or exactly and what they intended. This avoids the language of absolute certainty in realizing that because we're separated the two millennia or more from the text, because of some of the distances between us and the original contexts, and because the authors no longer here, all we have is the text itself. Therefore, by considering the text we can arrive at a high degree of probability that our interpretation corresponds to what the author was intending.

How I like to put it is, I would say, any interpretation is valid if it answers the question: What can be justified from the text itself and what we do know about the original author, his context and his readers. Again, by text itself it would include the structure of the text, the grammar, but placing it in its context, everything we can draw out the author's historical situation and context, the readers' context, the grammar, the structure of the text, and the context. What can be justified based on that data?

So it is a call to respect, to give priority to the original act of communication in its original context. Whatever else we might do with the text. However, we might apply it, however else we might use it, it seems to me it is a valid and necessary goal to begin by asking: what most likely was the author intending to communicate through the text?

This could also even account for saying that we looked for the possible response where an author might say when confronted with an interpretation, although again we don't have the biblical authors consult, but certainly the case could be the same with biblical authors, there may be the instances where an author might say, "I did not intend that, but, now that I see it, it does make sense of the text. I would accept that as a valid interpretation of my reading." But even then a reading would still have to be consistent with the text, the grammar, the wording, the structure of the text, what we can know about the author, what we can know about the readers and the historical circumstances in which it was produced.

Concluding Remarks on Author's Intention

Let me make just a handful of concluding observations about author's intention as it relates to hermeneutics or as it relates to biblical interpretation. So first of all, as far as additional reflections, the author's intention then means that not just anything goes when it comes to interpretation but even where there is disagreement one still is seeking to uncover, as much as possible, the probable intention of the author.

So, for example, to interpret Jesus' parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16 as about elephants, giraffes or something like that is clearly outside of bounds of what could have been intended by the author given the background text. That's very extreme and silly example but just to show that there are boundaries. Even some would say the author's intention is not necessary or valid would still want to find boundaries that Luke's parables are not about elephants, giraffes or something like that but is to be understood more consistently with what one finds in the text.

Number two, it is important to realize that author's intention is not to revert to the idea going back to the romantic ideal of the blank text or the enlightened ideal of pure induction and the ability to arrive at meaning based on simply a rational inductive

method, that is not the goal of author's intent. But it is also to realize starting with Kant and others that we do approach texts with presuppositions and predispositions. None of us come to the text with a blank mind. None of us comes with as a blank slate simply waiting to be inscribed upon. None of us are dry sponges simply waiting to objectively soak up data so that our interpretation corresponds in a one-to-one and perfect manner with the meaning of the text itself. Most, I think, would realize that that goal is probably unachievable and probably illegitimate. However, that does not mean that we are therefore relegated to an interpretive free-for-all or anything goes, but instead, our presuppositions, our theological beliefs, our faith, our cultural background can all be subject to the text and challenged by the text which makes it impossible may be exhaustively or perfectly to recover being meaning of the text but we can still uncover the author's intention substantially and adequately.

Number three, the person that says I just sit down and read the text objectively is probably in the worst position to understand text and is probably in more danger of distorting text because by saying something like that they come unaware of how their own prior beliefs, experiences and predispositions might influence the text. The person that begins with and brings their presuppositions in their baggage and all they are to the text is probably in a better position to deal with them as opposed to the person thinks that somehow they can come the text completely objectively and is therefore unaware of how their presuppositions and beliefs are influencing the way they read and interpret the text.

Then fourth, interpretation, especially in light of the author's intention, is not to conceive of the interpreter as merely a passive observer of the text. But instead, the reader, the interpreter is active and creative in discovering meaning. The interpreter is active in skillfully applying methods of interpretation to the text. The reader does have to interpret the text, and read it, and make sense of it. We are not just sponges waiting to soak up data. But instead, we must read the text and apply the methods of interpretation creatively and think about the text and in order to arrive at the probable understanding of the author's intention. We enter into a dialogue with a text in allowing it to challenge us and change us and reveal its meaning to us.

So what might this look like just quickly, by way of summary, considering the author's intention, our means of examining the text and its ancient context. We talked of about this in connection with the historical critical method. It means learning everything we can about the author, his circumstances and background. It means learning what we can about the readers, their circumstances and background. It means learning about their environment--the historical, cultural and political environment--out of which the text grew. It means looking at the words in light of what they would have meant during the time of the writing of the text. It means looking at the grammar of the text. It means looking at the way the text is structured. We must look at all this, for an interpretation to be valid. It must fit these criteria. For an interpretation to be valid it must make sense of what is known about the author. It must make sense of what is known about the readers. It must make sense of the historical background circumstances out of which the text was produced. It must make sense of the grammar of the text, the wording and structure of the text and the way it is put together. Any interpretation that is to be plausible must fit these criteria. So what can be justified from the text itself and what can be known about the author, readers and their circumstances is the question that is necessary to ask in order to validate our interpretation.

So given some of these qualifications, and given this discussion, I will proceed with the assumption that it is valid to start with and to seek the author's intended meaning. Again not that we're reading the author's mind or trying to uncover the author's thought process, we realize there are difficulties because of historical distances and because of possibilities of not communicating as clearly as one wants or the possibility of readers misunderstanding. We must recognize that we don't have the original author to consult, but even given all that, and realizing that we cannot recover the author's intention perfectly or exhaustively, does not mean we cannot do so substantially and adequately. Given those qualifications the author's intention is indeed a worthy and, I think, necessary goal in our interpretation.

Text Centered Approaches

Now, what I want to do this is move on to make a larger jump through our journey, through the process and methods of interpretation and hermeneutics. We've been focusing on the last few sessions on historical oriented approaches. We have focused on historical criticism and within historical criticism some of the other criticisms that developed: source, form, and redaction criticism. We have looked at the author's intention, those are usually seen as attempts to locate meaning or to locate the activity of interpretation behind the text, looking at the historical production of the text.

Now I want to focus our attention on looking at the text itself as the focus of meaning or looking within the text, that is, text centered approaches to interpretation. So we looked at historically oriented approaches or author centered approaches, now we want to look at text centered approaches to interpretation. In doing so we'll look at a variety of methods. One or two of them have not completely cut their ties with authors and history but in that they still focus mainly on the text as a finished product I will include those as well. But I wanted to examine a number of approaches that seem to be interested exclusively in looking at the text itself as the object of interpretation and the center of meaning.

Now due to some of the shortcomings of author oriented approaches or author's intention some that we mentioned just a little bit ago in our discussion of author 's intention, because of some of the shortcomings or objections to author centered approaches to interpretation again historically and logically you can see how hermeneutics has generally moved from historical and author oriented approaches to text oriented approaches and then the next stage will be reader oriented approaches. Historically and logically that's often how hermeneutics has moved both in literary studies and literary disciplines outside of biblical studies, but also in biblical studies.

As kind of another aside, one thing you'll see is biblical studies tends to lag behind literary studies. So what is often done in developing literary studies or even reader approaches, biblical studies usually catches up sooner or later and starts to implement some of those approaches.

So I want to get at some text centered approaches to hermeneutics or biblical interpretation that are approaches that find meaning centered in the text itself. Usually, again, based on some of the shortcomings of author centered approaches attention has now turned to the text itself. This is again especially found in literary approaches or in literary criticism. If you have ever taken a course in a university setting in literary criticism, those similar types of approaches have now been applied to biblical studies.

Observations on Text or Literary Centered Approaches

Just a handful of observations related to literary approaches or text centered approaches. Again my point isn't to spend a lot of time developing a literary approach and defining exactly what it was is, but more to introduce you to some characteristics of literary approaches to the Old and New Testament and biblical literature. First of all, literary approaches, especially as text centered approaches developed, often rejected the author as the center of interpretation. This is related to the second observation in that the text alone then is the sole guide of meaning and the sole guide for understanding. It has been cut off from its author and now text has a life of its own. So some interpreters are only interested in the structure of the text itself. Irrespective of the author who produced or the history that produced it, they consider the text as it stands. So, historical approaches more looked at the historical production of the text as the author and the historical circumstances that produced the text, where literary studies see the authority in the text itself as the guide to understanding. So the text alone is the sole guide to meaning. It has been cut off from the author to become a free-floating entity, an autonomous text.

A third characteristic of literary and text centered approaches is that they pay attention to the formal features and structures of the text. They often focus on the final form of the text. They are frequently uninterested in any sources or forms that proceed as they usually focus on the final form of the text as it stands. They are not interested in isolating forms or uncovering sources behind the text.

A fourth characteristic especially related to biblical studies is they tend to treat the Bible as literature, that is, they're asking the same questions that they would of any other literary text, the same kind of questions often asked in courses on literary criticism of a text that one might find a university literature course setting, for example.

The fifth and final characteristic is that historical questions are often bracketed. Again the text is seen as a self-contained unit and the only world that is important is the world that is contained in the text the world that is found in the text. It's not as concerned with the world outside of the text. Literary texts are often seen as self-referential in the world created by the text itself and the world that it refers to outside of the text. So you often see literary studies uninterested in whether a certain character in a narrative was historical or not, or whether a certain event actually happened. They are not interested in that. They're simply interested in the narrative structure itself and the structure of the world found in the text, not some world outside of the text that the text might refer to. So often then historical questions are bracketed and the text is seen is a self-referring, self-contained unit.

Literary Approaches

But within this there are a wide variety of approaches. I want just to give you an example of a handful of approaches that I'm going to place very broadly under literary approaches or more broadly under text centered approaches. Usually literary approaches to the Old and New Testaments are seen to emerge in with what is known as formalism, or the new criticism that actually emerged in the 1920's. Again, as I've said often biblical studies plays the role of catching up to what is done in other disciplines. But formalism or the new criticism is often what most people think when they think of literary criticism whether it is of any other text or a biblical text. Again, the characteristic features of formalism were that the text is sufficient for producing meaning. The text is self-sufficient. It is autonomous. It is disconnected from the author. So it does not ask questions about the author and why the author wrote and the historical circumstances that produced it. The text is sufficient itself for producing meaning.

Second, historical matters are usually bracketed. Again, we mentioned this before because again the world of the text is self-referential. It is contained within the text. They are not interested in the world outside of the text to which the text might refer. Formalism also gives attention to aesthetic and literary artistry. In other words, it means for biblical studies treating text in the same way that any other text would be treated.

So, for example, one might treat a biblical narrative such as the text of Job, one might read the book of Job and not be concerned about issues of authorship as far as who wrote the book or issues of date or place of writing. One would not be interested in the question of whether Job was a real historical person or not, or whether the events of the book records were events that actually occurred or whether the friends that counsel him are real or not. One would not be concerned with whether they were real speakers but rather one would only be concerned with the literary artistry and literary structure of the text itself and the effect that has on the reader and how characters are portrayed within the text itself and how they relate to each other, the plot of the story, the main point of view, and questions such as that. They are the same kind of questions one would ask of any work of literature.

For obvious reasons this approach did catch on in narrative and also poetic texts in the Old Testament particularly poetic texts. Narrative texts in the New Testament Gospels and narrative forms such as parables were the logical place this would catch on. Perhaps one subset or one type of formalism or literary criticism is what is known as narrative criticism. We'll talk a little bit about that as well in relationship to the Old and New Testaments. Just to give a couple of examples very, very briefly, again I'll give a little more attention to the New Testament for reasons that I have stated before.

Old Testament Example

Within the Old Testament, for example, Genesis one and two, and I'll use a couple examples to compare how a treatment of them in a literary approach might compare or contrast with how they might been treated under more historically oriented approaches,

for example. So with the Old Testament we talked briefly about Genesis 1-2 and the juxtaposing of two accounts of the creation narrative because of differences in style, vocabulary and perspective. An older historically oriented approach would ask the question of what sources lie behind those two creation stories. It may even go further and ask about the date and the setting of those two stories. But the attempt would have been to reconstruct the sources that lie behind the two accounts of the creation in Genesis 1-2 and assigning them to the right sources, the J source or the E source or whatever, that lie behind the story of creation in Genesis 1-2.

A narrative approach or a literary approach to this text would point out unity of the text. Interestingly, the same data that source critics will use to dissect the document might be used by literary critics to demonstrate the unity of it and the inner workings of the text. So a literary approach would emphasize the literary unity of the text. It might seize upon the themes of water, creator and the land and sea and cursing and blessing, and the role they play in Genesis 1-2 as well as in the rest of the book. It will do that instead of asking questions about what this text might say regarding the actual creation. Did God create the world in seven literal days or was this longer, a day age or a gap theory? What does this say ontologically about the actual process of creation historically? A literary critic might examine these themes and how they function and again examine the literary artistry of the text instead of asking questions about the author putting together sources or whether this corresponds to the actual creation of the universe a literary approach would look at the text as a literary unity and looking at the structure and the inner workings of the text itself.

Another example to use a shorter example is the book of Ruth. One might examine the book of Ruth by reading it simply as a story not asking questions again of the historicity of the characters and asking questions of any sources that may have been utilized or asking questions of how this text functioned historically. Instead they might ask questions about the plot of the story, the development of the characters, and read the story for its aesthetic effect on the reader. Again those are often the traditional kinds of questions now asked within the context of literary criticism.

So I could multiply examples in the Old Testament especially in the narrative texts that are examined through the eyes of literary criticism or formalism. Again, they simply look at the text as a piece of literature, asking questions about its structure, its development, looking at it as a self-contained, world in the text, not so much the world outside of the text, bracketing questions of history etc. just looking at it as a piece of literature.

New Testament Literary Approaches

It in the New Testament literary criticism also caught on primarily in the Gospels, though literary criticism has ranged outside of the narrative literature and the Gospels. I want to look a little bit at the Gospels later on when we talk about narrative criticism. But let me mention one example of literary criticism in the New Testament. One that we already have referred to is the parables of Jesus. We suggested that the parables of Jesus could be seen as limited allegories, that is, as stories that have one, two or three main meanings according to the main characters within the story. Parables seem to have been a fruitful field of study for literary criticism because parables do seem to be fictional stories, that is, although they are often realistic. Jesus never claims that he's telling stories that actually happened historically, but seems to be drawing on common stories to communicate truths about his teaching, his ministry and the kingdom of God.

Literary criticism though pays careful attention to things like the structure and the aesthetics of the parables. For example, we have already seen that the parables can be examined according to whether they are monadic, that is, with one main character, dyadic with two main or a pair of characters, or triadic, with three main characters. Sometimes even when you have three main characters another question literary critics ask is whether the characters all play identical roles, or whether you have a mediating figure with two other characters on the same level of authority, or whether the structures are more vertical where you have an authority figure and other figures under that person such as a master with servants. So they ask questions about the structure of the parable; how the characters function and how they are put together.

Some ask questions about the aesthetic nature of the parables. It is interesting that many of the parables include unrealistic elements in them. We've already seen it in the parable of the Prodigal Son. It's unrealistic that a father of the nature of the father in the first century would've run out to greet his son. So sometimes the parables are seen to have a punch line and to have aesthetic effect and appeal as the parable is read. Sometimes the parable is labeled as to whether they are tragic or comic, that is, whether the plot of the parable rises and the falls where that would be a tragic with the main character meeting a tragic end; or whether the parable dips down to have a seemingly sad element to it, but then it rises to have a positive ending for the hero of the story. So parables are often categorized as to whether they are more comic or tragic. So literary criticism at least with parables can often help us see where the main points lie, to see how the story is structured, and how it works and creates an effect on the readers as well.

What I want to do in the next session is look at one more example in New Testament of literary criticism, but also move on to a more specific feature of literary criticism known as narrative criticism and examine what that is and what that does, how it has been used and how it can help interpreting narrative literature in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Transcribed by Ted Hildebrandt
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 13

Narrative Criticism

Literary Criticism

When thinking about literary criticism and the Old and New Testament, we looked at some of the characteristic features in the last section of literary criticism, and the primary point to try to get across is that literary criticism is a text center approach that traditionally has found meaning located in the text itself, at times bracketing historical questions as far as authorship, sources, forms, the historical context, and even the external world outside the text in exchange for a focus on the world inside the text, and looking at the text solely in its structure, and its inner workings as determinative of meaning.

New Testament Literary Criticism Example: Romans 1-8

We've looked at a number of examples in the Old and New Testament as far as what kind of questions the literary approach might ask and what types of conclusions and results might come about from that as well. To give one more example, we ended by looking at the parables as an example of how literary criticism might work analyzing the parables as fictional literature and analyzing it in terms of the structure of the parables, the characters, and main features within them. But, to give one more example, interestingly, to go outside of narrative, and look at an example from an epistle, one individual named, Gustav Freytag, has suggested that Romans chapters one through eight, he uses an example from Paul's letters. Freytag has suggested that we can break Romans one through eight down into a five-part drama. He analyzes Romans from the perspective of a drama and he suggests for example, that chapter one, verses sixteen through seventeen, which we usually see as the theme of the letter, when Paul introduces justification by faith, he suggests is sort of the "in sighting action," the initial action of the drama. Then, in Romans 1:18 all the way through chapters 4:25, he sees as the increasing tension. Then chapter five is the climactic turning point of the narrative, and chapters six and seven is the falling action. Finally, chapter eight is the resolution of the

drama.

So, Freytag sees Romans chapters one through eight as being able to be analyzed, not just according to the common conventions of a first century letter, but he analyzes it according to a drama. One interesting feature of his analysis is the suggestion that chapter five is the turning point of the letter, while some modern outlines of Romans see a new section beginning at chapter six, with chapters one through five dealing with justification and chapters six through eight dealing with sanctification. But according to this analysis, chapter five, is the main focal point, the main point, beginning a new section of Romans chapters one through eight.

In contrast you see chapter three, or perhaps chapter eight as the main section and point of the letter. So this is one example of an attempt that in some respects is somewhat intriguing and compelling of applying dramatic literary elements to a New Testament epistle.

Evaluation of Literary Criticism

So, having looked at a number of approaches, literary approaches, to Old and New Testament texts as examples, let me just in conclusion, mention a couple of issues in applying literary analysis to biblical text. First of all, is the issue of imposing modern structures or simply imposing structures or categories on the ancient text that may or may not belong there. Certainly it is not objectionable, in and of itself, but still, our understanding, our literary analysis of the text must be grounded in the text itself, rather than imposing structures or imposing categories on the text that really don't fit and don't work. So, number one, be aware of imposing, or those who impose modern structures and categories on ancient texts. Any structures or categories must be grounded and arise from the text itself.

A second issue to be aware of is the danger of ignoring the historical and theological dimensions of the text. As we have seen, sometimes literary criticism tends to bracket, or even jettison historical issues or historical questions related to authorship and the historical cultural background of a text which was produced. Issues of referentiality outside of the text, especially for Christians who claim that the Bible

records God's redemptive activity in history and dealing with people in a historical context and revealing himself in historical acts, historical and theological questions cannot be ignored. So, literary criticism has much value in that it deals with the text itself, in that it forces us to pay close attention to the text rather than hypothetical reconstructions behind the text, or focusing on our own theological agenda. Literary criticism allows us to encounter the text in new ways; it allows us to be in touch with the text itself. But at the same time we need to be aware that it is simply one facet of the "hermeneutical enterprise" in that historical and theological questions must also be considered and cannot be ignored.

Narrative Criticism: Introduction

Now, one perhaps, subset, facet of literary criticism, more specifically would be narrative criticism. Narrative criticism again is the study of a narrative text from the standpoint of the kinds of questions that one would ask of any narrative literature in literary type studies. It asks the question of what the plot is of the story. It asks questions about the characters, how the characters are portrayed, how they develop, how they interact with each other. It asks about things like the story time as opposed to narrative time, and asks questions about the point of view of the narrative. These kinds of questions have also been applied to biblical texts. For example, one common, explanation of the text from a narrative standpoint is to talk about instead of traditional categories of the author, the historical author's circumstances and who are the readers, is to frame it in terms of the narrator and the narratees [those receiving the narrative as readers or addressees]. That is, the narrator would be the person telling the story in the text, not necessarily referring to the historical author, but who is narrating the voice of the text itself. Then the naratees are those who are hearing the text, that is, the person that is to be identified with the person who is being told the story or the narrative. Things like "point of view," would be the perspective the author takes on the events, what is the perspective of the author as he tells the story and as he narrates the events? Then, one of the more interesting ones, and significant ones, is the plot of the story. Most narratives, in terms of narrative criticism, are usually seen as moving along a plot that begins with

the introduction or the setting that introduces one to the main characters, and introduces one to the story, it's the "in sighting action" of the story. The next element beyond the introduction or the setting would be the conflict or the crisis in the text. Then third, that causes a rising tension; there is a rising tension in the story that then reaches a climax, which then experiences a resolution. The resolution then brings the solution to the rising tension that is created by this climax or this crisis. Then the conclusion, which simply ties together all of the lose threads, and brings the story to its proper end.

So Old and New Testament narratives then, in particular, have been studied from the standpoint of the literary workings of the text. Again, asking some of these questions about the narrator and the narratees, and the plot of the story, and the characters, how they develop, and how they are presented, and how they interact with each other? Again, it is sometimes at the expense of bracketing historical questions and historical concerns as well, though again that's not necessarily the intent of this method, but often accompanies it.

Examples of Narrative Criticism

Once again, let me give you some examples of the usage of narrative criticism in analyzing biblical texts. First of all, to give you an Old Testament example, let me give you one from Genesis chapter 22, the well-known Akedah, the sacrifice of Isaac, or the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22:1-18. As the story goes, God comes to Abraham and asks him to take Isaac and present him as a sacrifice. Abraham does that, and he takes Isaac up into the mountains. Isaac himself wonders, "Where in the world, where are we going to find the sacrifice…the wood, we're all ready to go, where is the animal for sacrifice?" Abraham ties up Isaac and puts him in the altar, and is ready to let the knife fall, and an angel, the voice of the LORD stops him, and God then provides a ram for the sacrifice. The story concludes there.

One can analyze this according to the narrative technique, especially plot. For example, the exposition, or the setting, is found in verse one, where the narrator clearly indicates God's intention to test Abraham. So, this entire story at the very outset, at the very beginning, is intended to indicate that God is testing Abraham in the rest of the

story. The crisis arises in verse two where God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Now, to most of us, that might not seem like a crisis, except for the fact that we might interpret the crisis more existentially or psychologically. The difficulty is that Abraham is being called to execute his own son. How would we feel if we were called upon to take the life of one of our children? So we see this problem as mainly, sort of and existential one, which no doubt has some of those dimensions. But, when you look at the larger context of Genesis, the primary difficulty here is that this is a threat to God's promise. Isaac is not just Abraham's son, Isaac is the promised seed, the continuation of God's promise, and now, Abraham is being told to kill the promise. So in this story, the crisis is a threat to the very promise of God.

The rising tension occurs then in verses three through ten, where Abraham responds in obedience. He is going to go ahead and kill the promise. Again, even Isaac asks about the ram that is going to be slaughtered, "where is the animal that is to be slaughtered?" which makes the story even more intense. The tension rises to the point that Abraham has the knife raised above his head, and then comes the resolution in verses 11-14, where God stops Abraham from dealing the death blow and then provides an animal to be sacrificed. Then verses 15-19 are the conclusion, the promise of God. God's promise and blessing to Abraham is reaffirmed and then the story comes to its conclusion. That is more of a micro level, just one section of the book. Even entire books could be analyzed according to typical narrative structures such as its setting, a crisis, followed by a rising tension, reaches a climax, followed by a resolution to the tension, and finally a conclusion to the narrative.

One can also analyze Old Testament characters in a variety of ways. Some narrative critics have expressed interest in classifying characters as to whether they are round characters that develop fully even as they describe their physical characteristics as well as their psychological characteristics, or whether they are flat characters that don't get much development at all. Some are comic characters, and by comic characters we don't mean necessarily that they make you laugh, but comic meaning that the story has a happy ending or a positive ending in terms of the character. Whether the character is a

tragic one, that is, the story takes a down turn where the character meets a negative or a tragic end. Again, is the character is a main character or a peripheral one? Scholars have shown interest in analyzing characters according to those perspectives: how the characters relate to one another and whether the character is a foil.

For example, in the story of Elisha, the Elisha narrative in the Old Testament, some scholars have characterized him as a round character and a round figure because he is described and develops rather than being static. Saul is often deemed a tragic figure, in that Saul's career seems to have an upward turn, but in the end seems to take a tragic down turn. In the story of David and Goliath, when you read the narrative more carefully, the real conflict is not between David and Goliath, the real conflict is between David and Saul. Goliath seems to be a foil that both David and Saul confront. Saul clearly is the king of Israel and in charge of the army. Goliath is Saul's problem and Saul does not know what to do. Saul is portrayed as responding in fear and not knowing what to do, but when David confronts Goliath, with God's help, David slays the arch enemy of Israel. Goliath is really a foil to highlight the true conflict between David and Saul. So, the real story is not about David and Goliath, it is about David and Saul.

So, I wanted to look at a number of Old Testament texts and apply the characteristic methodology of analyzing it in terms of common narrative features, such as plot, and characterization, and point of view, narrator, narratees, etc.

New Testament Examples of Narrative Criticism

To give a couple of New Testament examples, we've already looked at the parables, so I don't intend to go into any more detail there necessarily. A lot of fruitful narrative work has been done in analyzing, especially entirety of Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But again, even parables, as we've said, could be analyzed according to their plot whether they have one main character, or two, or three, and how they interact. Parables have often been analyzed in terms of the "U-shaped" plot. Whether they are comic, or whether they are tragic, that is the plot takes a downward turn. Several have analyzed parables according to that perspective. One of the earliest attempts to apply narrative criticism, or analyze the gospel from the narrative or story

perspective was an interesting book that has been updated, but was produced by three individuals named Rhoads, Dewey and Michie. They produced a book called, *Mark as Story*. And what is interesting about this book is that it is co-written by a scholar and an English professor and scholar. They demonstrate that Mark is a consistent story, with a consistent plot, and consistent characterization, and they apply some of the methods of narrative criticism and story analysis to the gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Matthew could be seen as developing along the lines of growing hostility. There seems to be a rising tension or a plot that emphasizes the growing hostility between the religious leaders and Jesus himself. Beginning all the way back in chapter two, where Herod tries to stamp out Jesus, from that point on, the plot increases and the tension develops, as again, the religious leaders increasingly become more hostile towards Jesus. The narrative of Matthew seems to be structured, among other things, to emphasize this.

Characters in John: Barabbas

In the gospel of John, Jesus functions, obviously as the primary protagonist, or sort of the hero of the gospel. The rest of the story has to do with how Jesus interacts and relates with a number of other people. Jesus is portrayed as interacting and relating with God himself. Jesus is portrayed as interacting and relating to the disciples, and interacting and relating to the Jewish leaders, and other minor characters including Satan himself. The Gospel revolves around the responses either acceptable or unacceptable to Jesus. Jesus' character is spelled out in relation to his interactions with other characters in the Gospel. Then, it draws attention to the different responses, especially in the sections of chapters seven, eight, and nine of John, featuring the different responses of Jesus that call the leaders to align with. It asks the readers to align with appropriate responses in light of the consequences of those responses.

So, one can examine the characters of the Gospels. At this point, I'll slow down, and talk about that just a little more. In terms of demonstrating how a couple of the characters function in the gospel of John. Actually, both of them are relatively minor characters. The first character that I want to discuss, is probably the most minor

character, or at least gets the least attention in the Gospel, and doesn't appear to play a significant role, and that is the character of Barabbas, who actually occurs in all three Gospels. But, it's interesting the role that he plays in John. One of the ways to examine characters in literature, especially in the Gospels that I think is helpful is to examine their function in the broader discourse by noting what role the author gives them grammatically in the text. That is, to ask questions like this: Does a character play a significant role throughout the entire work or does the character only emerge in one place? Does the character emerge all throughout the Gospel, such as Jesus, or the religious leaders, and the disciples?" These are obviously major characters and major players in the Gospels. Or, does the character only emerge a couple of times only in specific places in the Gospel?

Second, when the character is mentioned, how is the character referred to? Is the character the subject, the subject of verbs? Is the character presented as actually performing the action of verbs? Or is the character only the object? Is he acted upon by someone else or does he do his own action? If he is the subject of a verb, is he the subject of only verbs of "being" that identify him? Like, "Barabbas is…" or "Barabbas was an insurrectionist" or "Barabbas was a robber…" That word, "was" is not an action he performed, it is simply an action that identifies who he is. Or again, is the actor a subject of a verb of action? Is the actor actually doing something in the narrative? Or again, is the actor only referred to as an object of a verb, or a modifier of something else. Again, is the actor merely referred to in speech of another individual as opposed to being an actual participant in the narrative? Again, what type of actions are associated with the character or participant? Are action type verbs? Are they doing things or are they only being linked to a verb that identifies who they are. Adding all of that up, one can begin to understand what role the person plays. You find Barabbas mentioned only a couple of times in the Gospels, in the Gospel of John. What is interesting is that very little is said about him. We find in verse 40 when Jesus is on trial, the crowd is asked by Pilate, "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" And verse 40 is the response of the crowd. They shouted back, "No, not him, give us Barabbas!" And the author says,

"Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion."

Now this is a little bit easier to tell in terms of the function. Number one, you will notice that Barabbas never occurs anywhere else in the narrative. Furthermore, notice how he is referred to. First of all, he is the object of the verb, "give", and second, when Barabbas is the subject, he's the subject of a verb of being. He's simply identified. The text says, "Now Barabbas was a rebel, or a robber," there are different ways to translate that, but the point is that Barabbas doesn't seem to do anything. He's not developed, he is not an actor in the narrative, he is only mentioned by way of identifying who he is, and he is only mentioned as the object of a verb.

So, in conclusion, Barabbas does not appear to be a significant person in the narrative. Instead, he probably stands as a foil. Number one, to further emphasize the innocence of Jesus that the crowd would prefer an insurrectionist, a robber, a rebel, that they would prefer him to be freed over Jesus, whose innocence is clearly demonstrated in chapter 18. So the irony is that they would prefer the death of an innocent person over the death of a person that is an insurrectionist rebel.

But, second, Barabbas also seems to, by calling him an insurrectionist rebel, the difficulty is the crowds then, by asking for his release, seem to fall in that same category. That is, they now also become involved in this illegitimate plot. They become involved in what is an illegal activity. Not just Barabbas, but the crowd is now participating in this. So when you look at chapter 18, Pilate, the crowds, and Jesus, seem to be the main characters. Barabbas is only a minor character that again, only emerges in this section and doesn't play any roles as far as performing actions. He's actually the object of a speech. He is embedded in a speech, and even in that speech, he is an object of a verb. He's not doing anything. Then when John mentions his name again, it is simply to identify his character.

So, in looking at characters and how they seem to be referred to, the different participants and how they seem to be referred to in the text, says much about how the author sees them functioning.

Satan/The Devil/The ruler of this World in John

Another example of a character in John that I have been working on is Satan, or "the devil", and how he is characterized throughout the Gospel of John. At first glance, it may appear that Satan plays a rather intense role and rather significant role in the gospel of John. He is referred to several times in several crucial places. But, once again, what we need to do is ask the question, how is the character of Satan or the Devil referred to? There is one term that is used to refer to the same individual, "the ruler of this world" three times. Actually he is called "the Devil" three times, and "Satan" one time, and then "the ruler of this world" three more times. So seven times in all, Satan is referred to. So Satan does not overtly get mentioned frequently in the Gospels which might suggest he is not a main character or primary character.

But second, it is important to notice how he is referred to. Number one is to notice, in a text like John 6:70. Then, this is the first time that we see the mention of the name, "Devil" or "Satan", and Jesus replies, Peter has just told Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of life." And then Jesus says, "Have I not chosen you [the twelve], yet one of you is a devil." Or it could even be translated, "One of you is the devil." Jesus is referring to Judas. Again, what is interesting to note here is that Judas is identified as a devil. The devil does not play a role here in doing anything or performing any actions, but he simply is a term used to identify Judas. Furthermore, the devil is couched in a speech of Jesus. So again, the devil plays no part in the narrative except to identify Judas.

The next place that he is mentioned is in John 8:44, where Jesus is in conflict with the Pharisees. The question gets raised in a context of different responses appropriate, and inappropriate to Jesus. Now, Jesus, in his high point with his discussion or debate with the Pharisees, is found in verse 44 with the question of, "Who is the true father of the Pharisees?" Jesus is working with a common idea or metaphor that one's origin determines one's character. The Pharisees are claiming, "We are children of Abraham". Notice what Jesus says in verse 44. "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to

the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks in his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Again, what I want you to note is that the Devil is referred to here several times as "the Devil," as "the father," but also with pronouns such as "he" and "him." Then again, I want you to notice that in the narrative, Satan doesn't do anything. He is simply characterized as the father of the Pharisees. Even when it does describe him, once again, it's identifying him as a murderer. When he does do something, he speaks lies. But again, all of this is embedded within a speech of Jesus. So if Satan isn't doing anything, Jesus is simply referring to him and talking about him in a way to demonstrate the true source of his conflict with the religious leaders, with the Pharisees. So, here, Satan primarily plays the role of inciting or instigating the activities of the Pharisees, or the religious leaders.

If you read the context more clearly, the problem with the Pharisees is that they refuse to listen to Jesus, who speaks truth, and they want to kill him. Because of those two activities, failing to believe the truth and wanting to kill Jesus, Jesus can say, "You are of your father the Devil who is a liar and who is a murderer." So, Satan functions here, not as a main character in the narrative, but to demonstrate the true source behind the main participants, the main actors, who are the religious leaders or the Pharisees.

Satan is referred to as "the devil" in a couple of other places. In chapter 13 verse 2, the evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot's desire to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that God the Father put all things under his power. Here the devil is again mentioned, not as a primary actor in the narrative, and notice again, that he is presented in relationship to Judas. He has already influenced Judas. But, again, the main character in this story is Jesus. Grammatically, this statement about saying the devil is already prompting Judas, is simply a backdrop to what Jesus does in verse four. In verse four, Jesus is going to take a towel and wash the disciple's feet. So, once again, Satan plays a rather minor role and an insignificant role in the narrative. Again, not that he is an unimportant or not important himself theologically, but we are asking, what role did he play in the narrative? How does Satan function? How is he referred to? How does the author present him as acting in the story and in the

narrative?

The last place that Satan is referred to is in verse 27, towards the end of the sentence, in the same story, after Jesus had washed the disciple's feet, and after his betrayal. In verse 26 Jesus answers when they ask, "Who is going to betray you?" Jesus says, "It is the one whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him." This is the first place where Satan is a subject of a verb of action or doing. This is the first and only place that he actually does anything in the whole Gospel of John. Everywhere else until this point, Satan has simply been referred to in speech by Jesus. Or, in verses 15, he is identified with Judas as a backdrop for Jesus performing the action of washing his disciple's feet. Now for the first time, Satan actually does something.

Now, Satan is referred to three more times throughout the Gospel with another designation or phrase, and that is, "the ruler of this world." Satan is three times referred to as, "the ruler" and some translations have, "the prince of this world." So, for example, chapter 12 verse 31, Jesus said, "this voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out." The "prince of this world" or "ruler of this world" is referring to Satan. He is referred to twice more in chapter 14 and then twice more in chapter 16 verse 11 in regards to judgment because the "ruler of this world" or "the prince of this world," Satan, now stands condemned.

Now, what is intriguing, again, is that in all of these instances where Satan is called, "the ruler of this world" or labeled, "ruler of this world", first of all, note again that all of these names, all of these references as Satan as the "ruler of this world," occur in the speech of Jesus. They are embedded in the speech of Jesus. So again, in the narrative, the "ruler of the world," does not do anything. He is simply referred to in the speech of Jesus. And furthermore, in all of the references to "ruler of the world," Satan is portrayed as being judged. He is the one, he is rendered powerless. In all of these references, he now stands condemned, or he now stands judged. He is a defeated foe.

What is interesting, number one, notice the irony of how Satan is portrayed. The very thing that Satan insights other people to do, like Judas, and the other religious leaders that betray and kill Jesus, that ironically, turns out to be Satan's judgment and his downfall. So, in these cases where Jesus refers to Satan as "already being judged," or "now the prince or ruler of this world is condemned or judged," that's because that's in a context of reference to Jesus' death and his glorification. So, ironically, the very act of Satan, remember we saw the very reference to the devil or Satan is in connection to Satan entering and influencing Judas and being the father, the true source, the origin of the murderous, deceitful activities of the religious leaders, the very thing that Satan does, turns out ironically to be his downfall and his judgment.

But another interesting thing, notice that in the names there is a pattern in the way that Satan is presented. When Satan is called, "the devil," or the one time that he is called "Satan," it's always with reference, with relationship, to other human actors, namely, Judas and the other religious leaders. So, when Satan is discussed in relationship to other human actors, such as Judas and the other religious leaders, he is depicted as Satan and the Devil and that seems to be a very apt correlation. The devil, meaning "the accuser," or Satan, meaning "the adversary" and "enemy." This is the role of Satan. Probably both the words "devil" and "Satan" stem from, according to the text of Revelation 12 verses 9, the creation narrative in Genesis chapter three, where Satan deceived, and killed, and brought death to Adam and Eve. So now, Satan or the Devil is an appropriate name to use for Satan's activity of inciting or influencing Judas and the religious leaders to believe a lie and to kill Jesus.

It's interesting though, that whenever you find Satan in relationship to God or Jesus; he is referred to as, "the ruler of the world" or "the prince of the world" probably for a couple of reasons. Number one, the issue is one of: who is really in control? Who is truly the king of the world? There is a cosmic battle or cosmic conflict, and now, Satan, as "the ruler of this world" bows to another ruler and is defeated and rendered powerless by another ruler, who is Jesus. So, the issue is one of power and one of kingship, so Satan is described as "the ruler of this world." Also, perhaps, the tittle is

used because several times, Jesus is described as "not of this world" and Satan is seen in contrast as, "ruler of this world." So, even the ways the names are used, there is a pattern. When Satan is seen as interacting with and in relation to human beings, as in Judas and the religious leaders, he is portrayed as Satan or the devil who deceives them or incites them to believe a lie and to murder. When he is depicted in relationship to God or Jesus, other supernatural beings, he is depicted as, "the ruler of this world." That demonstrates his defeat, his loss of power, and his bowing to another ruler, and his losing the cosmic war and the cosmic battle.

So, by looking at the way that a character is portrayed in a gospel, even grammatically, what role they play, if they are a subject, if they are actually doing action, or are they merely the objects of verbs, merely identified, are they merely modifying something else, are they embedded in the speech of someone else, or are they actually playing a role in the narrative? How frequently across a narrative does a person emerge? All of that indicates a role that an actor or participant plays. Based on that in John, I would conclude that Satan, although important, is a minor character as far as the role that he plays in the narrative. That doesn't mean that he is minor theologically, or he is minor in his influence or importance, it means that in the narrative as far as how he is portrayed in acting and as a participant, he plays more of a supporting role in inciting and deceiving other human actors into killing Jesus rather than playing a major role in acting throughout the narrative itself.

So, narrative criticism can frequently tell us about how characters function, how the plot of the story might be put together, the point of view of the author, and all of that again helping us come to grips with the text itself. How might the text be working? What might be the author's strategy in communicating?

Narrative Criticism and Modern Movies

As kind of an aside, not to get too carried away with it, but one interesting thing that is interesting in and of itself in comparison to how narrative works, but what also might be significant in helping persons understand how stories and narratives work, is often to watch movies. Notice how the plot develops in movies, how the characters are

portrayed, how there is often rising tension and it gets resolved, and how then the story is brought to a conclusion. How do things like characterization or type scenes or repetition or important and crucial speeches all function to reveal the significance of a narrative or a story?

One movie that I think of, and hopefully some of you can identify with is, this is an older movie, but my wife and I were first dating, the very first movie we went to was a movie called, "Back to the Future" I think there are three of them now, Back to the Future I, II and III. But it's a story of a teenager, portrayed by Michael J Foxx; some of you are familiar with him. He actually travels in a time machine back in time, and certain things happen that threaten to undo and alter the course of time. So, he goes back in time, and fortunately he is able to rectify things, but when he comes back to the present after being in the past, he does see that things are altered, but in a rather surprising and pleasing way to him. But, one of the interesting things to understand about that movie is: what is the point of view of the narrative? What might be the main message, the main perspective and point of view of the story?

There are a few important things that happen in that movie. Number one, there are a couple phrases that get repeated two or three times right at the end, and that is, "you can do anything, if you just use your head." But, along with that, is if you watch the movie carefully, notice how many times this phrase is buttressed by scenes where the physical head is featured. Particularly, at the end of the story, the character who is played by Michael J Foxx, who is back in the past, he needs to get back into the present, and he is in a car, a DeLorean, that is able to do that, and the problem is that the DeLorean stalls. He needs to reach a certain speed, at a certain time, so that he can get transported back into the present, but the car stalls. So what does he do? He bangs his head on the steering wheel and the car starts. That type of scene, where the physical head is involved is featured several times throughout the movie. So, putting that all together, the main perspective or message that the movie is trying to communicate is that, "you can do anything, if you just use your head."

So, again, narrative works that way. By examining the plot, examining the way

characters are developed, how they act, by looking at crucial speeches and things that are repeated, asking the kinds of questions that you would of any narrative or story, is beneficial in having us come to grips with narrative literature.

Evaluation of Narrative Criticism

Now, let me end by just relating several issues regarding strengths and weaknesses of especially narrative type approaches to the Old and New Testament. First of all, as far as the strengths of narrative approaches, narrative approaches are helpful in that they pay close attention to the details of the text. In the past, especially for Evangelical scholars who hold to the Bible as the inspired word of God, which I do, narratives were seen as merely "containers" from which to extract the main truth. So narratives were seen in having value that you would mine it to pull out just what was the theological, propositional truth found in the narrative. But, narrative approaches help us to see that a narrative is not just a container of the truth, but communicates the truth itself. So, narrative approaches help us to pay attention to the details of the text, by looking at the plot, which is again the exposition and crisis, rising tension, the resolution, et cetera, how the characters are developed, et cetera. It helps us to focus on the details of the text. We've said that any approach that helps us focus on the detail of the text itself is to be welcomed, especially for those who hold the Bible as nothing less than the word of God, anything that brings us into contact with the details of the text.

A second value to the narrative approaches, is that they focus on the text as a whole, the final form of the text, rather than a preoccupation with the previous forms behind the text, or reconstructing the sources, whether hypothetical or not. Instead, once again, this is consistent with an understanding of inspiration. Narrative approaches help us focus on the text as a whole, the final form of the text, rather than dissecting it and asking about the origins and the sources, not that that cannot be valuable, but ultimately we finally have to deal with the final form of the text, the text as a whole as it stands. Narrative criticism can help us do that. In fact, sometimes, narrative criticism can help us see unity in the text where previously there was thought to be disunity, or conflicts, or contradictions, or maybe a kind of "scissors and paste" kind of origin of putting the text

together. Sometimes narrative approaches and literary approaches can help us see how the text is actually a coherent unity.

Number three, is narrative approaches and narrative criticism reminds us again, related to number two, that the text itself is the locus of meaning, not the activity behind it. Once again, this should be welcomed by Evangelicals for whom the scriptures are inspired texts the word of God. So as much as asking questions about the origin of the text, the background and production, ultimately, we need to focus on the text itself.

Number four, is to remind us that texts come before theology. New Testament and Old Testament texts are not only pretexts for our own theological themes and to support our own theological constructs. Instead, theology is dependent on the analysis of texts. Because of that also, narrative and literary approaches remind us then, that our theology must account for all the data and all the details in the text, not just ones that we select.

In the past, when I was taught hermeneutics and biblical interpretation very early on, I often heard something like this, "you shouldn't base your theology on stories and narrative." The problem is, most of the Bible is in the form of story and narrative. The problem is not basing my theology on narrative and story; the problem is they didn't know how story and narrative work to communicate theology.

Number five, is that narrative approaches help us focus on the aesthetics and the effects of the text. It is sometimes valid to read the text, and I'm convinced that sometimes the biblical stories are told in such a way, not just to communicate theologically, but because of the effect. So, again, narratives are not just "containers" for theological and propositional truth. Sometimes the stories are there for the effect, and for the intrigue, and for the literary impact they have.

And then, number six, I think one of the strengths of the narrative approach is that it opens us up to new insights in the text that we may not have seen before, or that we may have overlooked.

To mention just a couple of weaknesses of narrative approaches that seem to overlap with what we've already said, number one, sometimes narrative approaches are in danger of ignoring the historical dimensions of the text. One cannot emphasize the

plot, the character, and lose the historical background or the historical referentiality of the text, especially for Evangelicals that are convinced that the Bible is nothing less than a record of God's acts in history on behalf of his people, God revealing himself in history, so that the history of the text is lost. Instead, we must be reminded that the text has an author that produced it, they were produced in a language for people to understand it, and they were produced in a specific historical context. So we need to be aware of not losing the history or the historical dimensions of the text.

Number two, there are dangers to losing or ignoring the theological dimensions of the text. That is, not only do we have to remember that this is the inspired word of God, but we have an entire collection of Old and New Testament documents that the church claims as its scripture, as the very word of God. It testifies to God's redemptive activity for his people, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ.

And then, finally, third, some of the methods and categories may be in danger of being imported into the text, and we always have to raise a question of: Can we use categories of modern fiction and modern literature to analyze and understand ancient texts? This is not to say that we can't, it is merely to make sure that the text itself determines how we analyze it and must control the kinds of questions that we ask and the kinds of categories that we bring to it.

So, given those caveats, those weaknesses, the text-centered approaches of literary and narrative criticism can be valuable tools in helping us see the texts in new ways, looking at the text as a whole, looking at the details of the text, understanding how it works and how God reveals himself through story and narrative to his people today.

The next session, we will look at two more literary approaches, or as I should say, "text centered" approaches, approaches that give precedent to the text itself. That would be structuralism which we will treat very briefly, and I'll explain why. And then, rhetorical criticism or rhetorical approaches that are not completely divorced from historical questions and author questions, but again, focus on the text as a whole and look at the inner workings of the text, and look at the text primarily as the locus of meaning, or the place of interpretive activity.

Transcribed by Erin Falkenstrom
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 14

Structural and Rhetorical Criticism

Structuralism and Rhetorical Criticism

The main topic we've been discussing in relationship to hermeneutics and biblical interpretation has been text-centered approaches. We looked at how hermeneutics, hermeneutical theory, and methods of interpretation move from more historically oriented approaches that focused on the history behind the text, the author's intention, the sources and forms that gave rise to the text and the author utilized in the text, and focused on author's intention as the main determinant of meaning in author centered approaches. Given some of the questions raised by such an approach, historically and logically, the focus shifted to literary approaches or text centered approaches. We looked a little bit at literary criticism, formalism, and also looked at narrative criticism specifically; what that is, what that does, and how that might be useful in interpreting biblical texts?

I want to continue looking briefly at two more text centered approaches to interpretation. Ones that do not, at least one of them does not ask questions of, or focus on, the author, but finds meaning solely in the text. Another one does often take into account the author, the historical readers and background, but still focuses on the text not sources and forms behind the text, but focuses on the text, its workings, its persuasive techniques, and things like that. It is known as rhetorical criticism. So we'll talk about these two final text centered approaches, structuralism and I've included rhetorical criticism as a text centered approach and ask: what they are, what they do, and how they might be helpful, or not, for biblical interpretation, and interpreting the text of the Old and New Testament?

Introduction to Structuralism

The first text-centered approach that I want to look at is known as structuralism. I don't want to spend a lot of time discussing it for reasons that we'll see, but structuralism seems, generally, to have run its course. Actually, it's been replaced by a movement known as post-structuralism that we'll talk about in the next session, and it's given way

to other methods. Structuralism in some respects is difficult to define, especially when you start reading about it. It appears to be more of a philosophy or an approach to a text than a specific method or a collection of methods or principles. Structuralism, again, was a movement, or an approach, that ranged far beyond biblical texts and even written texts. It was utilized in the humanities, psychology, sociology, et cetera. But it did have its day in biblical studies. It developed quite early, beginning in some movements back in the 1920's, but again also eventually made its way into biblical studies.

According to structuralism, what it is, the most profound and important part of a communication, and for our purposes the communication is the text, and more specifically the text of the Old and New Testament, the most important and profound part of communication is not at the surface level of a text. So when one reads a text, the most important part of it, and the most significant part of meaning and understanding, is not in the surface structure of the text, not what lies on the surface of the page, but instead meaning is found in the deep structure that underlies the text. So those two terms, the surface structure and the deep structure, are often important for structuralism. Simply what that means is the surface structure again would be what I find on the surface of the text, the words, the grammatical constructions, what we would often call the outline of the text, and how the text is structured and put together. The deep structure would be the deep underlying structure that actually gives rise to what's on the surface.

What structuralism does then is tries to penetrate below or behind the surface structure, what one finds in the text, to recover the deep structures the deeper meanings that have given rise to that. It is a deep structure that even the author was probably not aware of. So structuralism again has moved away from author's intentions. The primary goal of interpretation is not to uncover the author's intended meaning, because it is the deep structures that have created the surface structure. It is the deep structures that have determined what the author has written, and may not be available, or may not be known, at all by the author. These deep structures of meaning are inherent in human thinking itself, and in the human mind, and so generate the surface structures, what again we often associate with the wording, the grammar, how the text is put together and arranged, and

its outline. So the goal is to map the deep structures that lie behind the surface structure of the text and what structuralism does, it often works with oppositions, for example, between light and darkness or good and evil, et cetera.

One example of structuralism, and then we'll look briefly at one individual who, at least in North America and especially in biblical studies, has championed structuralism, and then briefly look at where it has gone by way of evaluation. One example of structuralism, at least some who have worked with structuralism and applied it to the biblical text, have often used, is a model called an actantial model. That is it looks at narrative particularly, in terms of the primary actives, the primary structure that seams to be the universal structure of narrative that gives rise to all the different narratives and the different surface structures. For example, this actantial model consists of six different actors within the narrative, and again we're not talking, although it doesn't always work out this way I don't think, but at least for those that would advocate this model, they're not so much talking about what one sees on the surface and the order of the narrative, but the underlying structure.

This actantial model consisted of six parts, or six actants within the narrative. Number one, there was a sender; the first element was that there was a sender in the narrative who functions to communicate an object to a receiver. So you have the sender who is trying to communicate an object to a receiver. When he does so, the sender communicates that object to a receiver through a subject, that subject is helped by certain helpers, which would be the fifth category, and opposed by certain opponents, which is your sixth and final category. So you have those six actants in what is known as an actantial model. We have a sender trying to communicate an object to a receiver, and he does so through a subject, who is aided by helpers, and who is opposed by opponents. And, the goal then is to look at narrative and how it follows the structure, and to see this underlying structure behind the stories and narratives. For example, and this has been applied to Old Testament texts, and New Testament texts as well, it's been applied to the parables, and we'll see an example of that later, smaller narrative units like the parables, smaller stories, but also entire narratives.

One intriguing example, at least in my field of interest, the book of Revelation, is that Revelation has often been subject to this actantial model. They try to look at the primary actants, the primary structure behind the narrative. For example, the sender of Revelation, according to one analysis, the sender of Revelation is God himself, the object that he's trying to communicate is salvation or judgment, the receivers of that object, the recipients or the receivers, would be the seven churches that are addressed, or the entire world, the subject through which the sender tries to communicate this object, that is salvation or judgment. The subject is Jesus Christ, who is helped by angelic beings in the text, and who are opposed by a number of opponents, especially Satan in chapter twelve. Sometimes, that model of those six actants is applied to individual chapters, and other times the entire book of Revelation is analyzed according to that model. My intention is not necessarily to evaluate that, although it could help to expose who the primary characters are, and what role they play in narratives, but just to give you an example of how biblical texts are sometimes analyzed according to structuralism, or looking at the deep structures of the text. Now as we'll see a little bit later on, one of the difficulties with the method is that at times, those that claim to be analyzing the deep structure seem to actually be analyzing what is on the surface. But we'll return to that.

Daniel Patte and the Good Samaritan: A Structuralist Approach

I want to talk very briefly about one of the primary figures behind structuralism in biblical studies, an individual named Daniel Patte. Most know him as the one who has made structuralism popular, or had made structuralism popular among North American scholars in biblical studies as well as elsewhere. Daniel Patte was influenced by a movement called French Structuralism. He produced a number of publications in book and article form, from the mid-1970's on, where he demonstrated the value of his structural approach to biblical interpretation. He taught at Vanderbilt University in the United States for years, and again popularized among scholars structuralism as an approach to understanding the biblical texts. What Patte did is, he suggested a synchronic approach to the text, that is looking at the text as it stands, as it is, uncovering the various structures of the text, the linguistic structures, the narrative structures, as well as the

mythical structures that underlie the text itself, that underlie the structures of the text. These underlying structures, these linguistic and mythic and narrative structures under the text are complex, and not necessarily known to the author, according to Patte. But these underlying structures are what determine the meaning of the text, not the author's intent. So again, when I'm reading the biblical texts, the goal is to be able to map and uncover the underlying structures that gave rise to what I see on the surface that may or may not have been in the author's mind at all. So, once again, according to Patte, the author's intention is not significant when it comes to interpreting a biblical text because you're dealing with the structures that the author may not have been aware of.

So, for example, Patte frequently analyzed narrative structures in much of his writing, and also in his commentaries on biblical texts. He analyzed narratives according to the actants, that actantial model that we just talked about, where you have a sender who sends and communicates an object to a receiver, through a subject; the subject is helped by helpers, and opposed by opponents. So for example, he analyzed the parable of the Good Samaritan according to this model, and again my purpose in providing this is not to suggest agreement with it, but to demonstrate how one parable could be analyzed according to the structure. So in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is a story of a traveler who is on the road to Jericho, gets jumped and attacked by thieves and robbers and is beaten. The priest and Levite come by and do nothing. Then a Samaritan comes by and helps him, and tries to restore him to his health. Patte said in that parable, the receiver of the action was that traveler, the person who is on the road. The object that the receiver is communicating is his health, the subject is the Samaritan, and the helper is the provision that is made for the traveler. The opponents would be the robbers, the ones that beat him up. So one can ask the question, what's the implication of such an analysis? but at this point I just want to demonstrate how he used that model to understand one parable.

When it comes to Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus's interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Patte analyzed according to oppositions within the text. That's another important part often of structural analysis and Daniel Patte's analysis seeks to uncover the deep structure in terms of the oppositions that are in the text. So, for

example, he found as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, opposition between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, opposition between Jesus's identity versus lack of knowledge of who Jesus was, opposition between spiritual water and literal water. The point is the meaning of this narrative is found in the deep structure that lies behind the text not in the author's intention.

Now, one thing to be said that we'll return to in making a final statement about this method, is that structuralism, as I have already indicated, seems to have run its course. You don't find very much anymore, as I see it at least, you don't find too much work done on biblical texts from a structuralist perspective. Maybe once in a while, but again it's basically given away to the approach that we'll look at in the next section, and that is post-structuralism.

Evaluation of Structuralism

Several observations about this method; first of all, we have moved beyond structuralism then. Again you don't hear much about it. Even Daniel Patte has move away from structuralism into more sociological approaches, or cultural approaches to interpreting the text. Second, one of the difficulties that some have highlighted with structuralism is the complex nature of the vocabulary, and the technical nature of the vocabulary used to describe it. One often has to master a highly technical vocabulary, to understand or utilize the method.

Third, one observation I've already hinted at is that often the insights that structuralism reportedly gives are more based on the surface structure of the text and not so much on the deep structure. So there's the question of what's the relationship between the two. At times, some of the insights from structuralism appear to be not much different from insights one could gather from simply analyzing the surface structure itself. So, it's often not much different from literary criticism at times.

Number four, should we ignore the surface structure of the text, for an underlying deep structure? Again, what is the purpose then of the surface structure? Should that be ignored since that's all we have? It's the only evidence that we have of any type of deep structure. Certainly the surface structure itself shouldn't be ignored.

A fifth one is, how do we validate a structural exegesis when all we have is the text itself? So for some, based on these reasons and others, structuralism is no longer really a major player in hermeneutics. Again, you don't hear a whole lot about it, you don't see a lot written on it, although it still has some influence and it was an important method and played an important role historically which is why I have touched upon it. But, I will leave it at that because it's basically an approach that has sort of run it's course and given way to other hermeneutical theories and approaches to interpreting the biblical texts.

Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism

So, having said that I want to move on to the last text centered approach that I will consider, and that is rhetorical criticism. As I've already mentioned this is not exclusively a text-centered approach in that it does not necessarily bracket the author or what is often called the rhetorical situation, that is, what some of us might call the historical background, or the occasion of the biblical text. Those items are often still of interest to rhetorical critics. But again, since it focuses on the text as a whole, since it focuses on the structure and the working of the text, I have placed it here. By the way, given what we've just talked about, from now on when I talk about structure I'll be referring to the surface structure, I won't be using it in the technical way that structuralism used it, of the underlying deep structure. When I talk about structure, I'll be using it to talk about how the text is put together, the surface structure of the text. So, because rhetorical criticism then focuses on the text as a whole, the structure of the text, I've placed it in the category of text centered approaches, though again one could quibble about that.

The primary feature of rhetorical criticism seems to me to be to analyze text in terms of text as a means of persuasion. It analyzes the text from the standpoint of its persuasive techniques, and it's ability to persuade an audience. The classic expressions of at least ancient rhetoric go back to Aristotle and other ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians, and how they conceived of rhetoric. They have left us with many writings that at least exposed us to the theories of rhetoric and how that was done. Many have mined those works for the value that they have for trying to come to grips with the

persuasive aspects or the rhetorical dimensions of biblical texts as well. So, in light of rhetorical criticism then, biblical texts are analyzed rhetorically, or how they are structured and put together, in order to persuade, and how they contain persuasive argumentation. Again, rhetorical criticism has played a significant role in both Old and New Testament interpretation. We'll see especially in the New Testament there are a couple of figures that are particularly associated with analyzing New Testament documents from almost an exclusively rhetorical approach.

Rhetorical Criticism Methodology

There are actually two approaches, especially in New Testament studies, to rhetorical criticism. First of all, one could simply study the rhetorical techniques of a document, focusing on things like style, figures of speech, or rhetorical argumentation, and look at rhetorical units, or again rhetorical style, or how argumentation works in the text. One common method or model applied to both the Old and the New Testament would include these steps. Number one is identifying the rhetorical unit, that is, simply identifying the unit of the text, by isolating the beginning and the end of the unit. Second is asking the question of the rhetorical function, how does this unit function in its broader context? Then third, analyzing also the rhetorical setting, that is, the situation that this unit is addressing and how it is functioning, what it is trying to do. Then finally, analyze the teaching style of that unit and things like proof and argumentation. So in that regard, rhetorical criticism has been utilized rather broadly to look at certain sections as far as the rhetorical techniques, their function, their means of argumentation, et cetera. Again you can find numerous examples of that in both the Old and the New Testament.

However, a second, especially in New Testament studies, approach to rhetorical criticism has really caught on, and that is to analyze New Testament texts, whether large sections of text, especially speeches, or more particularly to analyze epistolary literature, the letters and epistles by Paul and the other New Testament writers, according to ancient rhetorical speeches and ancient rhetorical speech patterns. Usually, ancient patterns that are discussed and outlined in some of the ancient rhetorical handbooks such as written by

Aristotle and others, and then to take those categories and take those rhetorical speech forms and patterns and analyze the New Testament documents in light of that.

Two prominent individuals that have done the most, at least among evangelical scholars especially, but even outside of Christian evangelical scholarship, first of all was an individual named George Kennedy, who did much work in classical Greco-Roman literature and was one of the first, to advocate and make popular the application of Greco-Roman rhetoric to New Testament texts and analyze texts such as the Sermon on the Mount, and other documents according to Greco-Roman rhetoric. Probably the most influential scholar to popularize among New Testament scholars, rhetorical approaches to the New Testament doctrines, where you would take, not just analyzing the figures of speech and persuasive means of text, some of the things we've often associated with rhetorical criticism, but taking entire rhetorical speeches from the Greco-Roman rhetorical text handbooks and applying them wholesale to biblical text is Ben Witherington. Ben Witherington has written commentaries on virtually every New Testament document. The majority of them are labeled something such as A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Romans, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Galatians, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Philippians, et cetera. So he's produced, and a couple others have as well, he's been influential in contributing to this series of social rhetorical commentaries that analyze the biblical text in light of ancient conventions of rhetoric.

According to those who analyze speeches, for example, you find the speeches in Acts Greco-Roman speech patterns, or even the speeches of Jesus such as the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospels. You find them analyzed often according to rhetorical techniques, but we said the epistles, Paul's letters in particular, have provided a lot of fruitful material for applying rhetorical criticism. In doing so, a full blown rhetorical speech, according to first century and earlier conventions of Greco-Roman speech patterns, might contain most or all of the following. Number one, a rhetorical speech would include what is known as an *exordium*. An *exordium* simply states the cause, it's kind of the introduction that states the cause. It states the issue and it tries to gain the empathy of the audience, and tries to get the audience sympathetic with the person trying

to argue his case. Second, is what is known as the *narratio*, which is basically a narrative of or an account of the facts, or of the background and facts of the case. Third, is what is known as the *propositio*, which is basically what is agreed upon, or the main point that is going to be argued, or the main thesis that the author will argue for. This is followed by number four, the *probatio*. The *probatio* is proofs and arguments that the author appeals to. The proofs are often of two types in the *probatio*. The *probatio* is often a longer section that includes all the arguments and the proofs for the *propositio*, or what the person is trying to argue for. There are often two types of proofs, one could often appeal to a *pathos*, or emotion, or one could appeal to *logos*, that is a kind of logical argumentation. So you'll see in the *probatio* those two types of argumentation and proofs. Fifth is what is called the *refutatio*, and this is a section that refutes the opponent's arguments. And then finally what is known as a *peroratio*, which simply summarizes the arguments, kind of the final appeal on the part of the speaker.

So those six parts, the exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, refutatio, peroratio, you'll find those discussed in most New Testament introductions to historical criticism, or most approaches within New Testament scholarship to rhetorical criticism. Again, most or all of those could be found in the New Testament documents which are often analyzed then according to these types of categories.

Another important feature of rhetorical criticism that seems to be revealed from ancient rhetorical handbooks is that there are three types of historical or rhetorical speeches. Again you can find these three discussed in virtually any treatment of rhetorical criticism of the New Testament. First of all, a rhetorical speech could be classified as judicial. That is, a judicial rhetorical speech would argue for the rightness or wrongness of a past action. As the name implies, the setting for this type of rhetorical speech was naturally the courtroom. So a judicial type of rhetorical speech would argue that a past act was either right or wrong. A second type of rhetorical speech is what is known as deliberative rhetoric. What deliberative rhetoric did is argue for, or try to persuade or dissuade, the audience from a future course of action. So judicial rhetoric focused on a past act, weather it was right or wrong, and deliberative rhetorical speeches either

persuaded or dissuaded the audience from taking part in or participating in a future course of action. So presumably a course of action that was desirable, the speaker was trying to persuade them to engage in that, or a course of action that was undesirable, the author then would dissuade them form following that course.

Then finally, the third type of rhetorical speech was known as epideictic, again you can find these names and titles in just about any treatment, that deals with the rhetorical criticism of the New Testament. Epidictic rhetoric was basically the use of praise or blame to affirm a point of view, or to affirm a set of values in the present. So, either praising or blaming, using the techniques of praise or blame, whether directed to a person or again a belief or set of values in the present. So those three types of rhetoric, again judicial rhetoric, a past act: a judgment of the rightness or wrongness of a past act, deliberative rhetoric, focusing on persuading or dissuading the audience about the correctness or incorrectness of a future course of action: and then epidictic rhetoric, affirming something in the present.

Rhetorical Criticism and Galatians

Now the starting point, or one of the most significant landmarks, I guess is the way to put it, for rhetorical criticism's entry into New Testament studies was an individual named Hans Dieter Betz, who wrote an article, but wrote a commentary too, a significant commentary in a series called the Hermeneia Commentary Series. In it he argued that Galatians was an apologetic or a judicial piece of rhetoric. And so, he was one of the first in New Testament studies to analyze a New Testament letter according to the techniques of rhetorical speeches. What he did is, he took those six features of a full blown rhetorical speech, *exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio*, et cetera, and also, starting with those three types of rhetoric, he concluded that the book of Galatians functioned primarily as an apologetic or judicial piece of rhetoric, that is, convincing the readers of the rightness or wrongness of a past act.

For example, you can pick up his commentary and see a more detailed treatment of what he does, but he saw chapter one, six through eleven of Galatians as an *exordium* that sort of establishes the cause. It's meant to gain a sympathetic hearing from the

readers, then chapter one verse twelve through chapter two verse fourteen, he labeled as the *narratio*. This is that section in Galatians halfway through chapter one into chapter two you find Paul discussing his life before Judaism and his interaction with the Jerusalem apostles, and particularly with Peter at Antioch. So Betz labeled it as the *narratio*, giving the background and the facts of the case. Chapter two verse fifteen through twenty-one, was the *propositio*. This was the main thesis, this is what was agreed upon, the main thesis that would be argued for in the rest of the book. Number four, the *probatio* Betz identified with chapter three verse one through the end of four. So chapter three and four are basically a long series of proofs or arguments that Betz saw Paul using to establish his case. Then finally he labeled chapter five through six, he labeled as paraenesis, that is, exhortational material, which really doesn't fit with that sort of a rhetorical speech pattern, but he saw the last two chapters as paraenesis or exhortational, commanding type of material.

Now many actually reacted to Betz, and suggested that Galatians isn't really an apologetic. If you look at the last two chapters Paul is certainly persuading his readers to obey, to obedience, and when you read Galatians he's trying to dissuade them from taking the course of action that the Judaizers are perpetrating, and persuading them to live out life in the Spirit. So, for that reason, most, more recently, those who have analyzed Galatians from a rhetorical perspective have analyzed it as a piece of deliberative rhetoric. Some have combined it to suggest that it has features of both apologetic and deliberative rhetoric. For example, Ben Witherington, in his commentary on Galatians, argues that Galatians is a piece of deliberative rhetoric, and he also analyzes it according to those same categories of *exordium* and *narratio*. Though it's interesting when you compare Betz and Witherington, and even others who have analyzed Galatians sometimes they differ significantly as to where they divide the text, or what sections belong to the *propositio* or what sections belong to this or that.

But the point is Galatians provided a kind of fruitful field for the application of rhetorical approaches to the New Testament epistles. But other New Testament letters, as I've already said, have also been subject to rhetorical criticism. For example, and many

of these Ben Witherington has contributed commentaries on, but others have as well. The book of Romans, and the book of Ephesians have been analyzed according to Greco-Roman rhetoric. The book of Philippians has, by a number of scholars, the book of Jude, and others, have been subject to rhetorical analysis, probably with various degrees of success.

Evaluation of Rhetorical Criticism

So what should we say about rhetorical criticism then, by way of evaluation? First of all, when it comes to rhetorical criticism, the value is, rhetorical criticism does two things. Number one, it can shed light on the function of different sections of a speech, or a letter, or a prophetic text for example. When certain texts or certain sections of text function similarly to sections of a rhetorical speech, this full-blown rhetorical type of analysis of biblical text can shed light on the function of various sections when there seems to be an analogy and there seems to be a fit in the way that they work.

However, a second one is that rhetorical criticism also focuses our attention more on argumentation and persuasion. It's a reminder that Galatians is not primarily a theological document or a theological tractate. It's not primarily Paul's intention to communicate theological data or theological truth, though it does that. It is a profound theological document, but it's theology in the service of persuading the readers to adopt a certain course of action. So rhetorical criticism can help us see the documents according to their true intention as persuading reader to adopt a certain point of view, and persuading the readers to pursue a certain course of action, rather than simply seeing them as containers for theological truth, or support for a theological system. Again, although they are deeply theological, they are theology in the service of Paul's pastoral intent to persuade the reader. So it kind of captures the pastoral intent and function of New Testament letters.

A third value, obviously, is rhetorical criticism's focus on the whole text, and focusing on the text as a whole, rather than partitioning it up into different sources and forms. Rhetorical criticism helps us focus on the entire text, how it functions and how it works.

In my opinion, there are still a number of limitations to a rhetorical approach. First of all, one of the dangers is forcing a construct on the text, whether it is more modern rhetorical approaches, or even taking the ancient rhetorical speeches, and forcing it on a literary text. We'll return to that one again. But for example, my impression often is reading through Ben Witherington's commentaries and other rhetorical approaches, of all the value of that approach, and some of the helpful insight, sometimes what you'll find is, when it comes to trying to deal with a problematic text or verse, they'll often survey a number of interpretations but then opt for an interpretation that I think has less support but would seem to fit the type, whether this is an *exordium*, a *probatio*, or a *propositio*, based on what we know about those categories. They'll often choose an interpretation that best fits. So Witherington will say something like, "Paul deals with this issue because this was a common issue to deal with in deliberative rhetoric," or something like that, whereas there might be a more suitable explanation for why Paul would have dealt with this issue. Or, "This text means this because this is what it would have been in rhetorical speech or *epidictic* speech," whereas there might be a more suitable explanation and interpretation of that text. So it assumes a rhetorical speech form, and then it often interprets the data in light of that, sometimes in ways, at least some examples I've seen could be explained more clearly and in a better way by different means.

Second, sort of related to that, is rhetorical criticism, and again I'm talking mainly about the second method, that is applying entire rhetorical speech patterns to large sections of biblical text, whether it's a speech, or again entire epistle for example. To me, rhetorical speech patterns seem to ignore the clear formal indications in the text itself of the literary genre. That is, in my opinion, the interpretation of a text, and identification of the text, must start with the formal criteria of the text itself. One of the difficulties with rhetorical criticism is that there are no formal controls or formal indicators as far as, where's the *exordium*, and how do I know this is deliberative? How do I know this is *epidictic*? Where are the formal indicators that show, here's the *exordium*, now I've moved on to the *probatio*, or the *peroratio*, or the *narratio*? Most of the judgments simply, I think, come out of possible analogies and similar functions between the

sections. But there seems to be a lack of clear, in my opinion, formal indicators that would demonstrate that you have an *exordium*, and then a *narratio*, and a *propositio*, and a *probatio*, et cetera. Instead, as I read New Testament letters particularly, and even the book of Galatians, the main formal indicators are grammatical and the different formula that one finds in the letter. The only indicators are that Paul is writing something that resembles a first century letter, or a first century epistle.

Again, I don't think I want to go as far and say Paul was not influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical speech patterns. I don't want to say he was unaware of that, although that is a debate that impinges on this; to what extent was Paul's upbringing and education, to what extent would that have included instruction and practice in Greco-Roman rhetoric? That's an ongoing debate and influences this. But still, when one looks at the New Testament letters it appears that the only formal clues that one finds is that Paul is writing a first century letter. That includes the typical epistolary opening, we'll return to this when we get to genre criticism in a subsequent session. But when one looks at Galatians, for example, what one finds are typical epistolary conventions. This is true throughout all Paul's letters, so a typical of opening for an epistle is: "Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ, to someone, greetings." Then it usually moves on to a thanksgiving, though that is lacking in Galatians. And again, sometimes those who analyze it from the standpoint of rhetorical criticism say that is because this is a deliberative speech, because of rhetorical conventions, the thanksgiving is missing. There are probably other reasons why the thanksgiving is missing here. But again, other than that you find a very typical formula of a first century epistle.

For example, when you read, let me just read a section of chapter four of Galatians. The reason I'm going to do this is, this is an example of where those who analyze the text according to rhetorical techniques often run rough-shot over it and ignore the clear formal indicators. For example, chapter four of Galatians is usually seen to just be part of Paul's *probatio*, that is, it's his proof, his argumentation. But what is interesting is the starting of verse eight, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God--or rather

are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weakened miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and season and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts in you. I plead with you, brothers, become like me for I came like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you." I'll stop right there, but the one thing that is interesting about this section is that is not necessarily revealed in reading an English translation, is that it includes a couple of significant formulas that suggest Paul has a slight shift here and begins a new unit to a request section of the letter. So this is not a *probatio*, a series of proofs, this is now a request section. He actually piles up three or so, typical epistolary type formulas that you would've found in first century letters to indicate that something different is taking place. This is kind of a new section or new focus in the letter, or something like that. But my point is, to simply analyze chapter for as a *probatio*, a series of proofs in a rhetorical speech, overlooks a number of important formal features that suggest that Paul is primarily following the format of a first century letter. Again I'm convinced that the primary clues that should guide us in the reading should be formal ones, what the text indicates that it's doing. If rhetorical criticism helps us understand that, well then good, but to force a rhetorical speech pattern on a text and ignore the clear formal features seems to me to be problematic.

Third and related to that, is the question of whether letters and rhetorical speeches could ever be mixed. Even if Paul did have an education and was aware of these rhetorical speech patterns, which he may have been, some scholars have still questioned whether rhetorical speech patterns, and epistles, or letters were ever mixed. So because of that, my conclusion is, I think we should use rhetorical criticism cautiously. More importantly, I think we should avoid the wholesale application of entire speech patterns to biblical text, particularly in New Testament letters. Rhetorical criticism, again, can be helpful in helping us see the persuasive techniques focusing on the argumentation and some of the techniques Paul may have used. Sometimes rhetorical analysis using entire speeches can help us see the function of text, and how they are working, but at the same

time I think we need to be cautious of taking entire rhetorical speeches and forcing them on biblical texts and analyzing the texts primarily in conjunction with those rhetorical speech patterns.

So, that brings us to the end of text-centered approaches to interpretation, and approaches that focus on the text as the primary locus of meaning. The text is that which determines meaning, whether literary approaches, narrative criticism, structuralism, that we said has sort of run its course, or rhetorical criticism, which without bracketing the author or historical background still focuses on the text and the text as a whole.

Reader Centered Approaches: Introduction

One of the difficulties was, with text-centered approaches, was that text-centered approaches still seemed not to yield any objective meaning in the text. And so, text-centered approaches soon gave way historically and logically to the third facet of the communication model, and that is readers, reader centered approaches. That is, looking at meaning in front of the text, and finding the locus of meaning in the reader soon became prominent. Today, structuralism has basically given way to what is known as post-structuralism, which includes a variety of approaches including, and focusing on reader centered approaches, and the fact that it's readers who make sense of text.

So, in the next session we'll shift our focus then and look at reader centered approaches, and also move on to talk a little bit about deconstructionism and a couple of other approaches that fall under methods that focus on the reader, and meaning residing in the reader, rather than the text or the author.

Transcribed by Jonmichael Tarleton (with the voice of an angel as Monica would say)
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 15

Early Interpretation

Introduction to Post-Modern Approaches

We finished a few sessions talking about text-center approaches to interpretation, and in the last session I indicated we would move on to a different facet or the third aspect of communication, that is, reader-centered approaches. We also said that structuralism, which was one of the characteristic approaches under or text-centered approaches, gave way to post-structuralism which manifests concerns beyond structuralism, and often post-structuralism is identified with more post-modern approaches to hermeneutics and to biblical interpretation. For example, although much more could be said to summarize post-modern approaches to interpretation are often seen as characterized by a number of things; I'll just highlight three of them.

Number one is pluralism, hermeneutical pluralism in approaching a text, that is approaching knowledge and meaning, where there is no worldview, no religious belief, no interpretation of reality that emerges as the correct one, but instead, instead of a hierarchy, there is a leveling effect where there is no interpretation of reality or meaning that emerges as the correct one. Often according to post-modern approaches, meaning is often seen as power and it is often seen as the abuse of power to assert that there is one correct meaning. So there's a leveling effect that there's no correct meaning or approach to interpretation.

Second, under post-modern approaches one of the things they have in common is meaning is seen as value-laden, that is, there's no such thing as an objective-neutral interpretation of a text, but one brings one's own predispositions and one's own viewpoint and one's own perspective to interpret the biblical text. What one values, what one finds in the text is what one wants to find.

Then third, reading communities shape our perspective in the way that we interpret biblical text. And so, again, our culture and the communities we belong to will inevitably influence and determine the way that we read a biblical text.

Reader Centered Approaches

But within the post-modern approaches or post-structural approaches to interpretation, I want to in this section focus on one approach in particular, that is, reader-centered approaches. That is, we said that to rehearse again sort of historically and logically how hermeneutics and biblical interpretation has developed. Hermeneutics has moved logically and historically through the three main facets of the process of communication, beginning with historically and author-centered approaches that emphasize the production of the text and the author's role in producing the text. The goal was to uncover the author's intended meaning. Because that was deemed unrecoverable or unnecessary or even impossible, the focus shifted to text-centered approaches where the text itself became the locus of meaning but yet because of some of the difficulties surrounding that and the failure of any methodology to emerge as central or the final reading or meaning of a text or objective reading of a text to emerge, that gave way to reader-centered approaches that we'll begin to talk about.

Now the primary locus of meaning is the reader and the reader's ability to interpret text. So reader-response criticism, as this approach to interpretation is often called, encompasses a number of approaches that we'll look at. There are a number of possible approaches, but the main focus of all forms of reader-response criticism is that readers make sense of texts. Again the failure of text centered approaches and even author centered approaches to provide objective meaning now gives rise to reader centered approaches where meaning must be the result of the reader's interaction with the text. It's the readers that make sense of text.

Another way to put it, according to author-centered approaches, is the text had a life given to it by the author. The author was responsible for the life of the text and the production of the text. So with author-centered text approaches, the author gave life to the text. According to text-centered approaches, the text had a life of its own. But according to reader-centered approaches, texts have no life until the readers give them the life by reading the text. In other words, the reader is responsible for determining meaning, for finding meaning in the text, or even creating meaning in the text. The reader is

responsible for determining what is found in the text, hence the use of reader-response criticism or reader-response approaches to interpretation.

Again, under this approach at best, the text only has meaning potentials, the text only has the potential for meaning that the reader must now discover or create. In other words, under historical approaches, especially author centered approaches, but more accurately going back even further to more enlightenment or rational approaches, the reader was often seen as objective, almost a passive observer. Remember we talked about a couple of models of a reader having a blank mind or being a blank slate, waiting to receive sensory perception from the text or the reader being like a blank slate or dry sponge waiting to soak up data, through pure inductive reasoning. One could simply interpret with pure induction the text and one's interpretation would correspond to what was found in the text. So the author was almost seen as a passive observer, whereas in reader-response approaches the reader is more active in reading the text and in interpreting it. The reader is an active agent in creating meaning in the text.

Reader-Response Approaches

Now most would agree that there are at least two, and I would add perhaps a third, approach that could fall under the category of reader-response criticism. Two important approaches that have emerged, that at least most would admit, two possible approaches to reader-response criticism are a more conservative approach as it's often labeled and a more radical approach that we'll look at those in just a moment.

But I think there's also a third approach and that is that reader-response criticism could choose to focus on the historical reader, that is, the original readers for whom the text was intended. So one could ask the question: What would the readers of the book of Isaiah or the original readers of 1 and 2 Kings, or the original readers of the book of Matthew, or Paul's letter to the Galatians, what would the original readers have made of the text, how would they have understood it? So from that perspective reader-response criticism could encompass the historical readers, the original readers of the text, and ask how they would have understood it and how they would have interpreted the text. So that's sort of a first century or fifth century BC reader-response criticism asking the

question of the historical readers.

However, more, more prominent is reader-response criticism has been what some have labeled a more conservative reader-response which is often associated with the literary critic Wolfgang Iser, and what he suggested is what some have labeled more of a text-guided reader-response or almost an author guided reader-response criticism or approach to interpreting text. That is, the text itself guides the reader as to how the text should be read. In other words, there are constraints as to what the reader can do with the text. So Iser thought that the author and the readers that are involved in meaning and discovering meaning and they should be creative but there are constraints imposed by the text itself. According to Iser, texts have gaps in them, left there by the author, that the reader is required to fill in order to make sense of the text. And the reader must fill in those gaps so that meaning can emerge from the text. But again, the text itself provides the constraints for how that takes place. The text itself establishes limits for the reading process.

Iser also introduced the notion of the implied reader or the ideal reader, that is, the reader that is assumed by the text, that the physical reader must identify with to read the text. Again some have called this more of a text guided reader-response criticism or an authored guided reader-response criticism, that is, the reader is not completely autonomous, the reader is not completely free to do whatever he or she wants to do with the text. Meaning and reading is not a free-for-all or what is simply in the eye of the beholder, but the author invites creative interpretation on the part of the reader.

Birth Narrative Example

An interesting example of how that might work especially in terms of filling in the gaps of the text is what that might mean in reading a text such as the birth narrative of Luke chapter two, or the so called Christmas story. When you think about it and you go back and read it, it's interesting how many gaps we have had to fill in to make sense of the text. So you start with a text that places the events of Jesus' birth within Greco-Roman history. So it begins in those days, Caesar Augustus was the emperor of the world. Then a call goes out for the taxing of the entire world at that time. And Quirinius

is the governor of Syria during that period as well. So it sets the historical background, but then it begins to jump, the text begins to jump along rather quickly and leave a number of gaps that readers have filled. It begins with Joseph coming up from Galilee from the city of Nazareth to Judea, ultimately to the city where David was born called Bethlehem. He comes with Mary his wife who has, is pregnant with child, but then the very next thing is while they were there she gives birth to a child. It tells you nothing, it tells you nothing about how the gap or how long, about they got there. We often fill in those gaps by envisioning, did Mary and Joseph ride in a caravan, or did they go by themselves? We often construct a picture of Joseph leading a donkey along with Mary. Did Mary give birth when she arrived immediately? Were they there for a long period of time? The text doesn't tell us, and we often fill in those gaps.

When it tells us that the baby was wrapped in clothes and laying in a manger, we're not told how they got to that manger. We're not told where that is, so we have to fill in the gaps by constructing various scenarios, sometimes based on tradition or based on our own experience. But somewhere there was a manger, a barn, or a shed that Mary and Joseph would have gone to. But the text doesn't tell us when they did that or why they did that. Due to a mistranslation of one of the words in the text, we often envision Mary and Joseph going to an inn, a hotel, but there's no vacancy left. We're not told exactly why that's the case but we can envision a scenario where they go to perhaps somewhere close to the inn, they go to a barn or this stable that has a manger where Jesus is finally born. Interestingly though, that word that's translated "inn" is a word that's used elsewhere in Luke to refer to a "guestroom." So, more likely it was possible that Mary and Joseph would have gone to a relative's house and stayed in a guestroom.

Furthermore, we're not told, although the baby is laid in a manger, we're not told exactly where that was, we're not told that they stayed in that manger the entire time. We often envision Mary and Joseph being in the manger the entire time they're in Bethlehem giving birth to Jesus, but is it possible that they stayed in the guestroom and when it came time to give birth they would've gone to the only isolated place they could find and that would have been a stable that would have contained this manger, this feeding trough.

Some archeological discoveries suggested that it would have been a closet or lean to against the house. So again, we're not told. Did Mary and Joseph spend the entire time there, were they in the guest room? Then the text says that when the time came to give birth she gave birth to a child, laid him in a manger because there was no room in the guestroom. Is it possible that they stayed in the guestroom for some time and then when the contractions got closer and it was time to give birth that the guestroom would've had other persons in it and it was too crowded and they went to the only place that would've had any privacy and that was to this stable? So again we're not told exactly, there are a lot of gaps that we necessarily fill in to make sense of the text as we read it. My point isn't to suggest how we should read the Gospel of Luke and the narrative, the birth narrative, but to demonstrate how, as readers, we creatively fill in the gaps and try to make sense of the story in Luke chapter two.

To give a couple of examples of a more conservative approach to reader-response criticism, again, primarily using New Testament examples. One individual named Robert Fowler, a New Testament scholar, has analyzed the feeding narratives, the feeding of the 4000 and the 5000 in Mark, chapters 6 and 8. He analyzes it from the standpoint of a reader who comes of the text for the first time and what it's like to read the text for the first time. One common approach to Mark as well the other Gospels, to the feeding narratives where Jesus feeds the 5000 or in Luke the 4000 or the 5000 is to read it in a Eucharistic context as having Eucharistic connotations that is having reference to the Lord's Supper. Fowler again is wanting to ask the question: What is it like to read the text from the standpoint of a reader who comes to it for the first time? He draws attention to the fact that the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper does not occur until later in the narrative in the reading process and that is until one gets to Mark, chapter 14. So, according to Fowler, it's illegitimate to come to the text and read it from the perspective of the first time reader to read the feeding of the 4000 and the 5000 in Mark from a Eucharistic context or Eucharistic setting since that does not come until later on in the reading process.

Revelation as an Example

Another example would be, the book of Revelation assumes an ideal reader. It's as if the author assumes a certain reader that he wants actual literal readers to identify with. That is, one who is able to read the book of Revelation in constant intertextual relationship to the Old Testament. So the ideal reader or the competent reader of Revelation that the author assumes is one who can draw connections to the Old Testament text and one that will realize and pick up on the Old Testament allusions that, and Old Testament connections that are found within the book of Revelation. In fact, the author at times even appears to build the reader's competency throughout the book of Revelation in, in overt references to Old Testament text. One way to describe a more conservative approach to reader-response criticism might be to compare it to a dot-to-dot. Some of you might be familiar with children's coloring books or sometimes in our newspapers in sections of the newspaper where you find crossword puzzles or cartoons you might find a dot-to-dot where you find this space in the newspaper or a page in a child's coloring book and there will be a series of dots that are numbered. You are asked to connect the dots and then what emerges is some sort of picture. A more conservative reader-response approach might be and has been compared to doing a dot-to-dot. The dots are there but you as a reader are supposed to connect them and the numbers guide you in connecting them. Perhaps a better analogy might be that for a conservative reader-response approach this is not a perfect analogy but an analogy might be a dot-to-dot that has some of the dots numbered but others aren't, giving you a little bit of freedom to connect them and create. In other words, you're guided, there are constraints on what you can produce but there's a little bit of freedom within there to produce a picture at the end of the day. In other words, you can't create whatever kind of picture you want, but instead you are guided by the text itself in what you discover within the text, so that not just anything goes. So that's a more conservative approach to reader-response criticism.

Stanley Fish and Reader-Response

Still emphasizing the role of the reader, the creativity of the reader is needed to fill in the gaps in reading a text but still placing constraints on what the reader can do as

guided by the text or guided by the author. A more radical approach to reader-response criticism is associated with one individual in particular an individual named Stanley Fish. A reading you do in reader-response criticism you'll be introduced to Stanley Fish who is best known for a text, his work entitled *Is There a Text In This Class?* This might seem rather odd of the casual reader to have it phrased this way but it gets at the heart of this approach, that is, readers create meaning, and to go even further readers create texts. That is, according to Stanley Fish, a text and meaning do not exist on their own. So, unlike author-centered approaches there's no text and meaning created by an author. Unlike text-centered approaches, there's no autonomous text that exists on its own but instead according to radical reader-response criticism, as advocated by Stanley Fish, there is no text at all but instead the readers create the text. Hence the title of his work, *Is There a Text In This Class?* The class is responsible for creating meaning, for creating the text. So meaning is certainly in the eye of the beholder or of the reader. It's readers that not just make sense of text but they actually create text, they determine what they do with the text or what they do in interpreting. To use the analogy of a dot-to-dot that we used in the last one, if a conservative reader approach, reader-response approach can be compared to a dot-to-dot that has some numbering to guide you with how you connect them, a radical reader-response would have dot-to-dots, scattered dots with no numbers at all, that you could just create your own picture according to whatever you want to do.

Another way of comparing another analogy might be the ink blot tests where one looks at it and is asked what one sees, "What do you see in this series of ink blots?" Often it's in the eye of the beholder, the one who is reading it. So a text could be seen as like a bunch of scattered dots that one simply connects according to the way that one chooses. So the way you connect them is going to determine the picture that is created. So by themselves the dots don't mean anything until you connect them and create a picture.

In comparison with, when we looked several sessions ago at some of the historical roots of hermeneutics and the enlightenment and the period of rationalism and emphasis on human reason, interpretation was often seen as a subject, gaining mastery over an object. There was a division between the subject, which is the interpreter, and the object,

which is the text. Under reading reader-response criticism this division between subject and object, that is reader and text, is eliminated and dissolved. Instead, texts become more, to use another analogy, a text becomes more like a mirror. It simply reflects who I am and what I choose to see in the text. It simply reflects how I perceive things, it reflects my own perspective that I bring to the text. So the text as an entity, the text as a separate object for Stanley Fish drops out of the picture.

We've already said that this approach in a sense is already anticipated by Immanuel Kant. We talked about him back in some of our historical study of hermeneutics and the important contribution that Kant made to interpretation but in a sense this radical reader-response criticism takes the insights of Immanuel Kant to its logical and extreme conclusion. We've said that Kant said that all that we can know is what he called "the phenomena." That is, all we can know is how we perceive things. We can't know something as it really is. We can't know something as it is in itself, but knowledge is filtered through the grids and the categories that are already present in the mind. In other words for Kant, then one could not be certain that one's understanding and knowledge necessarily correlated precisely objectively to how something really was. So again when I look at this book I cannot be certain that what this really is, in and of itself, but only how I perceive it. My knowledge of it, my perception of it, is filtered through the grids of the categories of my mind.

Now Kant seemed to think that generally human beings had similar, universally similar categories that allowed them to understand and make sense of things, but Fish, a radical reader reader-response critic takes this to its logical extreme and suggests then that because things are not, because we cannot know something in and of itself as it is. Stanley Fish said then, we can't know a text as it really is but instead it's our understanding of it is solely determined by our perception of it. Furthermore, he suggested that every reader perceives things differently. So every interpreter, according to Fish then, every interpreter will see things differently according to the perspectives they bring to the text. Again, the text is like a mirror that reflects what I already bring to the text. According to Fish then, because we only perceive the text as a reader he would

say interpretation precedes the text. The text does not exist first then we read it, he would say interpretation precedes the text. So to suggest that there is a correct meaning of the text, and that I can get at by applying the proper methods of interpretation to him is authoritarian. You can't tell me what I can do with the text, but instead as a reader I create meaning.

So, for example, one might suggest that there are different millennial approaches to interpreting Revelation 20. In verses 1 through 6 are the result of readers finding what they want. So readers make sense of text and no interpretation is correct. So no interpretation of the millennial passage is the correct one or is to be connected with what the author intended according to this approach.

Now one obvious question that this approach raises is: Are there any limits or constraints in meaning, or is it simply a free-for-all or an anything goes? Stanley Fish did suggest that the sky is not the limit and not anything goes. He did suggest that there are constraints for correct interpretation but the question is: What are the constraints, what are the criteria for a correct interpretation? What guides or constrains interpretation? According to Stanley Fish the answer was the interpretive community that one belongs to. So the community that I belong to determines the correct way of approaching the text or determines the values and the approaches, the beliefs that I will bring to the texts and how I will read it. So our reading then is simply an extension of a community's beliefs and a community's values and their interest and their approach of the text. So the correct reading of the text is not one that conforms to the author's intention, not one that conforms to the text, but one that conforms and is determined by the interpretive community to which I belong. And again one could ask: Is that why Calvinists read Hebrews 6 in a certain way, or is that why all premillennialists read Revelation 20 in a certain way? Fish would agree it is because the community they belong to determines what they find in the text.

To give a couple examples very very briefly of radical approaches to reader-response criticism a number of interpreters have been interested in simply reading, for example, Old Testament texts like the prophets in light of Marxist ideology. Again they

are not interested in trying to establish the historical meaning of a text according to the author but they're quite happy to apply modern day ideology and modern day thinking and to see and read that into the biblical text. Or another interesting example to go back to the parables, in the parable of the prodigal son, the father, the prodigal son, and the older son are seen in one interpretive approach to correspond to Sigmund Freud's id, ego, and super ego. And again, the goal is not what is the correct meaning of this text in light of the author and historical background or the structure of the text but simply the reader creating meaning in the text. And so when this is, this approach is often taken to the extreme, you sometimes find some very different and sometimes strange readings of the biblical text.

Evaluation of Reader-Response Approaches

So what should we say about this approach by way of evaluation both thinking of more conservative approaches to reader-response criticism but also in particularly more radical approaches to reader-response criticism. It seems to me that the subjective nature of the approach, sometimes the uncontrolled nature especially of more radical reader-response approaches are certainly at odds with the view of the biblical text as the inspired word of God where God intends then to communicate a meaning to his readers where he expects us to understand and he expects us to respond in obedience. Radical approaches that completely relativize meaning in the text as solely the property of the reader seem to me to be at odds with the biblical text. It is contrary to an understanding of the text as God's Word to his people, God acting in history to communicate to his people and expecting they will respond in obedience. So one of the questions raised then by reader-response criticism is: Is there meaning outside of myself that I am responsible to discover? Is the text a mirror that simply reflects what I bring to the text or is the text more like a window that there is meaning that I can discover however dirty the window is, however cracked it may be, however cloudy, that I can still see thorough it there's still a meaning outside of myself that God expects his people to discover and respond to with appropriate in obedience?

Second, Fish's radical approach to reader-response criticism and to interpretation,

according to many evaluations doesn't account for and does not explain how someone can actually change their mind and perspective as a result of reading a text. If the text is merely a mirror that reflects what I bring to it and I can do what I want with it, how is it that some readers are changed and transformed as a result of reading a text? It even begs the question, Why a text at all? Why would an author write a text? Why a text at all if all it is a mirror that reflects what I think and what I bring to it anyway and the meaning and the interpretation that I already possess? In relationship to that, how is it, how do you explain how readers are transformed but also how do people, to use the language of interpretive community, how can anyone shift or switch or change interpretive communities and interpretive approaches? It seems that Fish's radical reader-response criticism also cannot account for new insight that's gained when someone reads a text.

Third, outside of interpretive communities, there seems to be no way of evaluating a good or bad reading or a good or even better reading of a text. In fact how under Stanley Fish's approach under a radical reader-response approach how is a community self critical, is there any room for a community to be critical of itself and its own perspective and its own viewpoint? Is there any way for another reading community or a text to challenge a reader's interpretive community? Are there good or bad interpretive communities? Are there good or bad insights, readings and interpretive practices?

Number four, kind of as a final parting thought do reader-response critics write to be understood and to communicate their findings? One could ask if Stanley Fish was consistent. Could his reader-response approach be applied to his own works and interpreted in light of how one wanted to do so that maybe I could read Stanley Fish's works from a reader approach affirming that author's intention indeed is a correct way to interpret and approach biblical texts?

Insights gained from a Reader-Response Approach

But are there any contributions of reader-response approaches to biblical texts? What might be the contribution of reader-response approaches to interpreting the Old and New Testament in particular? First of all, I think reader-response approaches have reminded us that we are not neutral, objective observers and passive observers of a

biblical text. We are not pure inductive interpreters again simply waiting to soak up data or objective interpreters simply waiting to have our blank slates written upon and inscribed upon by the biblical text. But instead we come to the texts with influences, presuppositions, perspectives, and commitments that affect the way we read the text. We belong to communities and traditions that influence the way we read a text. The question to ask is: Are these determinative, do these necessarily distort the way we look at the text? Is there no meaning outside of me that cannot influence and change and transform the way I think? Will my perspective, my values, my own background, inevitably affect the way I read the text? But instead, text can challenge and transform readers. We can discover meaning outside of ourselves. We're not so constrained by our perspective and our insight that we cannot find meaning outside of ourselves. That is the text is not simply a mirror that reflects what I bring to the text and reflects my interpretation but instead it is a window that again, however cloudy, however cracked, or dirty still allows us to see and have insight into another world and meaning outside of our own.

A second insight of reader-response criticism would be that the reader is involved in the interpretive process. Reader-response criticism reminds us that the reader is not simply a passive observer sitting on the sideline simply observing what takes place but the reader is actively involved in discovering meaning in the text. The reader actively engages in a dialogue with the text. So the goal of the reader is in some respects to discover and identify with the implied reader and the text with the ideal reader that the text itself assumes, that the author assumes. Our goal is to identify with that, not simply as, to become passive observers, neither to simply to find in the text what I already bring to it. That is, communication does not happen, in some respects until all three facets of the process of communication takes place: the author producing the text and a reader reading it. That's why authors write, to communicate something to a reader that they will make sense of and appropriate. So in one respect communication does not happen without the reader interpreting and making sense of the text.

A third insight that I think of reader-response criticism is to remind us of the need for humility. Reader-response criticism can engender humility in the reader rather than

thinking that somehow I can objectively absorb the data and come up with an interpretation that perfectly and automatically corresponds to the meaning that the author has placed in the text. Reader-response reminds me of the need to approach interpretation with humility to recognize the danger of my own shortsightedness and the assumptions that I bring to the text. It reminds me of the need to be open to hearing other perspectives and other readings that might challenge my own. It calls on me to be open to being challenged by the text and being willing as a reader especially in light of the text and others who have read the text to help me overcome my own hermeneutical myopia and be willing to see other perspectives in the text that might help uncover blind spots in my own reading. It helps me uncover my own tendency to impose my own perspective, insights and values on the text.

Number four, and finally as far as contribution is a reminder that reader-response approaches can help us by reminding us of the role the historical reader and focus on the implied reader, that there are limitations to meaning. There are limitations to what I find in the text. The historical reader or focus on the historical reader can help us to uncover what the author intended to do with the text in its original context. A focus on the implied reader can help us identify what the reader assumed in the text, the ideal reader that the author assumes we will participate with and associate with.

Reader-Response Conclusion

So from that perspective and given those suggestions, I think reader-response criticism has much to contribute in some respects when carefully approached and carefully controlled to the process of interpreting biblical texts. To conclude by simply summarizing what might a reader approach might look like or what might be an appropriate reader approach to the text. First of all, in approaching a biblical text as readers we should recognize the assumptions and presuppositions that we bring to the text and the possibility of those distorting and influencing the way we look at a text, influencing for good and for bad. I've already suggested that one common response by many Christians to interpreting a text suggest is, "Well I simply sit down and read the text. I come to it with an open mind and I read the text without any biases or any

presuppositions. I simply let the text speak." Again the difficulty with that approach is that it's probably in much more danger of distorting the text because that person is probably then not going to be aware of how his or her assumptions, predispositions, influences and values will indeed have a bearing on how they read the text. So a reader approach should start with the realization that we do come to the text with assumptions and values and presuppositions as part of interpretive communities and that will influence the way we read the text. So it warns us to be aware of the possibility of distortion or even the possibility of how that might be productive in the way we read a text.

As we'll see later on in subsequent sessions at times I'm convinced that there are certain persons especially in third world countries, especially those who read the biblical text from a position of poverty and a position of oppression and disenfranchisement that probably will read the text in a manner that is closer to how the original authors would have read it. That is, they read from the situation that is very close to the situation of the original biblical text and the original readers. So sometimes one's presuppositions don't necessarily distort the text when they correspond with the original situation of the text, the original situation of the readers, it might be productive and fruitful. I've learned the most over the years of interpreting text, from my students from third world countries who have over and over again reminded me of how and where I might be reading into the text my own 21st century North American middle class white male perspective. Sometimes by listening to those that come from a third world country from a prospective of oppression who are reading from a location of dislocation, reading from a situation of poverty, they may be in a place where they can actually understand the text better because they're in a situation and context that corresponds more closely to the original context of the biblical writers at times. That may uncover a blind spot in my own reading. It may demonstrate how my own culture and situation living in a North American, western, middle class socio-economic environment might affect the way that I read the text.

This leads me to the second one. I must then allow those assumptions and presuppositions and values and my background to be challenged and corrected by the text that I would also say by other readings of the text, by others that may be in a better

position to at times hear it. I need to be open to those and to allow the text to challenge and correct.

Third what that means is I must approach the text with humility. There's no place, for authoritative or authoritarian readings that simply reaffirm and reassert my power over others and exclude others who have read the text. Finally, again, as I've said, we need to listen to the readings of others. We need to allow the readings of others to correct our shortsightedness when it comes to interpreting a text.

So, again, reader-response criticism when utilized carefully I think is an important part of the interpretive process. It helps us come to grips with understanding how our background, influence, values, culture and even theological traditions from the communities we belong to might influence the way we read the text. Reader-response criticism therefore reminds us of the need for humility, the need to listen to other voices.

Deconstruction: An Introduction

Yet at the same time we need to recognize that the text still can function to correct us. There still is meaning outside of ourselves that can transform, challenge and correct how we think. Reader-response criticism, especially more radical forms of reader-response criticism then logically could be pushed even further and especially radical reader-response criticism logically moved into what is known as deconstructionism, that is approaches that go even beyond reader approaches to find that there is simply no meaning there at all. Meaning is completely unstable, texts are unstable, and the result is that there is nothing to tie meaning to. There is no center. Meaning then becomes a free-for-all. It amounts to little more than at times just playing with a text and doing whatever one wants. More radical approaches of reader-response criticism have then begun to move, in that direction so in the next session we will spend a little bit of time talking about deconstructionism as an approach to interpretation that falls again within post-structuralism. We'll look at a couple of the major figures surrounding that, and also evaluate it asking what it might contribute to hermeneutics and interpretation of biblical text, what are the dangers to be avoided, and also introduce briefly ideological approaches to biblical texts. We've mentioned that already but reading texts from certain

locations and reading the biblical texts with the intent of critiquing its ideology, the values and perspectives that produced it. We'll focus on, for example, feminist readings of biblical texts, again just to introduce you to where hermeneutics and interpretation is going, always with a critical eye on asking what might be the value of that approach but the shortcomings and dangers as well. So in the next session we'll turn to deconstructionism and also dabble in ideological approaches to interpretation as well.

Transcribed by Courtney Scott
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 16

Deconstructive Approaches

Post-Structuralism: Review

The movement known as a post-structuralism gave rise to or included a variety of approaches that are often also seen in terms of post-modern approaches to biblical interpretation, but the last session we looked at one of the approaches, reader-response that focuses on the reader as a determinant of meaning. We saw that even reader-response approaches seem to make room for at least two different types of approaches, though they are all similar in that the focus is on the reader as making sense of the text and being involved in the discovery or creation of meaning.

Two of the approaches that we spent most time on, one of them was a more conservative approach that looked at the readers being guided by the text or guided by the author playing the role of the ideal reader or implied reader in the text, that the author creates or the author expects that the reader will identify with. The other is a more radical reader-response approach identified with the likes of Stanley Fish that had claims that were much more far reaching in denying that there was any meaning in the text but instead the text was a creation of the reader and the text functioned like a mirror to reflect what the reader brings to the text. We're so influenced by our perspective, the structures in our mind, and our values. That is what will necessarily determine what we find in the text.

Deconstruction

That gave rise to an approach, that radical reader-response could be seen as being pushed further to end up in an approach known as a deconstructionism, or deconstructive reading of text. Deconstructionism seems to have become and is becoming more widespread in literary circles and also has bled over into biblical studies. Though there's debate as to exactly how to describe it, and how to categorize it, it seems to be not just an interpretive approach, but it seems to also reflect a philosophical approach or a philosophical movement. Basically, at a very simple level, deconstructionism suggests

that all texts ultimately undermine themselves and they deconstruct themselves. That is, texts are not stable, there is no stable meaning in the text. Instead texts fail to communicate, but instead they undermine themselves, they deconstruct themselves.

One definition of deconstructionism went something like this, "Deconstructionism is generating conflicting meanings from a text and playing those meanings off of each other." So, at the heart of deconstructionism is basically that communication and texts are self-defeating. There are, one way to put it, fissures or cracks in the text that makes stable meaning impossible. There is no stable meaning, meaning does not exist, and instead there's a radical skepticism about meaning in the text.

Jacques Derrida

In fact, there's an absence of meaning in the text according to this approach. The most famous advocate, a well known advocate of this approach to interpretation was a French philosopher Jacques Derrida who lived from 1930 to 2004, I believe. At the heart of his understanding was "the sign" and what it signified and what it referred to. Basically, what he said was there was no connection between a sign and what it referred to. There was a difference or a gap, there was no connection. Words, according to him, endlessly defer meaning. Words simply referred other words and they never catch up. They can never capture meaning. They never quite catch up, so again there's no stable meaning.

What one finds in the text are multiple and contradictory meanings. Deconstructionism then is an undoing of the text. Again part of the issue for Derrida was the issue of power, that no one could claim a correct meaning, to do so was authoritarian. So therefore, text then overturned authoritarian meanings. Text overturned stable interpretive approaches. So, they do this by showing that there is no correct meaning in the text. Deconstructionism overturns authoritarian interpretations by showing there are no correct meanings, there are only conflicting or contradictory meanings.

So, for Derrida meaning was always something that was unstable, meaning was endlessly deferred, and it was only provisional, it was incomplete. Now Derrida himself did not see deconstructionism as negative, although most of his interpreters have. Part of

the difficulty then, again, that Derrida is responding to is that there is no transcendent truth, there is no center. Basically, at its heart, deconstructionism is usually bound up with atheism. There is no God, there is no transcendent, there is no center, there is nothing to latch meaning onto. If this is the case, if there's no transcendent metaphysical truth or no center then there is, according to Derrida, only endless play in the text. So, absolute meaning escapes us. And though, Derrida was not always well-received, especially by other philosophers and critics, he did have a lasting impact on hermeneutics, and also on biblical interpretation.

Stephen Moore and deconstruction

I'll give you a couple of examples of deconstructive approaches to biblical text, but one interesting individual, New Testament scholar named Stephen Moore, actually began his career in Ireland and now teaches at Drew University in the United States, spent some time at Sheffield University in England. Stephen Moore is well-known for his books, articles, and his publications that draw on Derrida and deconstructionism. Actually, he started in more literary and moved on to more reader-response and now moved beyond that to more deconstructive approaches to interpretation. But his publications clearly intend and clearly reveal his intention to apply Derrida's deconstructive approaches to biblical text, in such books labeled as *Mark and Luke, in Post-Structural Perspective*, and another one of his books, *Post-Structuralism in the New Testament, Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross*. In these texts, and these books the biblical text, sometimes even the English language, consistent with deconstructionism, but not only the English language but the biblical text is manipulated and reflects deconstructive approaches so that all that is left is to play with the text.

One classic example that you often find referred to in hermeneutical texts, that discuss or deal with deconstructionism, one famous example from Stephen Moore in applying deconstructive approaches to biblical texts is the way he applies deconstruction to the book of Mark. Let me just read an excerpt again, this is one that's frequently referred to as exemplary of this type of approach, and so listen to what Stephen Moore says with the Gospel of Mark. He says, "Mark's theology is commonly said to be a

theology of the cross, a theology in which life and death crisscrosses. In Mark, the signature of the disciple can only ever be that of a crisscross or a Christ-cross, which my dictionary defines as the figure of a mark of a cross in general, especially that made in signing his name by a person that cannot write." That comes from the Oxford English dictionary. "But a person unable to write is generally unable to read, and in Mark the disciples generally are at cross-purposes with Jesus are singularly unable to read. Jesus must speak cross-words to his puzzled disciples." Chapter 8 verse 33, and then chapter 8:17-21, "A cross is also a chiasmus."

So notice what he's doing, he's playing with the text and making word associations, even English ones. So he's not interested in trying to uncover the author's intention or a stable correct meaning. Now he is simply drawing all kinds of connections and simply engaging in free play with the text. "A cross is also a chiasmus, a cross-wise fusion in which the order established in the first instance, 'whoever would save their life or lose it,' is inverted in the second instance, 'whoever loses their life will save it.' Central to Mark is the fact of the crucifixion, a fiction structured like a cross or a chiasmus." And again, my intention is not so that you understand this, but to simply see what goes on with this type of reading. "Chiasmus" comes from the Greek word *Chaizein*, with means to mark with the letter X, pronounced 'key.' And key is an anagram of 'ich' which is German for the personal pronoun 'I', and the technical term in Freud that English translators rendered as ego. And Jesus, who identifies himself to his terrified disciples in Mark 6:50, with the words 'ego eimi', the Greek word for 'I am' or 'It is I', himself possesses a name that is an echo of the French 'je suis', 'I am'. The single superfluous letter being the 'I', or 'ego,' which is thus marked out for deletion; 'Father not what I want, ego, but what you want,'" in chapter 14 verse 36. "To be marked," [we're almost done,] "to be marked with the X, the cross, is painful, for khiazein also means to cut. Another meaning for 'chiasma' is a piece of wood, and the 'chiasma' on which Jesus rides or writes is a lectern as well as a writing desk. Dying he opens up the book of Psalm 22 and reads the opening verse, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Chi is the first letter of Christos, is also the 22nd letter of the Greek

alphabet, similar to Psalm 22."

So do you see what Moore has done, however wacko, or crazy, or strange this seems to us. It's very consistent with a deconstructive approach that simply plays with the text. There's no stable meaning, signs endlessly defer to other signs. So he can bring in German and French and draw all kinds of strange connections, because he's not interested in trying to capture the correct meaning of the text that the author intended or that is found in the text, but instead from a post-structural and deconstructive approach that draws on the insights of Derrida, Stephen Moore reads it from a deconstructive perspective.

Examples of Deconstruction

To give a couple of other examples, one Old Testament scholar that is interested in applying deconstructive methods or deconstructionism to interpreting biblical text is David, J. A. Clines, who has written several articles that apply deconstructive approaches. One of them on Job, and interestingly what he says when you read the book of Job, God vindicates Job, again to show how the text turns in on itself and deconstructs itself, God vindicates Job in the book of Job, but Job has claimed that God has unfairly treated him or punished him in the book. But if God vindicates and supports Job that must mean that God himself is unjust in how he treats Job and what he says. So, the text of Job itself betrays itself, it turns in on itself, it deconstructs.

To give a couple of other examples, one well-known scholar that has applied at times deconstructive methods to interpreting New Testament text is John Dominic Crossan, who is often better known for the role he played in the Jesus seminar and some of the things that he's concluded about the historical Jesus, what we can or cannot know about who he was and what he said. But John Dominic Crossan has written quite a bit on the parables, often interpreting them and reading them from deconstructive type approaches. For example, one of the more interesting ones that I've come across, I've seen others mention this is his treatment of the parable of the Treasure in the Field. Remember in Matthew 13, one of the parables Jesus uses to compare the Kingdom of God is someone who goes out to a field, they find a treasure, and they go and sell

everything they have so they can buy this field and possess this treasure. John Dominic Crossan interprets this as meaning, "one must abandon everything for the sake of the kingdom." But then he goes further and says, "But if one should abandon all, if one should abandon everything, one then must also abandon this parable, and ultimately one should abandon abandonment." So again, he's simply, as Dominic Crossan himself says, he's simply engaging in free play. That is, one can interpret a text forever.

Another book that has often been subject to deconstructive type approaches is the book of Revelation. Interestingly, the way Revelation is often seen as susceptible to deconstructive approaches, that is looking at the fact that there's no stable meaning, that the book generates conflicting meanings, it turns in on itself, it contradicts itself, is in Revelation. John appears to condemn Rome for its violence and its use of force over and over again, by portraying Rome as a beast and by describing it as built on bloodshed and force, and built on the death of the Saints but also taking the lives of everyone in the entire world. John over and over again condemns Rome, condemns the empire, for its violence and for its force. However, John's condemnation of Rome actually undermines his book, when not only John condemning Rome but when God ends up punishing Rome by violence and force, in the form of the seals and the plagues, the different plagues, and the bowls and the trumpets, and ultimately the ultimate judgment, the final judgment, where God throws the wicked and the evil into the lake of fire. Deconstructive approaches to Revelation emphasize and highlight the fact that while John condemns Rome for its violence and its use of force, the book of John's message undermines itself in that it deconstructs when God punishes Rome by the same violence and force that John condemns. So that then God is guilty of the same crime as Rome is and Rome is accused for and punished for. Furthermore, God does not ultimately overcome evil because he uses evil to destroy evil. And so, at the heart of understanding Revelation in those terms is a deconstructive approach that sees Revelation lacking any stable meaning and instead generating conflicting meanings that the text kind of breaks down and the text undermines itself.

Evaluating Deconstruction Approaches

So, what should we say by way of evaluation to deconstructive approaches, to interpreting the Old and New Testament? First of all, deconstructive approaches in my opinion are ultimately at odds again with understanding the text of Scripture as inspired by God. Deconstructive approaches are ultimately in conflict with the God who inscripturates his revelation in the biblical text and expects his people to understand it and to obey it and put it into practice. That approach seems to me to be at odds with an approach that says there is a stable meaning. In deconstruction texts simply generate conflicting interpretations and conflicting meanings that can be played against each other or an approach that says there is no stable meaning, there is no metaphysical truth or reality or meaning that anchors and grounds interpretation.

Second is deconstruction approaches should ultimately deconstruct themselves, and as many have recognized, it's interesting that at least some authors, although perhaps the example we read from Stephen Moore would be an exception, but some authors do write to be understood and to communicate their understanding of deconstructionism in a way that we will understand it. Again, finally, with the deconstructive approaches obviously their subjectivity and relativism reigns in what one finds in the text. So the third is again, there is no criterion for a good or bad reading or interpretation. So those that are interested in things like: Are there good or bad readings, are there correct or incorrect interpretations, are there good or better readings and interpretations of text, will find little value in deconstructionism helping to answer those types of questions.

But perhaps, to just mention a couple of insights of deconstructionism, I think at the very least, deconstructionism does remind us of the sloppiness or messiness of interpretation at times. That again, it's not always a straight forward process of inductively applying these methods and being able to abstract the pure objective meaning of the text. But deconstructionism does remind us of the messiness of interpretation that, as Paul says, "we do see through a mirror dimly," which I would attribute to human sinfulness rather than the inherent instability of meaning and the absence of any stable meaning or any metaphysical reality, or the existence of God himself. A second thing is,

sometimes deconstructionism, I think, can remind us not to gloss too quickly over tensions in the text. When there do seem to be oppositions or tensions in the text, deconstructionism can draw our attention to that and remind us not to gloss over those too quickly.

And then, finally I think deconstructionism, much like reader-response approaches, functions to engender humility, again realizing that we do bring our assumptions and our presuppositions to the text. We do read it from our own background, that because of human sinfulness, interpretation is not always an easy and straightforward process. There is sometimes a messiness to it. Deconstructionism can help, can help us approach the text with humility. It can engender a humility in the interpreter, and realizing the limitations of the interpreter when we approach the biblical text.

Ideological Approaches

Having said that we'll move on to look at just a couple of ideological approaches to biblical text, but again post-structuralists or deconstructionism is probably often seen as the most extreme form of post-structural approaches to the text and one that is least amenable to evangelical interpretation that sees the Word of God as God communicating that there is a reality that grounds meaning and grounds interpretation. There is a stable meaning, however difficult it is to get at, however much we cannot attain or arrive at that exhaustively and perfectly, that we still can substantially. However dim and dark the window is, there still is a window and there is a reality in the person of God that grounds meaning. So for those reasons deconstructionism or deconstructive approaches to hermeneutics are usually seen as the least amenable and least valuable, at least for evangelical interpretations.

Let me make two, then, two more comments about post-structuralist or post-modern approaches of the text. Let me just return again to summarize what is often labeled the post-modern approaches to interpretation. As I said, post-modern approaches could be seen as having a handful of values or a handful of characteristic features that seem to lie behind post-modern approaches or what we often hear of as post-modern interpretation. Most of these we've already mentioned but, first of all, there is no one

correct interpretation of a text. To advocate a correct interpretation of a text for post-modern approaches is more of a political move to again establish power. But what post-modernism wants to do is level the playing field so there's not one correct interpretation. All readings and all interpretations are equally valid.

The second thing that post-modernism advocates is that our interpretations are colored by our previous assumptions, our social locations, and what we bring to the texts. There's no such thing as an objective and neutral observer that comes to the text in a purely inductive manner, but instead, our social location, the assumptions we bring to the text, our values, etc. our traditions will affect what we find in the biblical text.

Third, according to post-modern approaches there is again no meta-narrative, there is no grand story that accounts for everything but instead all stories, all narratives are equally valid. Therefore, postmodern approaches with similarities to post-structuralism and deconstructive approaches suggest that there is no stable meaning. Post-modernism advocates refuse to acknowledge any one correct meaning or any one definite meaning in the text placed there by the author. But again, post-modern approaches, although inherently difficult with the advocating of pluralistic interpretations and no one correct meaning or stable meaning, especially for evangelicals who see the Bible as the record of God's revelation, his revelatory acts to his people that he expects them to understand and to obey. Despite that, post-modern approaches once again can function for Christian readers and interpreters to engender humility, to come to the text humbly, recognizing our sinfulness and recognizing our human limitations when we interpret a text.

Second, again, post-modern approaches can help us to recognize what we bring to the text, and third, also can cause us, as we saw with the reader-response criticism, to listen to other voices or other perspectives on the text, and when those perspectives align with the text, it can also, as I've said, help us to overcome our own hermeneutical myopia or our own shortsightedness in interpreting the text.

Another facet of post-modern types of approaches or where hermeneutics has gone and that has in some respects has come into vogue and still remains to be seen exactly what is going to be done with it, is known as ideological approaches to biblical

interpretation. That is, intentionally interpreting texts from certain ideological perspectives and approaches. The assumption behind this is this, the texts are ideological, biblical texts are ideological in that they reflect the beliefs, values, and assumptions of an author in a certain culture and location. So meaning in a text is really ideological, that is, it's the result of the struggle of the author in a culture to assert himself and to express himself so the text necessarily reflects the values, the interests, and the beliefs and assumptions of the author. So ideological approaches to the text do a couple things, number one they attempt to uncover the ideological perspectives of the text and the author, that is, as a reflection of the fact that the text was produced in a certain time and location. So in some respects ideological approaches have some overlap with historical approaches asking the question of the author and his situation, his social location. But what it does is it tries, as I understand at least partially, to uncover the ideological perspective of the text and how the author was trying to shape the readers from that perspective.

But second, ideological approaches go further and call on the reader to engage in and undergo an ideological critique of the text. So it uncovers the ideological perspective, the values, the assumptions of the text, the beliefs of the author, but it goes further and notes where certain other perspectives are silenced or not given voice to. It looks at the illegitimate often ideological use of power. So it looks at how the author has attempted to persuade the readers of his ideological perspective. It looks at how other perspectives have been silenced, and it basically critiques the perspective of the text, usually, in light of the values, concerns and interests of the modern reader and his or her culture.

Let me give you an example from what is often known as feminist approaches or feminist criticism, and their approach to interpretation. Feminist approaches or feminist criticism of biblical text often result in reading the biblical text in a way that again exposes its oppressive attitudes towards females. It assumes, sometimes you're relying on traditional, historical, critical approaches of the text. It assumes that the biblical text as often produced in very patriarchal culture, a male-dominated culture, and so it reads the texts it analyzes it from that perspective but it exposes that ideological perspective and

how it is oppressive and how it oppresses and silences women. Therefore, it reads the text in a way that is liberating towards women and towards females. So it begins with a perspective outside of the text, the need for liberation, the feeling of oppression, the experience of oppression, and exclusion on the part of females, and it reads the text in a way that exposes an ideology of oppression and then it calls for the liberation of women in reading the text. So, in that respect it's similar to older liberation theology or liberation reading of text. So it critiques the text of its ideological limitations. It tries to expose where the illegitimate use of ideology, the illegitimate use of power, and it attempts to note where certain perspectives are silenced. It notes where the text is oppressive to certain readers such as females.

Examples of Feminist Readings

One well-known feminist interpreter of the Old and New Testament, especially the New Testament, is a Harvard scholar, Harvard professor Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, a German scholar who, again, reads the New Testament in particular in light of the female, or women's experience of oppression, exclusion and their struggle for liberation. So Fiorenza reads a text appealing to criteria, self-consciously appealing to a canon or criteria outside of the Bible itself, that is, for the experience of oppression and the need for liberation. She sees the Bible as patriarchal in its structure and she engages in reading and critiques that viewpoint and shows how it is oppressive and reads it in a way that is more liberating for the female reader. Again, even feminist approaches can be seen from the perspective of more radical approaches to the text as opposed to sometimes softer, for lack of a better word, approaches to the text, the latter of which may have some value for interpretation, even for evangelicals.

An example of a more radical approach to interpreting the biblical text is again found in the book of Revelation, and one scholar in particular has done more than any other to advocate, an ideological reading or feminist reading of a biblical text that is, a New Testament scholar by the name of Tina Pippin. Tina Pippin has written quite a bit about the book of Revelation, advocating in most of her writings that the book of Revelation is an unsafe space for women. It is hostile towards women, and basically it

should not be read, it has no value for females at all. What she does, she goes through the text and she notes how the female is treated, how the woman is treated, especially in the symbolic vision of the book. She notes how the woman, the female, is treated.

In fact you can go all the way back to chapter 2 and 3 of Revelation, to note how even in the seven messages or the seven letters, how women are treated. For example, the text that I'm looking for where the author refers to a woman named Jezebel, and he says in, this is chapter 2 in verse 22, one of the messages to the church at Thyatira. He says, "Nevertheless I have this against you," this is verse 20, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess." Jezebel's probably not her real name, but a name from the Old Testament that the author gives her to simply characterize her, and he says, "By her teaching, this Jezebel misleads my servants into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality but she is unwilling." Verse 22, "So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her to suffer intensely unless they repent of their ways." So notice Tina Pippin would read this and say, "Look how females are treated in this book. She's simply treated as a prostitute, she's thrown on a bed and caused to suffer."

But Pippin finds in the visions of Revelation itself, she also draws attention to other references to women. For example, in chapter 12, John sees a vision of a woman who is adorned with the stars of heaven and she's pregnant about ready to give birth to a child. So even there, the primary role of women is simply to give birth to children. But furthermore, when the narrative goes on, later on in the story, verse 6, after she gives birth to the son, this dragon in the other part of the vision, goes after the woman and in verse 6 the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God. So the woman is marginalized and isolated. She's kind of exiled into the desert, forced into the desert to play no role. Again, in chapter 17 notice how Babylon, probably a reference of the city of Rome, in chapter 17 is portrayed as a woman who is a prostitute. So the only time the woman appears in chapter 17, all of a sudden she's a prostitute, abused and used by males. In fact, at the very end of chapter 17, actually, notice how the woman is destroyed, it says, "the beast," this is chapter 17 of Revelation, verse 16, "The beast and the ten

horns that you saw," earlier in the vision of chapter 17, "The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute, and they will bring her to ruin and leave her naked. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire." So Pippin's approach is this is not a safe book for women. Women are marginalized, they're prostitutes, they're victims of male, sexuality as far as prostitution, they're abused, they're beaten. Even chapter 21, where we would seem to be in more positive territory as far as how women are viewed, but the new Jerusalem is compared to a female, a woman. Again, Pippin takes the language of the nations entering her rather literally as sexually entering her. So the woman in Revelation is a prostitute, victimized by males, she is exiled to a desert, and even in chapter 21, she is an object of male sexuality. So, for Tina Pippin, the book of Revelation is not a safe space for women, and in fact she rejects it altogether and sees it as something that is hostile towards women.

Positive Feminist Readings of John 4 revisited

A softer approach might be to read the Old and New Testaments from a feminist prospective to uncover ways to read texts that we might have missed, that might actually be more in line with the text itself. One interesting reading that has a number of interesting possibilities that I came across at one point goes back to John chapter 4. We've dealt with this text a couple of times in connection with the background of the text with the reference to the fact that the woman that Jesus meets with is a Samaritan and the backdrop in history of the Jewish relationship with Samaritans that was not a good one, and how that makes a difference in the way we read a text. But also, it's interesting that Jesus meets with a woman and so chapter 4 of John is very interesting when we read Jesus' dialogue with the woman. What happens is, Jesus basically begins a question to interact with this woman and he says something very interesting, he asks the woman to call her husband, and the woman, and the woman says, "I don't have a husband," and then Jesus says, "I know you don't, you've had five of them, and the one you're now living with is not your husband." Now usually the way that we've read this and have been taught to read this is this woman that Jesus lives with is highly immoral, perhaps she's a prostitute but she's immoral, she shacks up with whoever she wants, she can't keep a

marriage together, she jumps from one husband to the other, and now she shacked up with someone that she's not even married to. So she's painted in very negative terms. And that's often how we read the text and how we've been taught to read it. Yet interestingly, a couple of approaches to this text that I've read that are more sensitive towards approaching it from the perspective of a female or a feminine approach suggest that perhaps we've read this all wrong. What if this woman that Jesus dialogues with is not a prostitute or a loose-living woman or one that simply jumps from one person to another and sleeps around? What if this woman is a victim, what if the husbands have left her and in that day and age to not be attached to a husband would have made it very difficult if not impossible for her to survive. So the fact that she's had five marriages isn't only her fault, but maybe because it's the males or the husbands that have left her, and causing her then to have to continually remarry and attach herself to another husband. Although the one she is with now is not her husband as she finds it necessary then to attach herself to a male figure just for survival's sake.

So sometimes a softer, for lack of a better term, feminist or ideological approach might reveal insight into a text or perspective that might uncover blind spots in our own approach and, in fact, might even be more consistent with the text itself. As I've said before, often one of the functions of ideological approaches is that they can often, as I've said, reveal blind spots in our own interpretation. Sometimes ideological approaches may reflect perspectives that are closer to the text itself, such as feminine approaches but one must be aware of the stance of ideological approaches that merely critiques the ideology of the biblical text. Without letting the ideology of the text or the theology of the text critique our ideological standpoints and our approaches to interpreting biblical texts.

So that actually brings us to the end of looking at post-structural approaches to biblical interpretation, especially reader oriented responses or approaches to biblical text. To summarize, we've seen that hermeneutics and interpretation has moved sort of logically and even historically through the three main phases of communication. That is, an author produces a text and communicates that to readers who must read it and make sense of it. We saw that text-centered or author-centered approaches belong to historical

critical approaches that look at the meaning focused behind the text, approaches that locate meaning and hermeneutical activity behind the text, doing such things as reconstructing the historical background, the historical features that are referred to in the text, and uncovering those to help understand the text. Looking at things like source, and form criticism, and redaction criticism focus is on the sources behind the text and ultimately on the author who produces the text. Then author-centered approaches focus on the author's intention and the author producing a text and the author's intention as the determinant of meaning. We saw that because of some of the difficulties of inherent in author-centered approaches, interpretation moved on logically and historically, not exclusively, but generally moved on to text-centered approaches where the text itself was the focus of meaning. So different literary approaches rooted in formalism arose, narrative-criticism, things like structuralism, not just the surface structure of the text but the underlying deep structure, and looking at things such as opposition, and the function of actants in narratives. Rhetorical-critical approaches focus on the text as a whole. Text-centered approaches focus on the entire text and find meaning residing in the text. But again, due to the difficulties of some of those approaches and their inability to provide stable meaning, and to provide objective meaning, interpretation moved then into more reader-centered approaches, and more post-structural approaches that focused on reader-response criticism. Here the reader discovers or even creates meaning in the text. There is no objective meaning in the text, there is no text but the reader, and it is up to the reader to make sense of text. Even more extreme approaches see the text sort of as a mirror merely reflecting the reader's disposition and the reader's values and beliefs and the community to which the reader belongs.

Then finally, even beyond that, deconstructive approaches are where there simply is no stable meaning of the text. Texts deconstruct themselves, they are inherently unstable, they generate conflicting meanings and conflicting and contradictory interpretations. So the result and the goal is simply to sort of play with the text in an endless free play, an endless interpretation cycle.

Then, finally, we looked at some ideological approaches, how the New and Old

Testament is commonly looked at in terms of the ideological forces. The ideological perspective of the author, and uncovering that and then even critiquing that to demonstrate where that might be unjust, where that might be oppressive to certain readers.

What I want to do in the next session is begin to kind of shift our attention and shift our focus to look at other methods of interpretation, other approaches, that fall within these different aspects that we've just looked at author and historical text-centered or reader-centered approaches and to begin to look at a variety of methods and approaches that are usually treated in hermeneutical textbooks and are seen as important methods for interpretation. And starting with the next session we'll begin to look at sociological criticism and briefly summarize again what that is, how that has been utilized in Old and New Testament studies, and also evaluate its weaknesses and strengths and how it might be useful in hermeneutics and interpreting biblical text.

Transcribed by Courtney Scott Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 17

Sociological Criticism

Introduction

In a later session we'll a bring together much of our discussion from the previous few sessions related to more hermeneutical theory, concerning author historical centered approaches, text centered approaches, and more reader centered approaches including deconstructionism. We'll bring that all together and consider how we might implement that into an evangelical approach to hermeneutics and interpretation and how those methods might be integrated and implemented. But what I want to do in this session is move on to begin to discuss a number of other methodologies related to hermeneutics and interpretation.

Sociological Criticism: Introduction

Today we'll begin by looking at sociological criticism or what is sometimes called social scientific approaches to interpreting the Old and New Testaments. Actually these approaches are in some respects too broad of a field at least for me to master and too broad of a field to be treated in much detail here, so I can only hope to introduce you to some of the very broad contours of sociological approaches and social scientific approaches to the Old and New Testaments. In some measure sociological approaches grew out of discontent with other methods of interpretation. When we consider sociological approaches or scientific criticism, it's important to understand that scholars have identified at least two areas or two different approaches to sociological criticism. Number one is investigating the social background of biblical texts and the history of the biblical text. In this way, this approach has a lot of overlap with some of the traditional historical critical approaches that we already talked about. But there is a second area or avenue of approached to social areas or sociological criticism is the application of modern sociological models. This approach takes entire models and the wholesale application of those models to biblical text or sections of biblical text to explain what is going on. As I said, the field is too broad and at least my expertise is too limited to go

into a lot of detail about this approach but again I want to whet your appetite and at least give you an idea what it is and how it might be useful.

There are numerous books that can aid one in exploring the social dimensions of the Old and New Testament texts. Books that are entitled Sociological Criticism or Social Scientific approaches to interpreting Old and New Testament texts. But let me just briefly look at two different facets of sociological criticism again that is exploring the social background of the biblical text and then the second one exploring the wholesale application of entire sociological models especially modern sociological theories and modern sociological studies to biblical text. I'll just give some examples of how that has been done.

Social Backgrounds

So first of all looking at the social background of biblical texts. This area, in many respects, could fall under, when considering the methods of interpretation, the broader umbrella of historical approaches to the Old New testament, where you examine the history behind the text with the historical references within the text. Part of that could be looking at the social background and the social dimensions of an Old or New Testament text. That's precisely what this method does. It looks at the social background or the social dimensions referred to either explicitly or implicitly within the text. It seeks to uncover the social structures or the social values in the ancient biblical world. Again looking at the social dynamics implicit or explicit in the biblical text that would make a difference in the way we read it and interpret it. Obviously, this then would function or is meant to shed light on understanding and interpreting the text.

The difficulty though is that for most of us, this might not be true of all cultures or many cultures including my own. The difficulty is that our culture and the social values and dynamics that we operate with are at times very different from and distant from the social values and dynamics of the ancient biblical world. A very simple example is that the ancient world valued the communal over the individual. It valued the group or the family unity or the community that one belonged to, which makes it difficult for persons living in highly individualistic societies or societies where it's acceptable or appropriate

to isolate one's self and where the emphasis is on who a person is as an individual and what they have achieved as an individual. When one reads a biblical text sometimes that can create a barrier in understanding a society that socially valued the community, so that more important than who you were as an individual was the group that you belonged to. So sometimes this gap between our world and the world of the ancient text can provide a barrier.

It is necessary then to try to come to grips with what might have been the social values and the social dynamics and the social background that is implicitly or explicitly referred to or lies behind the biblical text in order to try to understand it more clearly.

In fact, as some who apply sociological analysis to the text, especially evangelical scholars have recognized this is necessary like in an in analogy with the person of Jesus Christ, who was God incarnate in a world governed by social values. So the fact that Jesus was god incarnate in a specific social context, in a historical context means then that it is incumbent on us to investigate or to pursue an incarnational, as some would describe it, view of hermeneutics where we ask the question of the sociological context that would've produced the biblical text. The assumption again that I'm operating with is that we want to understand the text on its own terms in its historical and in its sociological context in light of what was shared between the ancient authors and ancient readers to whom he wrote. Therefore we must become familiar with the ancient Near Eastern world or the Greco-Roman world and again the social dynamics, the social values, that would've governed the way that they lived life and that it is now reflected in the text of the Old and New Testaments and how that might make a difference in the way we interpret the text especially if we're prone to read it in light of our own social values and our own social context.

Examples of Sociological Criticism: Kinship

So what I want to do is give you handful of examples very briefly of how social values in particular or social dynamics that is how persons relate to each other, how they view life, how their relationship in life is governed in society and the culture in which they live and how that might make a difference in the way one reads biblical text. For

example, and as I said one can there are a number of tools at your disposal that help you to come to grips with some of the sociological backgrounds of the Old and New Testament text, but to give you just a few handful of examples: as we already said one of the important and key sociological dimensions or values of the biblical world was the focus not on the individual, but on the group to which one belonged. So as I said what was most important was not who you were as an individual or what you accomplished as an individual but the family that you belonged to or the group that you belonged to or the community that you belonged to. So that often family belonging and loyalty often were prized above everything else. Again we here at least in my own north American context often see a very distinct difference where sometimes family loyalty or sometimes fragmented families are often the norm and there's often a tie between family members or family units, but in the ancient world especially the Greco-Roman world the family unit would've been valued above many or most all other relationships. Reading the texts in this way, one then finds statements such as this one made by Jesus rather that was shocking and challenging at least to the ancient reader probably read this text and yet most of us don't think much about it, but I'm convinced the ancient hearers, those that heard Jesus say this, and those that then read the text would have found this rather shocking maybe even offensive. In Mark 3, and there are other examples of this in the parallel accounts and in the other Synoptics, but I'll look at Mark 3:31ff through the end of the chapter verse 35. Applying the categories of form criticism this is an example of a pronouncement story where the climactic statement seems to be the key feature of the text. But listen to what the author, of the story tells, "then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived" and immediately for those who are tuned to the sociological dimension of the ancient world already recognize an important sociological dimension taking place. Jesus' own mother and brothers, his family unit, now arrived, "Standing outside, they send someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, 'your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'" We might not think that's unusual, but again in this context that prized the family unit it was a crucial statement. Then Jesus responds, "Who are my mother and my brothers? he asked." To which question most would've

answered by emphasizing ones physical lineage, one's physical familial ties, and the physical family unit. But what Jesus says in response to this question is very, in a sense, counter cultural. "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers and sisters! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and my mother.'" That again is rather shocking because Jesus has in a sense redefined family to include not specifically those who are of flesh and blood relationship or physical lineage, but now Jesus defines it as anyone who "does the Father's will." So Jesus defines the family unit in a way that is not physical, but spiritual. I think that is rather shocking perhaps even offensive though not to us but at least many first century readers.

This emphasis on the family unit as a key sociological value of the first century may also explain instances such as what we find in the text such as Acts 16, where entire household units would often respond to the gospel and often the saving message of Jesus Christ. Acts chapter 16 verses 14 and 15: "One of those listening was a woman from Lydia, a dealer in a purple in purple from the city in Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized she invited us to her home." So notice that that intriguing reference that it wasn't just Lydia but the entire household was converted and then baptized. This is probably a little more easily understandable though there are obviously theological issues and explanations at least at the sociological level. This is more explicable in terms of the emphasis on the family unit as a key and significant communal unit in the first century Greco-Roman world.

This is probably also reflected in Paul's statement in chapter 1 Timothy 3:15, where he actually, as an example of the author of a letter, tells us exactly why he's writing it. 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 15 Paul says, I'll back up and read verse 14, "Although I hope to come to you soon I am writing you these instructions so that if I'm delayed you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household [or in the household of God], so even the church." Frequently, Paul compares, that is, he portrays the church in terms of a family unit that has ties just as close as a physical one.

Paul expects that they will show the same concern and care for each other and the same support that one would in a physical family unit with the physical kinship ties. So that's the one social value that seems to be important in the Old and New Testament, that is, the emphasis on the group that one belonged to. I think that the phrase no person is an island or no man is an island, was certainly true in the biblical world because more important than who you were as an individual or what you accomplished as an individual was what group you belonged to. Especially the family unit and the kinship ties were a crucial social value.

Honor/Shame Cultures

Another important social value was that of honor/shame. Particularly in the New Testament values of the honor/shame and what that means is you were expected to avoid shame at all costs. You were expected to avoid bringing shame upon yourself by acting in a way that was acceptable and honorable. If your honor was lost you were to act in a way that restored that.

So, for example, to go back to a parable that we've already spent some time on, in Luke chapter 15, is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We've already suggested a couple of features of the parable that are intriguing. In my opinion, it can be understood clearly as operating according to the honor/shame dimensions of the first century. That is when the son asks the father for his inheritance, he is actually shaming the father. Some have said it was equivalent to wishing the father was dead because upon his death the son would receive his inheritance. So the son was acting in a way that brings shame upon the father. Furthermore, as I suggested perhaps the setting for this parable is not on some farm out in the middle of nowhere but is in a typical ancient Middle Eastern town and village where everyone would've been observing and would've seen what had happened. So it's interesting that not only does the son bring dishonor on the father by asking for his inheritance, but the way the father acts by running out which a father did not do and grieving over his son who had treated him this way, the father further risks his honor and risked his reputation and standing in society. His very reputation is at stake and he actually brings shame upon himself by acting in this very shameful manner.

To give another example in the Gospels, you frequently find Jesus especially towards the end of the Gospels, you see Jesus entering into debates or disputes with the religious leader whether the Sadducees or the Pharisees or different Jewish authorities. And often this takes place in terms of the Jewish authorizes asking Jesus a question to trap him and most likely what is going on when they asked Jesus a question it's not simply because they have a problem they want solved or that they're simply looking for information or to see if Jesus can relay an answer to the question though that could be part of it. Most likely by asking a question in this way they're challenging Jesus' honor. They're trying to bring shame upon Jesus in a culture that works with the honor or shame dynamic. When Jesus often responds by asking a question back that is taunting it may be to bring shame upon his opponents. So sometimes Jesus being questioned about a different biblical text or about a conundrum they present. For example, if a woman marries several times and all her husband's die whose husband's wife will she be in the resurrection. Questions such as that are all meant to again not just trip Jesus up a little. Although they do that to put him on the spot, they are probably trying to challenge his honor and bring shame upon him. Again, as I said, Jesus often does that in reverse by questioning his opponents.

In Revelation 2 and 3 the seven messages to the seven churches that provide the backdrop and the context for the writing of Revelation. You often see John speaking the words of Jesus or recording the wordings of Jesus to the seven churches. You find Jesus using terms referring to his opponent such as "Jezebel" an Old Testament text or "the synagogue of Satan," terms such as that. One of the things among others that those terms might do is function to bring shame upon the opponents in an honor/shame society. There's a number of other examples that we could give, that biblical authors might be working with the honor/shame dynamic. That is the idea that one must act in a way that brings honor and avoid acting in ways that bring shame upon him.

Malina and other Sociological perspectives

Another rather interesting, and I'll just touch on it rather briefly sociological dimension was expounded most clear prominently by a New Testament scholar that has

perhaps more than any other has applied sociological study and analysis to New Testament, is an individual named Bruce Malina. Malina developed what he called the theory of limited goods and what he said that especially when it comes to wealth. Wealth existed in a limited amount that was if someone has wealth and money it was at the expense of someone else, if someone had money someone else did not. We have a saying sometimes you hear a saying in North American English that "there's more where that came from." In first century with the theory of limited goods, the statement could be revised, "there's no more where that came from." But just simply this understanding of a theory of limited goods would probably explain the resentment of the poor towards the wealthy that you see reflected several times in the New Testament texts and even in the Greco-Roman world more broadly.

Patron-client Relationship

The last sociological value that I want to discuss is a one that has been recognized by a number of New Testament scholars and a number of them have picked up on it and utilized it to explain what is often going on in biblical text. That is, what is known as the system of patronage or the patron-client relationship in the ancient world. That seems to have been very prevalent in the Greco-Roman world and seems to lie behind a number of texts. The patron-client relationship to be real simplistic, was a patron who was someone who was well to do financially, who was of an elite social status, and who has financial means. This person would often enter into a relationship with a client. A client was someone who was poor, who was not so well off, who was probably very poor and on the lower rung on the social economic status. What the patron would do was to enter into a relationship with the client and bestow benefits on the client, financially or otherwise perhaps providing them with work, or other ways of providing help in exchange for the client's political support. The only appropriate response of the client was to go around and basically in society say how wonderful this patron was. So we might say that when it comes to today when it comes time to vote and everyone knows who to vote for. But the client then would sing the praises of the patron and provide them with political support et cetera in exchange for his support and gratitude. Ingratitude for what the patron had done

or to fail to respond appropriately to fail to respond with gratitude was a serious breach of this relationship and a serious breach of this social dynamic. In one sense some have suggested that God himself is portrayed in the Old and New Testaments as the ultimate patron who bestows benefits on the people and they are to respond in gratitude. But this patron-client relationship seems to lie behind a number of issues in a book like 1 Corinthians. For example, in 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10 Paul includes a section where he refuses the financial support of the Corinthians even though he has the right to receive the financial support as an apostle and even though he received financial support as other churches such as the Philippians and probably the church in Rome and some others. When it came to the Corinthians, he refused their financial support and some of that maybe because of the patron-client relationship dynamic. He wanted to avoid confusion in accepting their financial support and there's other things going on as well.

I think another dynamic in the Corinthian society would've been traveling philosophers and teachers of wisdom who would've gathered a following that would've been competition. They would've paid philosophers, these traveling teachers, for their services. So Paul wants to avoid all of that, but the patron-client relationship and some of the issues relating to that might've been one of the reason why Paul refuses financial support in Corinth.

The way the Corinthians treated their leaders in Corinthians chapters 1 to 3, remember that statement. Paul says, "some of you say I am of Apollos, some say I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, and some say I am of Jesus." That sort of attitude was in danger of dividing the church may owe itself to this patron-client dynamic that existed in first century Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5 and patron-client sociology

In chapter 5, there is a very interesting text in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. The author, Paul, deals with a man involved in incest and the church seems to be willing to tolerate that. What Paul is really upset about is not so much the man, although he's upset at that, but the people that get excoriated for what they're doing in the church. What really has Paul is upset is not just that the man is committing incest sleeping with his

step-mother, his father's wife, but the fact that what really has Paul bothered is that fact that the church would tolerate it. At least to us, why would anyone do such a thing? Is it possible that this man is a wealthy patron? No one wants to touch him, no one wants to call him out and that's behind this activity because it would be inappropriate for someone who is a patron, who bestows benefits. Maybe this is a wealthy man who has the church is meeting in his home or one of the churches and he has bestowed financial benefits or certain persons. No one wants to call him out on this, so they're quite willing to turn a blind eye and tolerate it so is it possible that the patron client type of dynamic explains why the church would be willing to tolerate this as a number of commentators on 1 Corinthians have recognized. There appears to be a number of other issues that Paul deals with in the church of Corinth that probably stem from this system of the patronage of the patron-client dynamic.

Hebrews and Philemon and Patron-Client Sociology

To give an example of another book in the New Testament. A scholar named David DeSilva had argued that the book of Hebrews depends on the patron system and the patron-client type of dynamic, especially the warning passages he interprets in light of this. He thinks what is going on is that the readers are in danger of refusing to demonstrate thankfulness and refusing to demonstrate gratitude to someone, God, who has bestowed so many benefits salvifically on them. For the readers to refuse that in an internal way would be to identify them as a client who refuses to acknowledge and be grateful for and to show gratitude for the patron had done and the gracious gift the patron has given him. So Desilva analyzes much of the book of Hebrews in light of the social dynamic of social patron-client relationship.

The letter to Philemon most likely, also, at least, partially assumes patron-client dynamic. When you read Philemon, the very last book in the Pauline corpus, Paul writes in a way that he expects Philemon to recognize his responsibility and the debt of gratitude that he owes Paul. Paul seems to focus on that and utilize that as a way of getting Philemon to follow through and take Onesimus back. Paul's main purpose in the book is to get Philemon to receive Onesimus back. Part of what's going is the patron-client

system. In the patron system dynamic Paul wants, as one who has done something for Philemon, now he wants Philemon to in turn do something for Paul and essentially return the favor in showing gratitude for what Paul has done. So, there might be some of the patron-client dynamic operating there as well.

More broadly and intriguingly, this seems to lie behind a number of New Testament books, but I'm not going to focus on any one book. The whole system of imperial rule in many respects seems to seems to have been built on the system patronage and the patron-client relationship. That is Caesar was seen as a patron and even beyond Caesar sometimes the God's, the Greco-Roman gods including the Caesar, the emperor, was increasingly deified and given titles of deities and often worshipped along with the pantheon on Greco-Roman gods. Often I think the emperor was viewed as along with the other gods would've been viewed as the patron who had bestowed benefits such as peace, wealth, and security upon Rome. The subjects of Rome were clients who were expected to show gratitude towards the emperor and towards the other gods by participating in festivals or ceremonies or opportunity to do that. You can begin to see how this might create difficulties and especially for the New Testament authors to try and get readers not to participate in what they saw as participation in pagan religious worship and compromising their relationship with Jesus Christ and the exclusive worship that belonged to God and Christ. Many of them operating under the system under patronage and may have seen it as unthinkable breach of social values that one would not show gratitude towards the emperor for all that he bestows. So when you go to work and you get a pay check but that is not necessarily how it happened. Whether there was a fruitful crop or the wealth they had or the job they had, they owed a debt of gratitude towards their patron the emperor and also the Greco-Roman gods for bestowing that upon them. It would be a serious breach not to show gratitude, for example, at opportunities to express worship.

So in that context sometimes New Testament authors have to wrestle with an important social code and must call readers to sometimes disentangle themselves or disassociate themselves from situations where they're called upon to show gratitude and

honor to their patron, the emperor or the Greco-Roman gods. So at times looking at the Old and New Testaments from through the lenses of the social values and the social dynamics of the ancient world through sociological criticisms can be of value as it overlaps with more traditional concerns of studying the history in the text. So that it's important then to be alert to the sociological world that is referred to implicitly or explicitly within the biblical text. One final interesting example, and we've already referred to this a little bit, when we talked about the character in narrative. In John chapter 8:44 when Jesus calls the Pharisees that he's in dispute with, when he says, "you are of you father the devil." That is in again a sociological dynamic. It draws on the notion of kingship ties related to the idea of family. That is who you belong to your familiar origin is reflected in your character and in your own life. So that is the way the Pharisees were treating Jesus in refusing to believe the truth and by wanting to kill him in John chapter 8. Jesus now demonstrates and tells them that they are actually demonstrating their true image, their true kinship ties. They belong to their father the devil. He himself is a murderer and he himself is the teller of lies. So there's all kind of insight to begin by looking at the sociological background of Old and New Testament texts. As I said there are a number of helpful books. There's a series on the whole social-rhetorical approach that are often sensitive to the sociological dynamic of biblical texts and can provide new fresh insight into how we understand the text. They provide a welcome corollary and addition to our traditional historical approaches to the background of the biblical text. But we said beyond studying the historical background of the text is the application of sociological models usually modern based sociological models to biblical texts. There are theories about human behaviors and insights from modern day sociological models that are applied wholesale to entire texts or sections of biblical texts in order to shed fresh light on understanding those texts.

Again, let me just give you a couple of examples of scholars who have applied sociological models to explain what's going on in the biblical text. My purpose is not to agree with them or evaluate them or to disagree with them, but just to give you examples on what's been done and how that works is very quickly.

Old Testament Sociological Approaches

In the Old Testament, one of the most well-known examples that most people refer to, to illustrate a sociological interpretation of the Old Testament centers around Israel as a nation and also the rise of their monarchy. A number have tried to explain the rise of Israel, particularly the conquest of Canaan, the settlement in the land, the rise of the nation of Israel or how the monarchy and the kingship arose trying to explain that by using sociological models. For example, one Old Testament scholar named Norman Gottwald suggested and developed a theory that explained Israel's origin that is often called the origin "a peasant revolt" for understanding Israel's conquest. He says basically what happens instead of a more nomadic model of Israel entering the land, what you had have are disenfranchised peasants who are oppressed by the Canaanite elite and the hierarchical society of Canaan and now they've revolted against that and were wanting to create a more egalitarian society. So he now uses the theory of peasant revolt to explain to explain the conquest narratives in the Old Testament.

Apocalyptic Genre and Sociological Criticism

Also considering very broadly again in the Jewish world, apocalyptic literature including books like the book of Daniel in particular and other Jewish apocalypses, I think we referred to Enoch before, but we'll turn back to this kind of literature when we talk about genre criticism later on. But a two volume work by an individual named James Charlesworth called the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* the first volume incudes a collection of English translations of most of the early Jewish and some of the early Jewish Christian apocalyptic literature. It basically records the visionary experience of an individual who ascends to heaven or through a dream or visionary type of experience they see visions of heaven or the heavenly world or hell. Sometimes they go on journeys and see different locations sometimes they see the future, but apocalyptic literature has provided a fruitful field for sociological analysis. That is, there's been a lot to interest in the social setting and the social dynamics that gave rise to such literature. Why would this literature be important? What sociological factors and social setting in the ancient world gave rise to this kind of a literature, these apocalyptic visionary experiences?

For example, a common understanding is that this type of literature is the literature of the marginalized and oppressed. That is, apocalyptic literature arises out of a sense of group alienation and deprivation. This is the social setting for apocalyptic literature so it arises out of a group that feels alienated and disenfranchised from society and the status quo. Apocalyptic literature then like the book of Daniel and other Jewish apocalypses or the book of Revelation is meant to address those concerns. It grows out of and it is the literature of a group that is oppressed and alienated from the rest of society. Some have even created rather elaborate theories of the emergence of this kind of literature, especially seeing it as part of emerging from the struggle, and emerging out of Old Testament prophecy. It is emerging out of the struggle between a visionary group and a group that is a priestly elite and that out of that struggle apocalyptic literature arose. So the social setting then of apocalyptic literature that engenders this type of literature is often seen to be a situation of persecution, oppression or deprivation. Furthermore this is also understood in sociological terms and there's been a lot of debate in some of the apocalypses as to whether there's really a specific crisis. Do apocalypses really address specific situations of oppression, persecution and crisis? One sociological model suggests that apocalypses arose in response to a perceived crisis, so the readers are not really necessarily experiencing a crisis. What is important is not whether they are objectively oppressed or persecuted, but whether they feel that way and whether they perceive it is a perceived crisis.

Now I think the last word has not yet been said on the social setting of apocalyptic literature, but again I simply give you this as an example of a how sociology analysis can be used to try to explain the origins of a movement an apocalyptic movement or apocalyptic type of literature. In the past it has often been associated with social situations of oppression and alienation, failed expectation, and perceived crisis as the sociological setting for this type of literature. Just to mention a handful of others briefly especially related to the New Testament.

Other New Testament Examples of Sociological Approaches

For example, there have been a number of theories of what kind of prophet Jesus

was, a number of sociological models that move across cultures and times and applied it to Jesus. Was Jesus a millenarian type of prophet that expected the end of the world? Was Jesus then seeking more to transform society? Was he a healer, a miracle worker? Was he a charismatic type of prophet? Without going into detail there have been all kinds of suggestions as to what type of prophet Jesus was and how that might help us understand who he was and what he did. There a number of theories that attempt to explain the emergence of the early church and what kind of society it was. There are a number of theories that try to explain how the church moves from a more charismatically oriented movement to a movement that was more institutional and institutionalized. A number of theories have tried to explain that. Again my intention is not to evaluate that or express agreement or disagreement, but just to give you examples of how sociological models have been used to understand the movement of early Christianity. But we will, in our conclusion, talk a little bit by way of evaluation overall.

How do we utilize these approaches? One interesting example, one sociologist John Gager, who is well known for some of his work in explaining the origins of the early church community, explained the rise of Christianity as a reaction to failed prophecy. In examining a number of other movements Gager basically said a common phenomenon in many movements is when early on the movements have to deal with failed expectations and failed prophecies. One of the ways they do this is by proselytizing and through proselytizing and evangelizing they gather a following and a group kind of with the idea of safety in numbers. By doing that they are able to in a way save face or they are able to maintain their existence in the group and perhaps then deal with those failed expectations. So Gager tries to explain the emergence of Christianity through this understanding of a reaction to failed prophecy. Again, there are other countless theories. We've already mentioned a persons by the names of David DeSilva or Bruce Malina, Timothy Tyson is another important person who has written a lot on sociological analysis again taking entire models to explain the early movement of Christianity or the emergence of Israel as a nation or a monarchy or something like that.

Evaluation of Sociological Criticism

By a way of evaluation positively sociological models not only provide a sociological background but the application of models. Sociological models can provide at times valuable interpretive insight in shedding new light on the text and explaining what is going on providing new explanations for what one finds happening in the text and helping us to overcome our distance with the text.

1 Corinthians 11 [the Lord's supper] from a Sociological Perspective

For example, in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul addresses another problem with a situation in the Corinthian church in starting with verse 17, Paul addresses a problem in the church, the Corinthian church, as they gather for worship with the way it conducts communion or the Eucharist or the Lord's supper. In 1 Corinthians 11 starting with 17 to the end of the chapter, sociological analysis and background has actually helped shed, I think, valuable insight on that text, that the main problem is not only a theological one because often we've interpreted this text especially when Paul castigates the Corinthians for taking the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner. We've often we've often interpreted this text mainly along theological lines, that Paul is castigating the Corinthians for having sin in their lives by taking the Lord's supper when they have unconfessed sin. So Paul calls on them to evaluate themselves and that is carrying over today in the way we often treat this text especially when we participate in our churches and congregations in the Eucharist or the Lord's supper today. But as sociological explanation might actually provide a clear avenue in understanding the whole problem in that the whole patron dynamic or the whole wealthy and poor social dynamic is probably the main problem lying behind the Corinthians abuse of the Lord's supper. That is most likely as the Corinthians participated in the communion, the Eucharist, Lord's supper, the whole patron-client or the whole social status between the wealthy and the poor would have bled over and influenced the Corinthians. This whole dynamic in secular society, now bled over into their church services and is now influencing the way that they participate in the Lord's supper. That is, what would have been natural for anyone living in Corinth in this patron-client or in this society with this status between the wealthy and the more

poor members of society would have been when they sat down and ate a meal. It was common for the wealthy to meet in the certain place in a home and to participate in more expensive food, more appropriate food for the wealthy. Whereas, the poor members in society those in the lower social economic status, would have met in a different location in the house and would have eaten a poor quality of food. To add and to that perhaps you would have had slaves serving both especially the wealthy. So the main difficulty, the main problem Paul has is not that the Corinthians are participating in the lord's supper with the wrong theological understanding or unconfessed sin in their lives, but they are taking a meal, the Lord's supper, the Eucharist, that should indicate and celebrate their unity they are now participating in that in a context that further perpetuates the social economic distinctions of the Greco-Roman society by dividing the poor and the wealthy, having the wealthy in one location, eating the best food and the poor somewhere else eating the lesser food. The wealthy were getting drunk and gorging themselves. So that was the Lord's supper that's has Paul so upset. So when he castigates them for participating in the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner again I'm convinced he's primarily aiming his comments and his rhetoric at the way the Corinthians are using the Lord's supper, that is, the way they are participating it in a context that reflects the sociological dimensions of the Corinthian society where the wealthy and the poor are distinguished by the patron-client dynamic that is going on. So when he tells them to examine themselves it's not so much to ask forgiveness for everything wrong they have done its more to examine the way that they are using the Lord's supper to create division and perpetuate social division then it is to use it to create unity and express their oneness in Jesus Christ.

A second value of this approach obviously is then that it places the Old and New Testaments once again in its historical and sociological context. As some scholars have said it's an incarnational approach to interpreting the Bible that is all that means. It is a reminder that it grew out of a specific social historical context. These approaches can help us come to grips with that.

One of the a few of the concerns of a sociological approach especially the

application of the wholesale application of sociological models particularly modern sociological models is: number one, sociological approaches to the Old and New Testaments at times have a tendency and a danger of being reductionistic. That is, it gives you the impression that the sole explanation for the text and the sole explanation for what is going on is a sociologic one and may rule out other theological and historical explanations for a situation. So, sometimes reductionistic tendencies lie behind the application of sociological models.

Another one is sort of related to that is often sociological models tend to be anti-supernatural, that is, they provide a solely natural sociological explanation while ignoring the possibility of God's intervention into history and providing a theological explanation as well for what is going on. That leaves out explanations that would allow for divine interventions and God's working in the midst of the people. So, for example, to provide a solely sociological explanation for the emergence of the nation of Israel while ignoring the theological dimensions and activity of God in bringing about his nation would be an example of a reductionistic approach, but also one that ignores the divine and supernatural dimension to the biblical text.

A third one is sociological models are in danger of forcing a model, especially modern models onto the Old and New Testaments. There's nothing objectionable itself about applying modern day models to biblical texts. The problem is when they are forced onto the text, when they are actually models that do not fit the biblical text but they are used anyway to try to explain them. Some modern sociological models may actually reflect values and situation that are very different from the ancient world. So, especially sociological models need to be continuously tested by the data of the text and what we know about the ancient world.

And finally, some models require actually require rejecting in setting aside parts of the data and parts of the biblical text in order to make the model work. So it is more appropriate I think to call for an eclectic approach that utilizes sociological models along with other models such as historical critical approaches and typical historical approaches, but also uses them as a integration with other interpretative techniques and other

interpretive methods. So when used along with other historical methods, when implemented with other methods of hermeneutics and other methods of interpretation sociological criticism does have the potential to be a valuable tool to bringing fresh insight into the biblical text in helping us understand it more clearly.

Beginning with the next session we will begin to talk about another method of interpretation and that is the issue of genre criticism. How does understanding the type of literature that one's dealing with affect the way one understands the biblical text. We'll consider that in the next session.

Transcribed by Abby Stockwell
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Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 18

Old Testament Literary Genres

What is genre?

Another important methodology in biblical interpretation is a consideration of the biblical text from the standpoint of the type of literature it is. That is known as genre criticism. Genre is the French word meaning "kind" or "type." So when you talk about "genre," in relationship to literary and biblical studies we're talking about the kind or type of literature that we're dealing with, and how that influences the way I read and interpret the text. We actually make genre decisions and identifications every day, though we usually do it in intuitively, naturally and implicitly.

Every time you pick up a newspaper, you automatically make a genre identification as far as what kind of literature you're reading and the expectations therefore that you bring to the text. Even if you're reading a newspaper, you make genre shifts as you turn the pages, because hopefully you don't read the comic section in the same way you read the sports section, or you don't read the sports section in the same way you read the front page of the newspaper, or the ads, the editorial page, or something like that. So, you make unconscious genre shifts in identifying the different kinds of literature.

When you pick up and read or write a letter, if I'm grading a research paper, I'm making a genre identification implicitly and intuitively, and that creates an expectation of what I'm going to find and how I'm going to read that text. If you pick up a book and it begins to use a very classic and common example, usually referred to as illustrating genre and it begins, "Once upon a time," I know what kind of genre I am reading, and I know what to expect. I'm not going to expect to find the scores to baseball games or football games. I'm not going to expect an historical account of the rise of a certain civilization. I am going to be reading what is called a "fairy tale," and whatever viable insight it might have in life, I'm going to read it in terms of the fact that this is not an actual historical

account of individuals and events that took place historically in space and time.

Genre criticism is important for understanding, in many regards, because, often, a failure to come to grips with the correct type of literary genre can often result in miscommunication or misreading. One example I'd like to give is, when we lived in Scotland, I had the most difficult time trying to understand the game of cricket. The reason that was the case is because I kept trying to understand it according to the conventions and according to the rules of American baseball. Over and over again I had difficulty figuring out what was going on because I couldn't get beyond my understanding of the game of American baseball. The same is true of understanding literature.

Two metaphors that have often been used, however imperfect they are, the two metaphors that have frequently been used for understanding genre is that literary genre has often been compared to a game. The author and readers are expected to play by the rules. Genre is like a game where there are certain rules that both the author follows in producing the text and that the reader will follow in reading and interpreting the text. Again, much like my difficulty with the British game of cricket to apply the incorrect rules to understanding the text will often result in misunderstanding at best. So the rules of the genre, in the same way determine how a game is played, when it comes to literary genre, one must apply the appropriate rules or guidelines for both writing, but also reading the biblical text.

In light of the reference to both the author producing the text and the readers making sense of it and reading it, is a second metaphor that of a contract. That is, both the author and readers enter into an agreement. The author will follow certain conventions in producing a type of text, and the reader then will follow them in attempting to make sense of and interpret the text. Literary genre guides the reading process; it is part of the meaning of the text. And the sense of the text, in some respects, is determined by how the text communicates. Literary genre has to do with how the text communicates. In one sense, the same questions one asks of literary forms - remember, we talked about form criticism as far as its structure, genre intention - those types of questions are now asked of

the entire text as a literary whole, as a literary genre. The primary difficulty, as we'll see, is that ancient civilizations might have literary genres that are very different than our own. In other words, the literary genres we intuitively use, we have to be more intentional about how we understand genres that do not exist in our own day or are very different than the literary genres that we operate with.

A literary genre could be described as a group of works that share recurring features of form, content, and function. That is, a literary genre is a work that we can identify as sharing similar features with other works. Those features are the group of works that share a similar form and shape, similar content, and that serve a similar function. But it's important also to recognize that literary genre is not just a classification tool, but it is what is known as a heuristic tool, that is, it is useful in interpretation. It's no good to simply classify a literary work apart from understanding what difference that makes in reading it and interpreting it.

One example I like to use in some of my classes is a comic, or a cartoon that one finds in the newspaper, and I ask them for example, "What are the formal features? What is the form of this that tips you off that this is a comic?" For example, the fact that there's a series of frames, some comics, I guess, is a single picture with a caption. But most comics are a series of frames. They are rather exaggerated and sometimes the features are caricatures of human beings or other animals or things like that. Then the other features: there's usually a bubble within the frames that contain the speech of the different persons within the comic. Usually, again, most students have to stop and think a little bit, but they can, indeed, identify a comic. They usually do that intuitively, and they also realize that when one reads a comic it's not necessarily portraying an event that actually happened, though a political cartoon can do that, but it portrays actual events or situations or realities in the political world in rather exaggerated, almost symbolic and metaphorical ways. One reads a comic and realizes that they're not necessarily referring to actual literal people and events, but they may function to provide a commentary on reality and on society and on life, but they do so in a way that evokes humor and sometimes even satirically poking fun at certain conventions in society. So, by reflecting a little bit on a

cartoon, usually, students can identify the reasons they classify it as a cartoon, and how that affects the way they read it and interpret it. This is to demonstrate that we make genre identifications every day.

Again, the difficulty is with identifying and utilizing ancient genres, and ancient conventions of literary genres one has to be more intentional, one has to make more explicit identifications. This becomes more difficult when you are dealing with genres from an ancient culture that may or may not have analogies to the literary types that we utilize today. Literary genres should also be understood both horizontally and vertically, that is, vertically the biblical text can be read as belonging to other literary types and genres of its kind. Again a literary genre is a group of writings that have similar recurring features of form, content, and function. So vertically, a given biblical text fits into a larger category of writings to which it belongs that it will correspond to.

But one should also read a literary type horizontally, that is following its own logic and its own structure. What that means is literary genre does not always solve all the interpretive difficulties. In my opinion the primary function of genre is to help us to get off on the right foot in interpretation. It's an entry point into the text to make sure we're off to the right start but sometimes the text will have its own logic and structure, and sometimes its own unique features that require interpretation and require the understanding that genre identification won't solve every last problem of interpretation.

One example is classifying the literary genre of the book of Revelation does not solve the problem of the millennium. It might rule out some approaches to that text, but it doesn't solve ultimately how one will read that text, there are other factors that come into consideration. The literary critic, E.D. Hirsh referred to this as extrinsic genre and intrinsic genre, that is, the literary classification to which a book belongs and the other works that it resembles. The intrinsic genre works on logic and structure, and how that influences the way we read it.

What I want to do is very briefly examine some of the literary genres and literary types of the Old New Testament, focusing especially on how that might make a difference on interpreting it. In the Old Testament we'll focus on poetry, law, and

prophecy very briefly. We've already talked about narrative as far as some of the conventions of narrative plot, structure and characterization, I won't spend a lot of time on narrative, I want to make a few additional observations in regard to the Gospels in the New Testament, but we'll look at poetry, law, and prophecy in the Old Testament. In the New Testament I'll make a few observations about the Gospel genre, the genre of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then I will focus on Epistles and then the last book of the New Testament and the Bible, the book of Revelation. Then we will again focus on the genre in some of the major broad conventions and maybe some brief guidelines for interpretation.

Old Testament Poetry

The first one in the Old Testament that I want to talk about is poetry. Actually the person filming this is far more qualified than I am to stand up here, maybe I should switch places with him, but what I want to do is simply summarize not so much my own individual insights but more summarize some of the key features of poetry that other works focus on and then we'll move onto law after that. Poetry, most truths of poetry, as I've understand it focuses on two features that I only have time to briefly touch upon and that is two important conventions, the use of parallelism and the use of figures of speech.

Parallelism is simply a feature of Hebrew poetry, where the lines in poetry stand in relationship to each other. Even most English translations if you read the Psalms or Proverbs or other poetic literature, will lay out poetry and structure in a way that shows parallelism. That is usually two lines, most commonly are juxtaposed to each other in parallel fashion. The second line in some way usually defines or expands upon or develops the first line in some way.

We see this for example just to give one example of this without lingering at it too long in Proverbs chapter 9 and verse 10 for example, and there's all kinds of examples of this. Proverbs 9 verse 10 is one of the more well-known statements in Proverbs,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

And notice the two lines stand in parallel fashion, the second line is set in some way

developing or expanding upon or unpacking the first line to which it is juxtaposed. So one of the things that one has to deal with in reading poetry, especially those of us that are familiar with poetry that primarily operates with the rhythm of sound, and rhyming sounds at the end of lines or something like that is perhaps there's been other work that's done I'm not aware of as far as I know that Hebrew parallelism doesn't work as far as the rhyming sounds or parallel sounds.

Although sometimes as we've said one feature at times of poetry is there may be other structuring features such as sometimes certain verses begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet taking you through the entire Hebrew alphabet, something that obviously is going to be lost in English translation. But the first thing that you need to be aware of then is the feature of parallelism. The best thing, the best advice I could give is to talk with someone who is an expert on Hebrew poetry or read works of persons like Adele Berlin, or Robert Alter, and some hermeneutical texts at times do a very good job of introducing you to Hebrew parallelism in poetry. But again the way it's often structured is according to two lines that are juxtaposed, the first line in a variety of ways and sometimes scholars have created categories such as antithetic parallelism or synonymous parallelism and different labels. Others have questioned whether those are valid categories or not. The main thing is to become familiar with the parallelism and the way it works; how one line functions to expand or unpack or explain in some way the line that comes before it.

The other important feature of Hebrew poetry, whether in the Psalms or Proverbs but especially the Psalms, or even prophetic literature often is cast in poetic form, is figures of speech and primarily what is often labeled similes or metaphors. Something is said to be like something else or simply something is something else. For example, when God is referred to as a "rock" or a "fortress" or a "tower" or in Psalm 119, verses 105, a classic example "your Word is a lamp to my feet." The Word is being compared in some way to a lamp.

For a another example look at the very first Psalm. It immediately begins by communicating through metaphor and figures of speech so Psalm 1 begins, "blessed is

the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked, they are like chaff that the wind blows away." And I'll stop reading there, but notice how already the Psalmist utilizes the convention of figurative speech especially metaphor or what is sometimes called simile. What this suggests is basically that a metaphor is consists of the juxtaposition of two things that usually do not belong together, such as explaining a man or a person in terms of a tree. That sort of creates a dissonance by juxtaposing two things that don't go together. Then one asks what light does that juxtaposition shed on the meaning that is trying to be communicated. So again, when the author compares God to a rock or when the righteous are compared to a tree that produces fruit and its leaves do not whither. What is communicated by the juxtaposition of two things that usually don't belong together or go together?

Or, for example, Psalm 57:4, the author says, "I am in the midst of lions. I lie among ravenous beasts." Now if I stopped there, is this author somewhere in the forest, or is he in the zoo, or what is going on? But you go on further and it says, "Men whose teeth are spears and arrows whose tongues are sharp swords." So instead of referring to physical animals that he finds himself in the midst of, he appears to be describing his enemies.

And so one can ask, what is the effect of juxtaposing the author's human enemies with wild beasts and animals? What is the effect? What meaning or meanings are communicated by putting two things together that usually do not belong? Four things to say about that. Number one, the problem is that often the biblical authors might use metaphors that are unfamiliar to us and that we do not use in our modern day societies so that once again, trying to replace the text within its historical context is necessary to understand the force of the metaphor.

A second, metaphors are in figurative speech which is important for its emotive appeal as much as its intellectual appeal. Too often we see metaphors, especially

sometimes I think Evangelical interpreters are particularly guilty of this, seeing metaphors as simply containers for some theological propositional truth, without recognizing the metaphor is there for its emotive appeal as much as it is for its intellectual facts of it. For example, when the Psalmist compares his readers to wild animals that are encircling him and are ready to devour him; that certainly has an effect on the reader. That goes far beyond a more bear description of "my enemies are ready to attack" or something like that. So metaphors are important for the emotive appeal.

Second, metaphors invite the readers' participation. One of the effects of metaphor and figurative speech I think is it invites the active participation of the reader to imaginatively engage this metaphor to ask: what is the primary point of comparison? What is the effect of putting together these two things that usually don't belong? Metaphor opens up a range of possible connections that the reader is invited to explore.

But a last thing to say about metaphor is unfortunately; often English translations are unable to capture the full force of the metaphor. Particularly if you have a metaphor, one of the difficulties is, again, if I have a metaphor in the biblical text that is unintelligible or is not current in the receptor language in the modern translation. That creates a difficulty, do I choose a different metaphor? Do I explain it which then would lose important features? What if the metaphor, especially if metaphors are meant to invite the reader to explore possible connections to simply explain the metaphor might limit the number of things that it could do. So I'll leave it at that.

But as I said with poetry, two things, one has to deal with, is the parallelism that is usually recognized as an important feature or poetic literature, Hebrew parallelism and then its utilization of figures of speech; metaphors and similes and things like that.

Legal Language in the Old Testament

The second literary type in the Old Testament that I want to talk about briefly is law or the legal language of the legal literature of Israel. The first thing to understand about law or the legal literature is that it needs to be understood within the context of instruction and the regulation of the life of God's people within the covenant relationship that he has entered into with his people. In other words, the law material, the legal

material, in the Old Testament is the personal demands of a covenant with God who has graciously entered into a relationship with his people. In other words, the first thing for most modern interpreters, especially some of us who may be coming to legal literature or the law material in the Old Testament for the first time, is to realize this is not simply what some of us might think of as a list of rules or stipulations or legalistic demands placed arbitrarily on readers. But it is important to understand that the literature grows out of God's covenant relationship that he enters into with his people.

Casuistic Laws: "If…/then…"

Scholars have identified at least two types of law, there are many things that could be said and again, one of the best things you could do would be to read works that discuss the different types of law and how they function, especially in the life of God's people, Israel. One type of law is often referred to as "casuistic law." It basically follows an "if/then" structure that is that the "if" part stipulates the circumstance, or the issue, or the case. The "then" is the penalty or the consequences or the legal treatment of that case. So if this happens then here is what you are to do.

One example that is found in Exodus 21, again there's a number of examples we could point to but I'll just start as close to the beginning. Chapter 20 is the giving of the Ten Commandments and we will use that to illustrate another type of law. Chapter 21, verse 2, "if you buy a Hebrew servant, then he is to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year he shall go free without paying anything." So, the "if" part is: "if you buy a Hebrew servant." It is the case or the issue and then the rest of it is how this case is to be dealt with and how it is to be treated legally. Or again verses 18 and 19, "If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die, but is confined to his bed." That's the 'if' part of the case. Then verse 19 gives the legal penalty or how the case is to be treated. Verse 19: "Then the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff. However he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed." And again we see there is a number, especially in Exodus 21 you can read that one through the chapter, there are a number of what scholars call casuistic laws, with the 'if/then'

structure.

Apodictic Laws: Thou shalt not…

The second type of law that Old Testament scholars frequently draw attention to is what is called "apodictic law," which are more categorical commands, simply "you will do this." A good example of that is the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. So, "You shall have no other gods before you." "You shall not make for yourselves an idol." "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord." "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." "You shall not murder." "You shall not commit adultery." "You shall not steal." So the Ten Commandments are examples of apodictic law, simply categorical commands.

Interpreting Legal Material

So in light of that, probably what of more interest is how we interpret the legal material in the Old Testament, especially how does it apply to God's people, to Christians today. Again what I want to do is just summarize very briefly some, I think some important aspects, there's much more to be said, and I can only briefly illustrate these principles. But first of all, I think the first important feature for understanding law, is like any other piece of literature, to understand the context of the giving of the law. Particularly Exodus chapter 20, and verses 1 and 2, we've already said we need to understand the law in the context of God graciously entering into covenant relationship with his people. So the law then stipulates what God requires of his people within that covenant relationship. So we need to start by understanding the context of the giving of the law. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 1 and 2 "and God spoke all these words." In verse 2 of Exodus 20, right before giving the so called Decalogue or the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." I think this provides the context for the giving of the law, in that the law was given in the response, to the gracious provision of God in redeeming his people out of Egypt. That is the law was given to maintain this relationship with God who had redeemed them and blessed them by rescuing them from Egypt. Now the laws given as Israel will respond to that and live in light of that.

Second, it's important to understand, I think, the law in light of its original historical context in the same way we would treat any other literature, that is, to understand the historical cultural background of the different laws. For example, to give you just one brief example, why in Leviticus 19, verses 27 and 28 does the Mosaic Law forbid tattoos? Why is it forbidden to clip the beard and things like that? So if I get up tomorrow and shave or trim my beard have I violated the Mosaic Law? If you have a tattoo, or several tattoos, have you violated the Mosaic Law? It's important just like any other biblical text, to place the laws within their historical, cultural setting.

One common explanation of this text is that what Leviticus 19 is forbidding is the association of Israel, God's people, with certain pagan religious priestly practices. So it's necessary then to put the laws in their original, historical, cultural, context is to ask what they were doing and why they were given?

Very quickly a third principle is, especially in terms of application, is having understood the original historical cultural context is to ask what then appears to be the true intention of this law? Why does it appear to be given? What appears to be the primary driving principle that gives rise to this law? For example, as we said, with tattoos in Leviticus chapter 19, the intention might be to avoid pagan religious practices. Today tattoos usually don't seem to be associated with pagan religious priestly practices so one could have tattoos without violating the Mosaic Law. So we have to look for other ways in our own society and culture where we might be in danger of violating the intention of this command that God's people avoid association with participation with pagan religious rituals and practices.

Or take, for example, another command found in the legal material of Israel's of the life of Israel, and that is in a couple of places, Israel is commanded not to harvest their crops all the way to the edge of the field but to leave some of it standing. Again, I think the true intention of this was basically we might say part of Israel's welfare system. It was a way of allowing some of the crops to stand so that the poor could come glean in the fields which is what you find going on for example in the book of Ruth. So one, the Israelites were commanded those who had a crop to leave some of it standing as a way of

supporting and providing for the poor. Again we have to ask, in our day, given this intention of this law, what might that look like? In our day we usually don't allow persons to walk through our fields; that's not a normal or acceptable way of feeding the poor. They usually don't go to farmer's fields; they might, but they usually don't. They usually don't go to fields to look for or to find substances. Today they may go to other places such as food pantries or something like that. So we have to ask ourselves in what way do we and should we care for the poor of our day? What way should God's people demonstrate their concern for the poor, within the church as well as outside of the church of God's people? Again, usually it's not going to be by allowing people go glean our fields, especially if you are not a farmer or rancher, or if you don't raise crops that are edible or suitable human consumption. So again I look at this command and ask: what appears to be the true intention? What appears to be the intention of this command? What is it trying to communicate? What might that look like in my contemporary society? How might I fulfill that true intention in my day and age differently form that ancient culture?

A final one, again that I can only touch on very briefly, I think that it is very important and this, this impinges upon my understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testament that ultimately the Old Testament finds its climax and fulfillment in the New Testament and in the new covenant revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. So ultimately I think interpretation of any text must end up by asking how it finds itself in relationship to the entire context of the Old and New Testament canon. This places the two testaments in redemptive theological relationship so that what that means then is that number four, ultimately one also needs to understand how the law applies to us today in light of fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Now that is sometimes very difficult and I don't have time to go into some of the questions related to that but one of the key texts I think is Matthew chapter 5 and verse 17 for understanding how the law applies to God's people where Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the law." This is right at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the law but I have come to fulfill it." What Jesus means by fulfilling the law I think is not primarily that he has come to obey it, though indeed he does that, but that

instead the word fulfillment needs to be understood in light of how Matthew has used the word fulfillment in previous chapters. Where frequently he uses fulfillment to demonstrate how Jesus life and his teaching fulfills or brings to completion something in the Old Testament. Jesus, his life, his person, his teaching, is the goal to which the Old Testament was pointing, in that the goal has finally arrived. Jesus then can be seen to complete it or fulfill it. So therefore when I take it that when Jesus says in Matthew 5, 17 "I have not come to abolish the law, I have come to fulfill it," primarily what Jesus is saying is my person and teaching is the true intention and goal of the Old Testament law, in that Jesus, in that the law was pointing to something greater. Now that Jesus has arrived, his teaching and his ministry, his life and person can now be seen to bring the law to fulfillment. So then as Christians, when we look at the Old Testament law, not only do we ask the question what appears to be the true intention of the law, but as we read the New Testament we ask: how does Christ seem to fulfill the law? So the Old Testament law in its entirety applies to Christians but only as seen through the lense of how it has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

To give you again a couple of very quick examples, number one is for example the sacrificial system of the Old Testament--the sacrificing of offerings and animals. The sin offerings referred to in Leviticus etc. those can be seen as being fulfilled. The sacrificial system we can be seen to obey it and observe it by trusting in Jesus Christ who now is the once for all, ultimate sacrifice that has been made in fulfillment. So the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus Christ once for all sacrifice. We continue to obey and keep and fulfill the Old Testament law by now trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our salvation and our sin.

Another example very quickly, is a little more controversial because it comes right out of the Ten Commandments, the so called Decalogue, and that is the Sabbath command, where Israel was called upon to keep the Sabbath, to observe the seventh day, and the various stipulations that grew up around that as to how Israel would do that, and even some of the penalties for failure to do that. However, it's then interesting to ask the question, "How then do God's people today observe the Sabbath? Do we do so by

observing Saturday, the seventh day? Or by observing some other day? Is Sunday now the Christian Sabbath? Has the Sabbath day been transferred to Sunday, so that we should now treat Sunday in the same way Israel treated the Sabbath day?" Or, I think when you read Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, once again I think the author is clear that we fulfill the Sabbath once again by resting in Jesus Christ and trusting in Jesus Christ for our salvation not by keeping a specific, separate day. I think we usually gather on Sunday to worship for different reasons, in my opinion, than keeping the Sabbath.

Now that does not mean that some might not still choose to observe days or periods of rest, and certainly that is still good advice, but when I read Hebrews 3 and 4, I find primarily that the true intention, or the command to observe the Sabbath, is primarily fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and the new covenant salvation that he brings. We keep the Sabbath now primarily by trusting in Christ.

Now we can still ask the question back to number three, "What is the true intention of this law?" And that might lead us to observe periods of rest and implement periods of rest into our own lives, but I think the New Testament is clear that primarily Christians keep the Sabbath by looking at it in terms of how it has been brought to fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now there is a lot more that could be said about the law and it's a lot more involved than just a few points I've made, but hopefully I've at least wetted your appetite to consider the legal literature of the Old Testament and providing some guidelines for reading it and applying it and interpreting it today.

Prophetic Literature

The final aspect or, I'm sorry, the final literary genre in the Old Testament that I want to touch upon briefly is the prophetic literature, which again makes up quite a large body of material in the Old Testament. A couple of observations initially to make regarding the type of literature the prophecy is: it's important to understand that, at least in our modern day world, most people, not only Christians and not just Christians, even outside of Christian circles, and outside of our churches, people in the world often associate prophecy with fortune telling or palm reading or something like that. So

prophecy is primarily simply telling the future, forecasting or predicting events in the future. This is usually in response to, simply in response to our fascination with the future or inquiry of wanting to know "What's going to happen to me sometime down the road?"

Often you found this particularly in Greco-Roman religions, that is someone would often go to a place called an "oracle" with different questions and they would consult the gods on those questions. Often through a priest or an interpreter, would convey an oracle back or convey a prophecy that answered questions such as, "If I go to war, am I going to win?" or "Should I do this or that? Should I marry this person?" One would bring that to the gods, and the god would respond back with an answer. We often think of prophecy in the Old Testament, as kind of a fortune telling, looking into a crystal ball to see what's going to happen months or years or even centuries down the road.

It's important though to understand that in the Old Testament, at least, prophecy, as one Old Testament scholar defined it, a prophet is what could be called a "covenant enforcer." One who, when Israel began to stray from their covenant obligations, and for example began to lapse into idolatry and idolatrous practices, God would often raise up a prophet to remind Israel of its covenant obligations, and to warn them of the dangers or even to communicate the punishment that now would take place because of their failure to keep their covenant obligations. So prophets don't just rise out of thin air to satisfy the curiosity of the person who wants to know what's going to happen in the future. Instead, the Old Testament prophets were covenant enforcers or those that God raised up to address Israel to remind them of their covenant obligations and to warn them of the dangers of lapsing into idolatry or even to pronounce judgment upon them when they had done that, as well as addressing and pronouncing judgment on other pagan nations as well.

Forth-telling / Fore-telling Distinction

This has led to a very popular and common distinction that you'll find in a number of interpretive or hermeneutical textbooks, a distinction between forth-telling and foretelling. That is, forth-telling being communicating a message, forth-telling a message to the readership as opposed to foretelling, that is predicting something that is going to

happen in the future. Old Testament prophecy is usually considered as containing both, but focusing more on the former. That is again the prophets are mainly there to communicate a message to the readers. Even when they do foretell the future it's in a way that is relevant to addressing the situation the readers find themselves in. Within prophecy in general, just to make you aware of the fact, the best thing you can do is read other works that deal with prophetic literature and what it is and how it functions and how to read it. One thing you'll find within prophetic texts is that you often will find various other forms utilized in the prophetic text. We've talked about one of those already the "call narrative" under form criticism. It is a literary form that seems to have arisen out of the need to legitimate the prophet's message and his calling, to legitimate everything else he is going to say, and often that was in the form of a confrontation of God with the prophet, and a commissioning followed by an objection by the prophet, followed by the response of God and then usually a promise and a sign as well. All of those are frequent elements of the prophetic call narrative.

There are other types of forms you find that seem to be a common form, a stylized form, you find in prophetic literature, such as what is often called "woe oracles." It is a text that begins "Woe to" whoever and then sometimes giving the reason for the woe. Usually the woe oracles are seen as developing from funeral dirges or funeral laments but in the Old Testament texts they are used to lament the judgment that is now coming upon Israel or the nations because of their sins. So you often find "Woe to" or "Woe, Woe to" someone, and then giving the reason. That is often known as a woe oracle.

Another common form is what is sometimes labeled "messenger speech" where you find something like "The word of the Lord came to so and so, thus says the Lord." You will find that form commonly appearing throughout the prophetic literature, probably again functioning to legitimate the message of the prophet and to demonstrate that it has divine sanction.

And finally, a form that actually develops into apocalyptic type literature like Daniel, is what is known as a vision report which records a prophet's visionary experience, whether through a dream or some other type of ecstatic visionary experience.

Usually you find references to the preparation for a vision, such as fasting, even the setting of the vision, a common setting of the vision is sometimes standing by a river, followed then by the account of the visionary experience, then followed by an account of what it was that the person saw.

Hermeneutical Principles for Dealing with Prophecy

So my point is even within prophetic literature you find various types of forms making up the prophetic text. What I want to talk about briefly is to summarize again, the principles of approaching prophetic types based on what I think the type of literature it is. First of all, a very important, basic hermeneutic principle is to recognize that prophetic literature is not primarily predictive. Instead, it is primarily a message from the present, it's primarily a message from the prophet directed at his contemporaries. Again when we said that the difficulty is, the prophets usually arise when Israel is in crises, when they've gone off in adultery or reneged on their covenant obligations the prophet is often raised up to communicate a message that primarily is a call to repentance and obedience. So we'll return to that, but the prophet's message is not primarily just to predict the future for the sake of predicting the future but ultimately is one of calling the people back to obedience and to repentance.

Second, like any other text, although I am always intrigued especially with how often this principle is ignored, although they're happy to apply it to other types of literature in the Bible, but like any other text, prophetic text must ultimately be understood, first of all, in light of the original historical context in which it was produced. Again, what that means then is it is probably illegitimate to read prophetic text as predicting 21st century events or earlier, or even later. Even when the prophet does predict the future, it still must be understood in light of what readers would have understood it to mean in the first century or earlier historical context.

Third, is to recognize that often prophetic literature utilizes metaphorical language and symbolism that the readers would have understood. So for example, when we think about how Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled or will be fulfilled, often the answer is not literally. While prophetic texts, especially those that do anticipate future fulfillment or

refer to future fulfillment, often they are accounts in metaphorical and symbolic language, that means while the prophets are indeed anticipating the fulfillment of God's purposes in actual persons and events, yet he communicates that symbolically and in metaphorical type language. So what that means is, we should not necessarily expect that the prophetic text will be fulfilled in what we might think of in some strict, straightforward, literal way.

I was raised in a church context, and I'll return to this same principle when we talk about Revelation in Daniel, that said one should interpret prophecy literally, unless there is good reason not to. I think that should be turned on its head and to say that prophetic language, the metaphorical, symbolic language should be interpreted symbolically, unless there is good reason not to. Again, what that means is, I am not suggesting that the prophets were not predicting actual persons and events historically, but that often when they describe them, they do so with symbolism and in metaphorical language. So we need to ask, we need to understand and ask, "What is the meaning of that language? What was the author intending to communicate? What is that metaphorical language suggesting about how the author sees the event and understands it?" So we should interpret not literally but interpreting symbolically.

A fourth principle is to understand that prophetic literature then refers to both the present and the future. The prophets, in fact you'll often see that sometimes the prophetic literature seems to be describing events that are taking place in the readers own day, or will take place just on the horizon, very soon, but then without warning, it is as if the author is all of a sudden using language that describes the ultimate end of history, the eschatological end of history. Often what you find happening is sometimes the prophets will describe events as they occur, but they describe it against the backdrop of God's broader purposes for the entire world. So sometimes interpreting prophetic texts can be a little tricky in understanding when the author has moved beyond his own horizons and his own situations to embrace a vision for God's purposes for the entire cosmos.

A fifth one, and I'll just mention it and we will pick it up in the next section, a fifth important principle in interpreting prophetic texts, is to ask the question of, "How

does this prophecy get fulfilled?" Especially to ask a couple of questions, number one is to ask, does this get fulfilled in the Old Testament period? Does it get fulfilled in the period of Israel's history? Or does it get fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Christ? Or further than that, does the prophecy get fulfilled ultimately in the future at the very end of the world and God's dealing with the entire cosmos? So sometimes it is important to ask, how does the prophecy get fulfilled? Does it get fulfilled in the day and age of the author and his readers? Is it fulfilled in their lifetime? Does it get fulfilled sometime in Israel's history? Or does it get fulfilled in the New Testament, mainly through Christ and his people? Is it a prophecy for the end of history, for the end of the cosmos?

There are other issues related to asking the question of how this prophecy gets fulfilled, and in the next session we will look at that and give a couple of other examples of fulfillment and mention a couple more principles for interpreting prophetic texts. Then we will move right onto the New Testament, and consider New Testament genres and literary types and how that influences interpretation, beginning specifically with the Gospels, and we won't spend a lot of time on those because we have already dealt with the gospels in a narrative criticisms, but I simply want to begin looking at New Testament genres by just making a few further observations on how we read the Gospels and what type of literature they are.

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Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Mathewson, Hermeneutics Lecture 19

Literary Genre: Epistles

Prophecy: Foretelling and Forth-telling

In discussing the prophetic genre in the Old Testament, we saw that scholars frequently distinguished between two terms, forth-telling and foretelling. That's common language you'll find in particularly hermeneutics type or biblical interpretation type text books to describe what prophetic literature does and usually scholars will emphasize the fact that Old Testament prophecy is primarily forth-telling or whatever language you want to use to describe that. That is, the prophets are primarily concerned, not with just predicting the future or some course of events that will transpire in the future, though they do that, but in proclaiming a message to the reader's present situation. We said that when the nation of Israel would go off into idolatry and renege on their covenant obligation with God, God would raise up a prophet to call them back to faithfulness to the covenant and to warn them of the consequences of failure to obey the covenant relationship and even to pronounce judgment on Israel and the other nations because of their sinfulness. But we did say that the prophets do engage in what scholars have called foretelling, and is promising, anticipating or predicting the future. We said that at times, one needs to distinguish between the immediate future of the readers and their horizons as opposed to the more distant future, which would be the wrap up of the cosmos and God's plan for the conclusion of the entire world, often known as the eschaton, things related to God's intention for the end. But I've also suggested we need to be aware of speculation as to how prophetic texts will be fulfilled and to be aware of the variety of ways we find prophetic texts being fulfilled.

Sometimes we find prophetic texts that in the New Testament get fulfilled rather in a straightforward manner. We've talked a little bit already about the quotation from Micah chapter 5, in Matthew chapter 2, where Micah's prophecy of a royal figure being born in Bethlehem seems to be fulfilled in a rather straightforward manner. On the other

hand, we see what is sometimes called "typological" or "analogical" type of fulfillment, where the Old Testament author may not necessarily be predicting a certain event in the distant future, but instead, we find in an Old Testament text a person or an event or something that gets repeated, something that functions as a type or pattern that gets picked up and repeated in a greater way in God's dealing with his people and life of fulfillment with Christ. So the conviction being that the same God who is at work fulfilling his promises and bringing about His purposes under the old covenant is likewise in a similar but greater way at work again to fulfill his promises under the new covenant salvation that is inaugurated in the purpose of Jesus Christ. So again, sometimes you find a very straightforward fulfillment, sometimes you find more analogical or typological type of fulfillment.

Sometimes you find New Testament texts portraying a fulfillment that seems to be more spiritual; that is, not a straightforward physical or literal way that one finds it portrayed in the Old Testament. For example, in Acts chapter 15, we find these words, where in the well-known apostolic council, that is, the Jerusalem Council, where Paul and others are debating the question what is required for Gentiles to become God's people? Do they have to submit to the Mosaic Law or not? And in Acts we find this quotation justifying the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God. Verses 16 and also 17, which intriguingly is a quotation from Amos chapter 9 in verse 11 in the Old Testament which is an anticipation or prediction of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. Now, notice it gets quoted here in Acts chapter 15, "After this, I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear [my] name, says the Lord, who does those things [that] have been known for ages." So interestingly, the author seems to find fulfillment of the Amos text, anticipating the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and rulership over the nations is already being fulfilled in the inclusion of Gentiles into the one people of God by responding in faith to Jesus Christ the Messiah. Now whether that has yet another fulfillment that is more strictly physical in the future is a possibility but the point is that the New Testament authors often find particularly references to restoration of national

Israel and the Davidic monarchy with a king ruling over them they find those prophecies frequently fulfilled in the first coming of Christ and his people, the church.

Another feature of fulfillment, when you consider how Old Testament texts get picked up in the New Testament, to keep in mind is sometimes you'll find texts that will receive a fulfillment in both the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ as well. That is, certain Old Testament texts that anticipate a future fulfillment get fulfilled, it seems to me, in two stages which correspond to Jesus' first and second coming. That is, at the first coming of Christ Jesus inaugurates the fulfillment, but at his second coming he consummates it. This is wrapped up in the New Testament understanding of Old Testament fulfillment or New Testament understanding of eschatology that is what the Old Testament often anticipated as a final climatic event that would bring the present age to a close and inaugurate a brand new age. That event in the New Testament is frequently seen as split into two parts: one part corresponding to the first coming of Christ that inaugurates it, the second part corresponding to the consummation, the second coming of Christ which brings it to its conclusion. So sometimes you need to be aware that prophetic texts will find a fulfillment in both the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ as well.

One last thing to say about prophetic literature in terms of fulfillment is particularly when we are prone to speculate about how something will be fulfilled or whether certain events in our day and age are fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic texts and how close we are to the end and speculations such as that, is, I find it instructive to note how fulfillment took place at the first advent of Jesus Christ and how different persons responded to that, particularly how the Jewish leaders, in fact, rejected Christ because they were not prepared for nor did they see prophecy being fulfilled in a way that they expected. So it's almost as if at the first coming of Jesus Christ, we find prophecy being fulfilled in a very unexpected way. I wonder if, in some respects, that does not provide a model or at least a possibility, that God could fulfill things in a very unexpected way in the future, at his second coming, therefore causing us to be very cautious and avoid speculation as to how this is going to be fulfilled and exactly where and when and

what that's going to look like. In the same way that God fulfilled his promises and fulfilled Old Testament prophecies in a very unexpected way at the first coming of Christ, opens a possibility for him, as some have said, "having some tricks up his sleeve," and still having some secrets or still fulfilling things in a way that is very unexpected, yet still in clear fulfillment and consistent with the promises and prophecies that he has made.

So, be aware of the variety of types of fulfillment when one moves from the Old to the New Testament. Obviously, I guess one could add a further type, and that is certain prophecies seem to only find fulfillment in the eschatological consummation of certain prophecies of judgment and the dissolution of the universe and in judgment and creation of a brand new universe and brand new cosmos. Some of those prophecies seem to find their fulfillment solely in the eschatological consummation, but be aware of the variety of types of fulfillment that one finds in Old Testament texts.

Finally, the last thing of principle to say about prophetic literature and interpreting prophetic texts is to recognize that the primary function and purpose of prophetic text is encouragement and warning or encouragement and exhortation to holy living. The primary purpose of Old Testament prophetic texts is not prediction of the future. As we said, they are not simply looking into the crystal ball to see what the future has in store. Instead, prophetic texts are primarily there to encourage God's people who are having a rough go or to warn those who are tempted to stray and to encourage and to warn God's people to pursue holy living. Any interpretation of prophetic literature that does not start there is off on the wrong foot to begin with. We should read prophetic literature primarily as God's continuing encouragement and exhortation for his people to obey him no matter what the cost.

New Testament Literary Genres

So we've looked at just a handful of Old Testament literary types and there is much more that could be said. We didn't talk about narrative because we talked briefly about some of the narrative techniques and story techniques under narrative criticism. There is much more that could be said. We touched very briefly on poetry and poetic type

of literature. We looked at (the legal or law of) Israel's law or the legal literature and also prophetic literature, which makes up the bulk of the literary forms or genres in the Old Testament. But I want to move on now and consider also the New Testament and the different literary genres that make up the New Testament documents, again realizing that when we read the Bible we are not simply reading a monolithic document that is simply homogenous from beginning to end, but we are reading a document that, although clearly demonstrating a unity within, there is a diversity of literary forms and literary types. Sometimes I wonder, kind of as an aside, how interesting it would be to ask the question, if God were to reveal himself to his people today, what literary media or what literary forms that would take. In the Old and New Testaments God revealed himself through very common and standard literary forms and means of communication during that time.

In the New Testament what I want to do is focus on three literary genres, that broadly make up the New Testament. The three genres are: narrative - within that would be included the Gospels and Acts, though that is not necessarily to say that they are identical in their literary forms. Some would distinguish the Gospels from Acts, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time discussing Acts. But we'll talk a little bit about narrative in general and some additional factors in reading and interpreting New Testament narrative, particularly the Gospels in light of the kind of literature it is. The second literary form one finds or literary genre one finds in the New Testament would be Letter or Epistle, which next to the Gospels and the narrative literature, which are the Gospels and Acts, makes up the bulk of the rest of the New Testament. Much of it is in the form of Paul's epistles or Paul's letters. Then, finally, the book of Revelation, the apocalypse, which is sort of a unique literary form in and of itself, in that it actually is a combination of two or three literary types and that causes or raises a number of questions as to what difference does that make in the way we read it. But before moving on, the other thing to say is, similar to the Old Testament, even when we might have analogies to some of these literary forms such as narrative or epistolary literature or letters, at the same time we can't be certain that we should read them in the identical way that we would read our letters or narratives or stories in the first century. There are enough similarities that make

it possible to understand what is going on, but we also need to come to grips with some of the differences between an ancient narrative and a modern biography or an ancient epistle and what it did and how it was put together in comparison to a modern letter.

Gospels Genre

Starting with the Gospels, once again I only want to make some brief comments and additional comments on interpreting the Gospels. We talked a little bit about narrative approaches and narrative criticism and literary criticism such as looking at characterization, plot and structure, etc. and uncovering the historical background, and the historical and cultural references in the text. So I won't repeat that material, but I want to move beyond that and just look at some additional features in understanding New Testament narrative, particularly the Gospels. One of the things with the Gospels is frequently the identification of the literary genre of the gospels has been wrapped up with issues relating to historicity. That is, sometimes the gospels have been often been categorized as a certain type of literary genre that was fictional and that then has implications and ramifications for the historicity of the Gospels. Were the Gospel writers interested mainly in just the theology? We've already talked a little bit about the theology/history disjunction. Does categorizing the Gospels as a certain literary form, especially fictional ones mean then that the Gospel writers are not writing reliable history or interested in writing history at all? So sometimes the identification of the Gospel genre is tied up with issues of historicity of the Gospels.

Let me just make then just a handful of comments related to the Gospels and New Testament narrative literature. First of all, it seems to me that one of the most common, identification of the Gospels is with first century Greco-Roman biography. There have been several scholars, that have been more prone to identify some form of first century Greco-Roman biography, following its conventions and communicating through the means that first century Greco-Roman biography would have communicated, but at the same time it's also clear that the author is attempting to get across his theological perspective on the person of Jesus Christ and on the life of Christ. So perhaps a better classification would be that the Gospels are theological biography.

One of the implications of identifying, the Gospels or even Acts as theological biography is, obviously one needs to ask what is the theological intent and not just what does it say historically about the life of Christ, although that is significant, but also to realize the authors are not simply writing a historical chronicle of everything Jesus did and said, but they have a theological motive. They are trying to communicate a theological message and one needs to try to uncover that through things like redaction criticism. We talked about how the authors arranged and edited their material especially in comparison with the other Gospel writers. What does that reveal about Matthew, Mark, or Luke, or John's theological intention in the way they portray Christ? Obviously, we still recognize the rootedness of this in history - that to some extent, harmonization of the Gospels is a worthy goal because it attempts to establish what happened. What were the historical events in which the events in the life of Christ - the accounts of the Gospel writers - were rooted. So one must uncover the theological intent of the Gospels, and also, I think, still be able to reconstruct historically what was taking place, but beyond that is also to think paragraphs. We'll see a little bit later on as well that outside of speeches the Gospels to me don't seem as much to be built on so much a tightly-knit argument from sentence to sentence or clause to clause. But it depends more on the different functions of the stories and the paragraphs. So I think especially with the Gospels one needs to think more at the level of paragraphs. How do the paragraphs, the different stories, relate to each other? But with speeches, at times it probably is a little more important to follow the logic and the argumentation in the speech.

As I've already said, I think as well that in comparison with the other Gospels one needs to read each Gospel and ask: what is their distinct and unique contribution regarding the life and teaching of Jesus Christ? So, as I just said in the previous point, although these are biographies, they are composed in a way to get across the unique theological perspective of the author. So we need to read the text in the Gospels in comparison with the others to see and to perceive what the unique contribution that writer makes to the life of Christ. What is their unique perspective?

I find it intriguing that in the New Testament canon we are left with four Gospels.

Why didn't the church have one official Gospel and life of Christ? There's actually an individual that tried to do that in a document called the Diatessaron. An individual named Tatian in the early centuries of the church tried to combine the Gospels together starting with John - which, interestingly, today most (especially non-Christian) scholars think is the most historically unreliable - but he started with John and tried to compose one life of Christ or one Gospel. It's interesting that never caught on and the church allowed four distinct Gospels to stand. So I think we need to honor that and ask what are the four distinct contributions of the Gospels, even before we try to harmonize them and put them into one Gospel. Again harmonization is important to understand the integrity of the Gospels - understand the historical events that lay behind them - but before that we need to allow the different Gospels, allow their voice to speak within the canon and the diversity of approaches to the life of Christ.

Gospel Genre Implications

Two further, I think, implications of the genre of the Gospels, I think more directly related to interpretation, is first of all, when we read the accounts of the life and the sayings of Jesus Christ as reported in the Gospels, we need to recognize that they are selective; that is, the Gospel writers are not giving us an exhaustive complete life of Christ or an exhaustive account of everything Jesus did and said. In fact, if you go to the very end of the Gospel of John in chapter 20, he actually says just the opposite; that in fact he almost expresses frustration that no document could hope - ever hope - to capture everything Jesus said and did. But out of all the pool of information regarding the life and teaching of Christ that the writers had at their disposal, they selected those that would communicate theologically what they were trying to say about Christ and about the life and teachings of Jesus. The four different Gospels then provide complementary perspectives on the life of Christ.

Related to that, not only are they selective, but often the Gospel writers are not arranging their Gospels chronologically. Yes, there is a rough chronology from the birth of Christ through his early life and ministry leading up to his death and resurrection; so there is a rough chronology. At other times the Gospel writers are clear that they are

arranging other material chronologically. But there seem to be other times when the Gospel writers are more interested in arranging material thematically or logically rather than chronologically. We saw that with Matthew chapter 8 and 9; there seems to be a collection of miracle stories that Jesus performed that may not have taken place in that order or all at the same time. Again, there's no difficulty in that if Matthew himself does not claim to be saying this is the order in which they actually occurred and that this is the exact time in the life of Christ when all of these events took place. Instead, Matthew may have more of a thematic interest just gathering stories that testify to God's mighty acts through Jesus Christ in these different miracles. Or, for example, in Mark chapters 2 and 3, or sections (the larger part) of Mark 2 and 3. Here we find a series of controversy stories between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, that again suggest perhaps Mark chapters 2 and 3 is not arranged chronologically as far as these all happened right after each other. But again perhaps Mark is arranging things more thematically according to the different forms; he's taken a number of controversy stories and kind of lumped them all together in one place. So again, the Gospel writers at times may be arranging material thematically as opposed to strict chronology all the time. At times they're very selective in what they include. You can see this by comparing Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that obviously each of those Gospel writers, especially Matthew and Mark - or Matthew and Luke material that you don't find in Mark. Both Matthew and Luke have unique material that you don't find in each other because again, they're being selective. They're not giving you an exhaustive account of everything Jesus said and did but are being selective to communicate their theological point. That was appropriate in first-century Greco-Roman biography; that's how you wrote.

A final principle related to interpreting the Gospels that we've also alluded to is to recognize, especially when it comes to the speeches of Jesus or even the speeches of the characters in the book of Acts, that sometimes what we find (and I'd say often what we find) is an adequate summary of what the person said rather than a word-for-word report of everything that the author actually said. There probably are times when the authors capture, at least in Greek translation, the wording of what Jesus said; but other times it

was entirely appropriate and standard practice in first century biographies to not record the exact precise wording of what an author said but to capture in essence or summary, what it was Jesus said. As long as that summary accurately and adequately captured the meaning and intention of what the author was trying to get across, it was entirely acceptable and entirely appropriate.

In our modern-day world we are more interested in quotations. We are interested in verbatim accounts where we will begin and end someone's speech or even something that we have pulled out of another document and to bracket it with quotation marks to show that we have not changed any of the wording. Actually quotation marks would not have been a feature of first century recorded speech. In fact, again, the quotation marks you find in your English translations would not have been in the original Greek text but are simply there to show you that the Gospel writers are recording or reporting the speech of someone else. But again, to recognize that they do not do so by giving you a word-for-word, blow-by-blow account of everything. If that were the case, I would suspect that the New Testament documents, especially the Gospels, would be fifty, sixty, seventy times longer than they are, or even longer. We have already referred to, for example, the Sermon on the Mount. If you sit down and read through the Sermon on the Mount, in a good English translation, I would guess it would take you ten, fifteen minutes maybe to get through. We said it is doubtful Jesus spoke only for ten or fifteen minutes. Probably, his sermon went on for some time. But, as long as the Sermon on the Mount is an accurate and adequate representation and summary of what it was Jesus said, then there's no difficulty whatsoever. That would have been entirely acceptable and recognized as accurate and valid in the first century.

So when we read the Gospels, particularly the narrative, we need to keep in mind the kind of literature it is and what it says about its historicity, what it says about the way of communicating theologically, and studying it to understand the theological intent of the authors and understand how they report events in the life of Christ and how they report speech.

Epistolary Literary Genre

The next literary type in the New Testament that we'll discuss briefly, is epistolary literature, or the Letters of the New Testament. Along with narrative I wonder sometimes in our technological age of being able to receive text messages so quickly in very short, cryptic form, and even email, etc. that we are seeing even more and more our inability to sit down and listen to a story and digest a lengthy story. But outside of the narrative, probably the literary form in the New Testament that we are most familiar with or have closest analogies to would be Letters, or Epistles. Letters and epistles were very common means of communicating in the first century. Virtually any type of information, virtually anything could be communicated through the form of an epistle or a letter. I don't intend to distinguish those two, although in the past, letters and epistles have frequently been distinguished; I will not distinguish those two. But virtually anything could be communicated by an epistle. It was a very handy means of communication. Furthermore, an epistle often functioned as a substitute for the presence of the author. That is, when the author was separated by a distance from his readers, an epistle was a way to bridge that gap. It was the next best thing to the person actually being there. It was meant to overcome the distance between the author and his readers. So writing with an epistle was a very common way of communication.

Some have seen in the Epistles a more straightforward means of communication, a more didactic way of communicating as opposed to poetic and metaphorical type of communication. Yet at the same time, it's important to understand that even in the Epistles, we often find figurative use of language; we find poetic type of speech or the utilization of poems; sometimes you'll find metaphorical type of language. So we shouldn't read the entire book as simply lacking artistry or seeing it as simply a straightforward, literal mode of communication. Although again, more so than poetry and other types of literature, it does communicate in a more straightforward, prosaic manner. However, we still need to be alert to artistry and, at times, poetic or even metaphorical use of language throughout the Epistles as well.

Occasional Aspects of the Epistles

One of the most important features of Epistles that virtually everyone recognizes and usually points to when discussing Epistles is what is known as their occasional nature; that is, the Epistles are written in response to very specific situations and very specific occasions, that is, they are written to problems, specific problems. For our purposes, there are problems in the first century as the Church begins to spread out, is established, and confronts the world and other teachings. The New Testament Letters are occasional in that they are written as specific responses to those problems. That is, the Letters are not just abstract theology couched in letter format. Paul or Peter or whoever did not just sit down and write a theological compendium of what they thought and then attached an introduction and conclusion in the form of a letter. Instead, the Letters could be seen as more pastoral or practical theology, that is, theology addressed to specific circumstances and situations. The New Testament authors don't record everything they think about, every theological topic, but they simply, in light of their theology, respond theologically. Their theology is worked out in the text, or presented in the text, in response to specific issues and to specific problems. So, yes, the Epistles are very highly theological, but again, we shouldn't expect to find anything like a systematic theology. Instead, we should find more of a pastoral theology - theology in response to very specific issues in the church.

What that means then is that we have to try to reconstruct the situation that engendered the writing of the Letters. If you are dealing with one of Paul's letters, such as the book of Galatians, you need to have some idea of the circumstances that precipitated the writing of the letter. You need to understand to some degree the occasion that brought the letter about. So this takes us back to historical criticism to understand the historical circumstances that lies behind the documents, the historical circumstances that gave rise to them. That is certainly true in Letters, because they are occasional. Paul just didn't sit down and decide to write a letter. He decided to sit down and decided to write a letter because there was a specific problem that he's been made aware of, that has caused him to write.

So, for example, if you pick up a document such as 1 Corinthians, you need to come to grips with a series of issues or a series of problems. What were the problems in the first century city of Corinth that the church was facing that caused Paul to include all the different information that he did? When you read through 1 Corinthians, it seems that Paul is addressing a series of topics. In fact, the book clearly tells us that there have been a series of issues after Paul left the church, having established the church in Corinth. After he left, a number of problems arose that, number one, were made known to Paul by word of mouth. Someone orally reported to him certain problems.

Number two, it appears the Corinthians themselves sent Paul a letter, isolating a series of problems. So Paul's letter, the first to Corinthians that we call 1 Corinthians, actually takes up those issues that he has been made aware of by word of mouth and by letter from Corinth and he deals with them. The difficulty is trying to reconstruct what precisely were the problems and what caused them, to help us more fully understand Paul's response to those problems. So it's incumbent on us to reconstruct to some degree the situation that engendered the writing of Paul's letters, the overall situation or the situation behind specific problems that Paul might deal with.

Scholars often call this “mirror reading” the letters. That is, the letters are seen as in a sense a mirror that reflects the situation that gave rise to it. In other words all that we have, the only access we have to the situation is the response itself. So we try to find mirrored in that or reflected off of that, we try to read off the letter itself what the circumstances might have been that were behind the writing of the letter. Obviously there are certainly difficulties with that type of approach, but in a sense it’s necessary, because again the only access we really have to the problem of the Galatian community is the book of Galatians itself. So mirror-reading is an attempt to, based on reading the letter itself and clues from the letter, try to reconstruct what most likely was the situation behind Paul’s letters, or other New Testament epistles--I Peter, I John or whatever.

Helpful Analogies

There have been actually two analogies that might be helpful for understanding the New Testament letters and they’re perhaps not perfect, but two analogies that I have

frequently found utilized in hermeneutical textbooks or discussions of Paul's letters and I sometimes will use them in my classes. One of them is reading the New Testament letters can be compared to reading someone else's mail, or more accurately today, reading someone else's email. So if I have access to someone else's computer and I see one of their emails on the screen, I might read that, and without understanding previous dialogue or previous emails without understanding who the person is that they are emailing and what the situation that gave rise to the exchange through email and what the problems were that are being addressed. I might have a difficult time reading that email. The same is true with Paul's letters. We're reading documents that were addressed to someone else. So we need to try to recover as much as possible and as clearly as possible and as fully as possible the background that gave rise to that. Who were the readers, what was the crisis, what was the problem, that caused Paul to sit down and write this letter, and how is that letter a response to those problems?

Another analogy that I often find used, is listening to one end of a phone conversation. It's like listening to someone else talking and all you have access to is the person you're hearing. You don't know what's happening on the other end of the line. You don't know who they're talking to. You don't know the problem or previous exchanges that they've had. You don't the problem that caused one of them to call the other, the issue that caused the phone conversation to happen in the first place. But interestingly, sometimes by listening to someone talk, you can kind of figure out who might be on the other end and what they might be talking about and what issue, what problem, and even what the other person might be saying in response.

So those two analogies might be helpful in understanding what scholars call the occasional nature - of letters or epistles; that is, they were addressed to very specific occasions or very specific circumstances.

So one of the primary goals or primary features of the interpretive process, when it comes to letters, is the ability to reconstruct to some degree what most likely was the circumstance, the occasion, the issues, the problems that gave rise to this letter. We've already given a couple of examples of historical reconstruction or historical criticism, as

far as again we've looked at the letter of Colossians, for example, figuring out first of all whether Colossians was actually addressing a specific false teaching. Then if it was, what was the nature of that false teaching. I gave a summary of what I thought it might be, but certainly how you understand and read Colossians will in some respects be affected by how you answer those questions.

So New Testament documents then are not merely the author's theological reflection on various theological topics, or a compendium of the author's theological belief. But, they are rather practical or pastoral theology, theological responses to the various problems and difficulties in the first century church.

Amanuensis

One other thing to mention about letter writing, that we will return to, and talk about briefly in relationship to authorship is to recognize that a frequent way of writing letters in the first century that was ubiquitous or would have been just highly available to virtually everyone was the use of amanuenses or sort of secretaries. This is reveals the very human element of the production of Scripture, but most first century writers would have availed themselves of the services of an amanuensis. Very seldom did a person sit down and write a letter all by themselves, but they often would dictate it to some degree to an amanuensis or like a scribe and that scribe then would write what they were told to write.

You actually see this reflected clearly in the very end of the book of Romans. When you're reading Romans it does sound like any of Paul's other letters that he writes - but when you get to verse 22 of Romans 16, the very end where you have this series of greetings like you find in any other letter of Paul and that was again rather typical of a first century letter. In verse 22 of Romans 16 you find, "I Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord." So Tertius was probably Paul's amanuensis or his scribe that he would have dictated the letter of Romans to. Now Tertius himself in verse 22 adds his own comment to the letter in greeting the readers.

Epistolary Structure

To move on, another facet of first century letters that you need to be aware of is

the Epistolary Structure, that is, how were first century letters put together. One thing to realize before we look at that is that one of the differences, at least as far as I can tell, between Paul's letters particularly and even Peter's letters for example and first century letters would have been the length. Most first century letters that we have available as letters on papyri, for example, were much shorter in length. In Paul's letters particularly, one of the differences is they seem to be much longer than typical first century letters. Philemon might be closer to the length of many first century letters.

Introduction/Salutation

However, a typical epistolary structure might include most of the following five elements. Number one is an introduction or salutation, where an author will begin a letter by identifying himself and his readers with a greeting. So, X to Y, X being the author or the writer of the letter to Y the recipients. Then there could be an expression of greetings, which often New Testament authors expand not just to greetings but "Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ" or something like that. So often they'll expand on the introduction and salutation.

Thanksgiving

Usually the introduction is followed by a thanksgivings clause or thanksgiving period or section, where an author sometimes thanked Greco-Roman gods, for example, for the health of the recipient or something like that. Obviously in the New Testament authors, especially Paul, you find them thanking the God of the Bible for certain things in relationship to the readers. So an introduction and/or salutation followed by a thanksgiving.

Body & Exhortation

This is usually then followed by the body of the letter, which is the main reason for writing. It communicates the main content. At least for Paul's letters you often find this followed by what is often known as a paraenesis or the exhortation section that is based on the major information in the body. These are the commands and exhortations for holy living based on what God has done for his people through Jesus Christ.

Farewell and Greetings

And then you usually find this followed by a closing farewell, and sometimes including a greeting of certain individuals as we saw with Romans chapter 16.

For example, if you look at the book of Ephesians as one example, you'll find it following this format rather closely. For example, chapter 1 verses 1 and 2 of Ephesians are the introduction and salutation where Paul in typical format - as Paul again usually expanding these elements: "Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ to the church, to the saints who are faithful in Ephesus, Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ" or something like that. Chapters 1 in 3 through 23 would correspond to the thanksgiving. Paul does something a little bit different in Ephesians, where he includes a blessing at the very beginning that corresponds to a Jewish *berakah* or blessing, "Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" because he's done all these things. Then that merges into Paul's thanksgiving, where he does thank God for certain aspects of the life of the readers. That is followed by perhaps in chapter 2 in verse 1 at times what is tricky is, sometimes it's difficult in some of Paul's letters to isolate exactly where the body begins. Colossians, I think, is a good example where it's not clear when Paul has emerged from the thanksgiving into the body. Sometimes I think he just does it and doesn't necessarily have a clear transition. But perhaps chapter 2 in verse 1 through chapter 3 in verse 21 of Ephesians could be the main body, main reason for writing. Here he reminds his readers of all that they have and all that they are by virtue of their identification with Jesus Christ. This is followed by the paraenesis or the exhortation section, the commands and imperatives that are found in chapter 4, verse 1 into chapter 6 in verse 20. Ephesians 6:20 ends that spiritual warfare section, which is just sort of the conclusion to the entire exhortation section of the letter. Then, finally, verses 21 through 24 of Ephesians 6 would be the closing farewell, which would follow a fairly standard way of bringing to a conclusion a first century letter.

So if you read most of Paul's letters including the letters of Peter, and also James as well, sometimes they appear to be missing what we might think of as certain features of a typical Greco-Roman letter. James' letter doesn't have a specific thanksgiving, nor

does it develop like Paul's letters where it has a kind of a theological part followed by an exhortational part, but most of the letters you can read as models of typical first century Greco-Roman letters.

Impact on Interpretation

A couple of things to mention about as far as the impact this might have on interpretation is certainly it's helpful to note if you're interpreting a verse - where it falls, in what section it falls in a letter. But number one - it seems to me what is most significant is when one of these elements is expanded, we shouldn't be too surprised that Paul begins a letter by "to the church at wherever, greetings or grace and peace," that shouldn't shock us very much. It's probably not that significant. But when he expands upon that, when we find him developing or expanding upon typical epistolary formulae, that might be significant and something you want to sit up and take notice of. So be aware of where Paul or one of the other authors expands - takes a typical element of a first-century letter and expands upon it – that might tell us something significant about what the author is emphasizing.

Galatians

Another thing might be, especially with Paul's letters, when a certain feature of a first century letter is missing, and so, for example, when one reads the letter to the Galatians, one of the first things you recognize when reading that letter, especially if you've read Paul's other letters, is that it is missing a thanksgiving. So that should be right after the salutation, the introduction and salutation, which intriguingly Paul expands. Notice it begins in chapter 1 verse 1, "Paul an apostle" to show you how both of these elements, expansion and also missing elements, how that might work. Chapter 1 of Galatians in verses 1 through 5, notice how the typical features of a first century letter get expanded: "Paul, an apostle sent not from men nor by men but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers with me to the churches of Galatia." Now notice how Paul's identification as an apostle, which is typical in his letters, gets expanded. He describes that as sent not from human beings or by human beings but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. Paul seems to want to emphasize this. In

fact, when you read the rest of the letter this seems to be one of the issues he must deal with. This seems to be one of the things that his opponents are calling into question, his apostolic authority. Now at the very outset of the letter he signals a key feature, a key theme, that he will deal with, is that his apostleship is not one that comes about by human beings, but one that comes about by divine authority.

Then "to the churches of Galatia" that would not be surprising, but notice the last one "Grace and Peace to you;" a typical Pauline greeting, but notice how it gets expanded: "from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." And notice that long expansion which again I think is another key feature of the letter. Paul wants to demonstrate, or at this point Paul is assuming that his readers will understand and buy into the fact that they have been redeemed and rescued through the death of Christ from the present evil age.

In the rest of the letter of Galatians, Paul is going to place the Old Testament law within the category of the present evil age. Not that it's bad or evil, but it's just that the giving of the law took place before Jesus Christ and the age of the fulfillment and the Holy Spirit arrive. So if the readers have been rescued from the present evil age, why do they want to go back to it by submitting to the Mosaic Law that these Judaizers are trying to get them to submit to? So right at the beginning Paul is kind of getting the readers on his side and anticipating and arguing for key features, that his apostolic authority comes not from human beings but by God himself and that through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, a new era has been inaugurated. His readers have been rescued from the present evil age, and have been therefore transferred into a new age, so why would they want to go back to the old age, which is characterized by or one of the characteristic features is submission to and domination by the Mosaic Law. So, already Paul is, in a sense, getting the upper hand of his argument. He's anticipating the important features of his letter by how he's expanded the typical greeting or salutation of a first century letter. So by paying attention to how the certain features are expanded can be important.

The last one is - we just said the second one is paying attention to what is deleted. Notice that between verses 5 and 6 what is missing is the typical thanksgiving. Verse 6 simply begins, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Jesus Christ." It doesn't take a lot of reflection to see perhaps why Paul skipped the thanksgiving; most likely he is so upset with the situation, it's so urgent and perhaps he's even so upset and astonished by what the readers are doing that he doesn't have a lot to be thankful for. Not that he didn't have anything to be thankful for but in a sense it is perhaps for shock value he just skips the thanksgiving where a reader might have expected one and jumps right into the heart of the problem. So again by paying attention to how certain features of a letter are expanded or developed or one that might even be missing, those are the times where you want to sit up and pay attention.

In our next session we'll talk a little bit more about epistolary literature in the first century and how that might influence the way we read epistles and the truth of the epistles and letters. Then we'll move onto the last literary type or genre in the New Testament which is the apocalypse or the book of Revelation.

Transcribed by Mike Larcon; Norman Britt; Catherine Ryan; Daniel Ko; Matt Sawyer;
Kyle Ojemann; Sarah Juhlin, editor
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 20

Apocalyptic Literary Genre

New Testament Epistolary Genre

Another feature of interpreting and reading New Testament epistolary literature or letters is to realize the possibility within the broader category of letter or epistle in the first century but especially in the New Testament is the possibility of recognizing sub-types. This would be in the same way that even in our own day and age under the broader category of a letter we might have different style for a letter that one would write to a family member which would be very different from the letter of complaint that one might write to a company or a cover letter for a job application. So in the first century there also appears to be a number of sub-types of letters that may correspond to certain New Testament letters as well.

Philemon

For example, just to give you a couple of examples, the book of Philemon or the letter to Philemon, the shortest letter written by Paul, seems to correspond fairly closely to a possible sub-type of a letter known as a letter of recommendation or a letter of introduction. Usually what that entailed was the writer would introduce or recommend a certain person to someone else often asking for a favor intending them or promising to sort of return the favor to the recipient. In other words, when you read the letter to Philemon, Paul introduces Onesimus, the other main character. The author is Paul but Philemon is the main recipient. Paul introduces Onesimus to Philemon because Onesimus was a slave of Philemon who had run away now has become Christian through and has been converted through Paul's ministry. Now Paul writes a letter of recommendation or introduction to send him back and introduce him to Philemon, the recipient, and also asks Philemon for a favor, promising to do something for Philemon. So it's almost as if Philemon reading this letter would recognize his obligation to respond in the way that Paul has asked.

Philippians as a Family Letter; 2 Peter and 2 Timothy as a testament

Or for example, the book of Philippians has often been labeled a family letter corresponding and having certain sections of it that correspond to what is known as "a family letter" and some of the language is perhaps reflecting that.

A couple of the letters may correspond to what is known as "a testament," which wasn't so much a letter in the first century but a rather an actual literary genre. That is, a testament was sort of the last words of a dying hero as a person was on his death bed and had his family and friends surrounding him. It was the final instructions to the followers as the person was about ready to die, which included both exhortation and sometimes-eschatological prediction in it.

You find at least two books that seem to correspond to possibly to a testament and one of them is 2 Peter chapter one verses 14 and 15 seem to reflect language of a testament. That is, Peter on his death bed in a sense now these are his final instructions as he's about ready to pass from this life, these are his final instructions to his followers starting with verse 13. I'll back up this is 2 Peter 1:13, "I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things" You find similar language in 2 Timothy as well so that both of these letters 2 Peter and 2 Timothy may take the form of a testament in epistolary form that is the final instructions to the followers of these individuals right before they die.

In 2 Timothy, Paul is speaking his final words as he faces execution and both of them could be classified as testamentary type of letters, the final instructions of a dying hero or the final instructions of Paul and Peter to their followers right before they pass from the scene.

Authorship and the Epistolary Pseudonymous Form

One issue related to epistolary literature is how we understand authorship, just very briefly is kind of a digression but is related to the issues of genre because interestingly we just talked about testaments. Most of the testaments that we have in

copies of or I referred earlier to a book by James Charlesworth *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. In those volumes you can find reference to a number of testaments, write an English translations of a number of testamentary type of literature. Most of them are what is known as pseudonymous, that is, they're written in the name of someone else. It's a later figure writing in the name of or as if the earlier figure is writing long after their death. Some therefore have suggested that some of the New Testament letters may also be pseudonymous is it possible that a few of the letters such as 2 Peter or 2 Timothy were written by a pseudonym? That is, after Paul and Peter have died could someone one of their followers have picked up a pen and written a letter in their name? Therefore, no one would have been deceived by this and no one would have been fooled into thinking that either Peter or Paul actually wrote this, but they would recognize based on literary genre that someone else was writing in their name. The question is whether this was an acceptable device not only in the first century but would this have been an acceptable device among New Testament authors? Would this have been an acceptable device within the parameters of the New Testament canon? I think, number one, good arguments can probably be made for the authorship of all the letters by the person named, though I would admit 2 Peter is far more difficult and even some Christian or evangelical scholars have recognized the difficulty even though while retaining Peter as the author of the letter.

But second it's not clear to me that pseudonymity would have been an acceptable canonical device, that is, would have been an acceptable device, recognized among New Testament authors, especially as the canon was being recognized and formed that those letters that would have been pseudonymous? It's not clear that they would have been accepted and that would have been an acceptable device.

Amanuenses

But, on the other hand, even if we reject pseudonymity, that is, writing in someone else's name, again long after the actual author is dead, a follower or disciple would have picked up the pen and written in that person's name, even if we reject that as we've already seen, it's not necessary to hold that the author's physically wrote every last word

found in the document. We are already talked about amanuenses, that is that this could sometimes account perhaps for the difference between the letters. Some people feel that Peter could not have written 2 Peter because the theology is different and the language and style are very different. Some have suggested that this could be accounted for by utilizing different amanuenses or sometimes an amanuensis, that is, a scribe or secretary, that you'd dictate the letter to. At times some of them may have been given slightly more freedom so that they perhaps would have composed much of the letter but the authors still would have signed off on that letter. So again what is written is exactly what Paul or Peter or whoever wanted to be written and would have signed off. They would have agreed upon it as accurately communicating what they wanted to communicate.

We saw this with chapter 16 of Romans in verse 22 were Tertius is mentioned as probably the scribe or the amanuensis who has actually written the letter. We find something else very interesting in a couple of Paul's letters. One example in Galatians the very last chapter, chapter 6, notice what Paul says. I'll start with chapter 6 verse 11: he says "see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand." It's possible that that refers to the entire letter, but is it possible though that this reflects something that you sometimes see in other ancient letters and that is towards the end of the letter, when an author has dictated a letter to a scribe or amanuensis, the author would often take up the pen and sign in his own name or produce the greeting in his own name. So is it possible that Galatians when you get to chapter 6 verse 11 that now Paul takes up the pen himself and writes the final greeting and finishes off the letter.

So epistolary literature was produced in a variety of ways, mainly by utilizing an amanuensis or scribe or something like that, which sometimes might account for some of the differences one finds in the letters. I will proceed with the assumption that New Testament letters have been produced by the persons or have been written by the persons whose name they bear in the introduction to the letters.

Interpreting the Epistles

One other feature just to mention before we look at a handful of principles for interpreting epistolary literature is, I've already expressed my cautions and misgivings

about rhetorical approaches, that is, identifying letters, especially Paul's letters, as examples of rhetorical speeches, deliberative speeches or judicial speeches or epidictic speeches. Not that there aren't some similarities and not that there can't be some value in comparing the function of them to certain sections of Paul's letters, not that Paul never uses rhetorical argumentation or things like that, but it seems to me that it's questionable to take rhetorical speeches of the first century and impose them on New Testament letters and said again when you look at the formal features of the letters, when you look at the clues the author leaves himself, it appears that New Testament authors are writing what is nothing less, however different than a typical first century letter with the introduction or salutation, the thanksgiving, the body, conclusion and greetings. They are using typical devices that indicate that that is indeed what they're doing. So I won't repeat my discussion or arguments for Paul primarily writing first century letters and not rhetorical speeches.

Guidelines for Interpreting First Century Letters

Let me by just drawing this together and highlighting just a handful or principles or guidelines for reading and interpreting firs century letters that rise out of the kind of literature it is. First of all, it is important for interpreting first century letters to reconstruct the historical setting and occasion. We've already mentioned that New Testament letters are highly occasional, responses to specific problems and issues in the early church. So based on the letter itself and based on any information we can gather about the first century situation it's important to try to reconstruct what most likely was the problem or issue or situation that Paul, Peter, or James is addressing and then how is the letter seen as a response to that.

Second, I think that it's also important to follow the argument of the letter to note how the thought develops. Even more so the narrative is asking how the sentences and clauses, how do both the sentence level and verse level, but also the paragraph level explain how the argument develops. How can one trace the argument of the letter from section to section.

Example from Romans 6

For example, just to give you a very quick example, a text that we'll return to later on towards the end of this course, but in Romans chapter 6 and verses 1-11, we find a good example of how it's important to trace the argument of the text. First of all chapter 6 of Romans begins with a typical question and answer format that Paul follows. There's more to be said about this that we'll say later, but frequently Paul will raise a question, which appears to be a potential objection to something he's just said and then he'll answer that question. So notice chapter 6 verses 1: "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" That's the question that he raises. The first thing to know then is that it's based on something Paul has previously said, and this is probably just a way Paul anticipates possible objections that the readers might have. These are not necessarily real objections that may have been voiced, although it could be. It's probably just a way of raising possible objections that someone might have, especially his readers but using it also to advance his own argument.

So if you look at chapter 6, this question, "shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" probably grows out of something he said back in chapter 5 in verses 20 and 21. The last two verses he says "the law was added," this is chapter 5 of Romans verse 20, "the law was added so that trespass might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more so that just as sin reigned in death so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." So a possible objection or possible question that could be raised: well if verse 20 is true, if where sin increases grace increases all the more, should I sin more so that grace may increase all the more? And that's precisely the question Paul raises, "shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

The rest of this chapter, verses 2-11, can be seen as a response to that question. As the answer, know in fact that the answer is in two forms, kind of an initial outburst "by no means, may it never be," followed more by a logical explanation. We cannot go on sinning because we've been united to Christ who has died to sin. We've died to sin because we've been united to Christ who himself has died to sin and who has raised us to

live in the newness of life. That makes that question absurd.

So it's important to be able to trace the argument to understand how the argument flows and how it fits. We'll talk more about that when we look at issues of literary context later on in a subsequent section. So it's important to be able to follow the argument, to trace the argument, not to just summarize the content, but actually to be able to explain how it develops and how the author develops his argument and his point.

Interpreting Guidelines for Epistles

A third important principle in interpreting epistolary literature is to recognize again what section you're dealing with, are you dealing with. If you're interpreting a text, are you dealing with the text that is part of a thanksgiving, or part of the body, part of the exhortational section? What difference that might make in the way you read it, particularly whether the author has expanded something and is doing something unique?

And then fourth, see if your letter perhaps belongs to a sub-genre, such as Philemon perhaps belonging to a sub-genre known as a letter of recommendation, and whether that might make a difference in the way that you interpret the epistle.

Genre of Revelation

The third literary genre or actually I would say the third book that it represents at least two or three genres in the New Testament is the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation seems to be able to be identified, although I'm not convinced the first readers would have clearly separated between all three of these, but three literary types seem to emerge from the text of Revelation: apocalypse, prophecy, and a letter. The author himself we'll see, clearly identifies his work as a prophecy. It actually begins and ends just like one of Paul's letters. It also seems to have characteristic features, especially in chapters 4 through 22, of an ancient writing that we have labeled an apocalypse, we'll look at that in a moment.

The difficulty is with at least one of these there is no precise analogy in our modern day world. In other words, we're familiar with letters, we write and we read letters, but when's the last time you sat down and read an apocalypse? When's the last time you sat down and wrote an apocalypse to someone? So genre criticism or an

understanding of literary genre is very important here and helps us particularly in this book to avoid misunderstanding.

As we said, literary genre functions mainly as kind of an entry point into the genre to get us off on the right foot, to get us off to the right start in interpreting the book. Though it doesn't solve all the interpretive issues, and difficulties, internally how the book develops and folds, it sort of has its own internal genre. But usually misunderstandings of the book of Revelation come by failing to note these three genres of apocalypse, prophecy and letter, and a failure to recognize them or to misunderstand what they are. Often failure to understand all three of these and what kind of book it is is what gives rise to misunderstandings of Revelation. Particularly at the popular level Revelation is used to do all kinds of strange things. But what we want to do is briefly as kind of an entry point into the book of Revelation is describe these three literary types, these three literary genres.

Revelation clearly intends to be read as an epistle or as a letter. In fact, when you read the very beginning, the very first chapter, at least starting with verse 4, it sounds like you're in essence reading one of Paul's letters. Notice verse 4, "John," there's the identification of the writer, "to the seven churches in the province of Asia," there's the identification of the readers. "Grace and peace to you," sounds like one of Paul's letters, but notice how this gets expanded. So I would sit up and pay attention to this. "The grace and peace," the greeting part, gets expanded. "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before the throne, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom of priests, to serve his God and Father, to him be the glory, and power forever and ever, amen." So that's your epistolary introduction, the salutation. Notice also Revelation ends like a typical letter. It ends verses 20 and especially 21, "Amen, come Lord Jesus," verse 21 "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." This is a common way that New Testament letters ended. So Revelation clearly intends to be read as a letter, and I don't think this is inconsequential. I think it is

illegitimate to look over that and ignore it.

The second, notice, that the author clearly intends, or clearly indicates, that he's intending to write a prophecy. Notice the first couple verses of this book, especially verse 3: "Blessed is the one who reads the word of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in them because the time is near." In chapter 22 again, at the very end of the book, it kind of the bookends, he will identify his work as a prophecy, and warn those who hear the words of this prophecy not to ignore them and disobey them. In another place in chapter 22, he clearly identifies this as a prophecy. So the book of Revelation has the beginning and ending features of a letter. It indicates John's intention to write a letter to these seven churches in Asia Minor, and he clearly identifies his work as a prophecy as well.

But chapter 1 and verse 1 also indicates John's intention to record another type of literature, that is, he begins by saying, "The revelation [or apocalypse] of Jesus Christ." The word "revelation" here comes from the Greek word "apocalypses," or "apocalypse," which "God gave him to show His servants what must take place." Now it's from this verse that we get the label for a literary genre, "apocalypse." I doubt that John is using "revelation" or "apocalypse" here as a label of genre, as a literary type, that came much later. But at the same time, while calling this "a revelation of Jesus Christ," which he shows to the prophets and to John, John clearly intends this book to belong to a literary genre of revelatory literature. It's to be taken as a revelation, a divine revelation of God to John. But as you read the rest of the book of Revelation, especially chapters 4 through 22, we'll see in just a moment that it actually contains most of the features typical of a group of writings that we now label as apocalypse or apocalyptic literature.

We'll start to examine the literary genre apocalypse, again "apocalypse" is the term that we use to describe this group of writings that share similar features to which Revelation appears to belong, and from which it derives its name. Actually, it is from Revelation chapter 1 verse 1, "the apocalypse or the revelation of Jesus Christ." But, just so you know, apocalypse is a modern label it's not necessarily one that was used by John and the earliest writers to label their works. Yet, at the same time, there clearly seems to

be a group of writings that have recognizable similarities and similar features and we'll talk about what they are.

So the literary genre is what is known as an apocalypse that Revelation seems to belong to. Again, apocalypse is a term that we use to describe a group of writings that were produced roughly during the period of 200 BC to 200 AD. Works such as Daniel and the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, and the book of Revelation in the New Testament, and by the way much of what I'm going to say would apply to Daniel as well as the book of Revelation since they seem to share the same literary features and belong to the same literary genre. But there were other Jewish and Christian apocalypses produced during this time of roughly 200 BC to 200 AD that are not included in the Old and New Testament. As I've already mentioned before, you can find English translations of most of these documents, collected in a two-volume work by James Charlesworth *called The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Volume number one contains English translation by a variety of scholars of most of these apocalypses. Or an easier way if you want, in Google, type in the name of the apocalypse and you can find English translations online.

Features of Apocalypses

But what these apocalypses are is basically first person narrative accounts, of the visionary experienced, or of a revelatory experience of a human being. Having had that revelatory experience, now they give a narrative account, a report, of what it was they saw. Sometimes this visionary experience is in the form of a dream, we find that going on in Daniel. Sometimes it's an actual visionary transport. The person has an experience where it's almost as if they're in an out of body type experience. They're transported by God's Spirit to certain locations to see different things. So, common behind all of these is some type of visionary experience where they see things, and now they record them for these visions for the benefit of their audience. The visions usually are visions of the heavenly world; sometimes they have visions of heaven or hell, the place of judgment. Often these are visions of eschatological, end time events as well.

Definition of Apocalyptic [John Collins]

Probably the most popular definition that I've come across that I find it repeated in almost every book that deals with apocalyptic literature, quotes this definition or at least uses it as a starting point, and this is a definition by a scholar named John Collins, who has done a lot of work in apocalyptic literature. He defined an apocalypse as: a genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being, usually an angel, to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisions eschatological salvation, and which is spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world." Now, let me unpack this definition, and let me say it one more time since most of you are listening to this: "an apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature that communicates a revelation, within a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by another worldly being, an angelic being, to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisions eschatological salvation and is spatial, insofar as it involves another supernatural world."

So let me just briefly unpack this definition. Number one is it's important to understand in this definition that an apocalypse is a record of a revelation to a human recipient. So the human recipient would be, in our case, John. He would be the author of the apocalypse who has a revelatory experience, primarily through means of vision, and now records that. Number two, notice that it's a narrative of that account. So apocalyptic literature can in a sense be treated like narrative literature. It's a narration of something that the author has experienced and seen through this revelation, this revelatory experience. A third part of this definition that is important is that this revelation is primarily about a transcendent perspective. What that means is it's primarily a revelation about something that transcends the present visible, earthly world. So it's kind of an out of this world experience. Now we'll see that this doesn't mean that this world is unimportant, and it's kind of an escape to a heavenly reality, a heavenly existence. It's not quite that, but it is a revelation of a world and a reality that transcends the physical world that can be seen by the human eye.

So the only appropriate way for someone to know this transcendent reality is to have it revealed to him or her. So apocalypse is about a transcendent reality, it provides a transcendent perspective by opening up the reader, the seer, this human recipient, by opening him or her up to this transcendent reality that, as we'll see, is meant to cast a new perspective on the physical earthly reality that they live in. So it's not meant to be a means of escape, but it's meant to open their physical world up to being understood in light of this transcendent reality, this transcendent perspective, that can only be known through a direct revelation. Apart from a revelation and this visionary experience through this other supernatural being, this other worldly being, human recipients simply couldn't know it.

There are two features of this transcendent perspective. Number one, in this definition, it's often temporal, that is it refers to eschatology or the end of the world. In other words, a vision that transcends time, it goes beyond their time, to include the eschatological end. But the fifth thing is it's spatial, that is, it is the vision from the transcendent perspective usually of a heavenly world. It introduces them to a heavenly reality, a heavenly world, one that could not be seen merely by human perception. So again what this means is that it's both temporal and spatial. Apocalypses are not just about the future. Often we've read books like Revelation or Daniel, just about future events but it's also to reveal a different reality, a different perspective, a heavenly world, a different perspective on reality and life. We'll talk more about that.

Revelation and Symbolism

But two other things I want to add to this definition of apocalyptic literature is first of all, is this transcendent reality that's temporally about the future but also spatially about the heavenly world, is communicated and couched in highly symbolic language. One of the things you know when reading the apocalypses is how they communicate through very graphic imagery. Often times they'll use animal imagery, often though used imagery that sometimes is a combination of animals and human things and other things, that reveal, rather bizarre at times, symbols. Revelation primarily communicates, perhaps even one of the features that some think is even more prevalent in Revelation than other

apocalypses, is the amount of symbolism that one finds in it. For example, this is Revelation chapters 8 and 9 are an account in Revelation of the author's vision of the sounding out of seven trumpets on the earth, something happens. Notice in chapter 9, notice what the author sees, and kind of strange, this is the fifth trumpet, the bowls come later. As the fifth trumpet is sounded in chapter 9, something happens and these locusts come out. I want you to know how he describes these locusts. We might talk about these later but right now I'm just interested in you seeing the symbolism and kind of the graphic nature of the imagery and how the symbols sometimes are put together in ways at least to us that are kind of strange, though they may not have been so strange to the first readers.

Chapter 9, "The fifth angel sounded his trumpet and I saw a star that had fallen from the skies to the earth. The star was given a key to the shaft of the abyss. When he opened the abyss, smoke came out of it, like smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and skies were darkened by the smoke from the abyss and out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them but only torture them for five months," which five months was probably the common lifespan of the locusts during that time in the first century. "And the agony they suffered was like the sting of a scorpion." These are locusts that can harm people and sting them in the same way that a scorpion can. Let me skip down to the start of verse 7 when they begin to be described. "The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle," now these locusts kind of look like horses, "on their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces were like human faces, their hair was like a woman's hair, their teeth were like a lion's teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron and the sound of their wings was like the sound of a multitude of horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails that stung like scorpions, and in their tails they had the power to torment people for five months, and they had a king over them, which was the angel of the abyss."

Here you have John seeing a vision of these locusts, but they're certainly more

than locusts, they have tails like scorpions that can sting and cause harm, they have human-like heads with crowns on them, and a face like a man, hair like a woman, teeth like a lion. What in the world is this thing that John was looking at, what is this thing that he sees in his vision? My point is at this stage in our discussion is simply to note the graphic symbolism and the description of the symbols and what John sees in his vision. So you have this transcendent reality of the eschatological future, temporally, and also the heavenly world is communicative in highly symbolic language.

The second thing I would add to this definition is an emphasis on the function. The function of apocalypses seems to be both to console and exhort God's people based on this transcendent perspective. So by providing a transcendent perspective on reality, an apocalypse is able to motivate the readers to obedience to God and his word. It functions to console those who are suffering but also to exhort God's readers to bring them in line with how God desires his people to live. So, in other words, apocalypses again are not just there for speculation about the future and about heaven. Some other apocalypses might engage in some of that, but primarily they function to exhort and console God's people. They have a hortatory purpose.

When it comes to understanding, then, apocalypses we need to look a little bit more at this idea of a transcendent perspective and what an apocalypse like Revelation does. Basically, what it does is it then functions to open up the present to this new and transcendent perspective, that is, Revelation and other apocalypses are not meant to be just fantasy literature. Again it's not meant to provide an escape. It is not just a way of escaping this world by providing this heavenly alternative, a kind of fantasy world that the readers can escape to. Instead, it's meant to help the readers see their present world in a new light. As they look out, as many apocalypses did, and as many apocalypses presuppose, as the readers looked out at their empirical world where they were often in situations of foreign domination, where some of them may be oppressed by the foreign domination, or maybe some of them were elites compromising with and participating in the foreign influence and foreign rule. What an apocalypse did is it cast a different perspective on their empirical world. As they looked out on it what an apocalypse said

was, “things aren’t all that they appear to be.” What you see with their eyes in the physical world, under foreign rulership et cetera, everything that’s going on in their situation, what you see is only part of the story. That’s not all that there is. What an apocalypse highlights is there is a reality that lies beyond what you see, but that is related to it, and influences it, and it helps you see it and respond to it and live in it in a new light. It presents a perspective that can only be known through a divine revelation. So an apocalypse, again, reveals a transcendent reality about the future and about the heavenly world that shapes how the readers should look at their present world, by opening up their present world that they see empirically and experience empirically to a transcendent perspective, a heavenly reality that lies behind it, that influences it. It gives a future that the reader then is able to see their present in a new life.

Apocalypse like a Play [seeing behind the curtain]

I often compare this to watching a play. If you ever have been to watch a play or performance, whether it’s a school or more professionally done, usually all you see is what’s happening on the stage. You see the actors performing and they’re acting with each other and you watch the story all the way to the conclusion. Sometimes what you don’t see is what goes beyond behind the curtain that makes the play work. You don’t see the manager and the stage directors, you don’t see the technicians making the lighting work, and you don’t see the prop people and the costume people, all work to make this play work. All you see is the play. If you were to lift the curtain so that you could see backstage, behind the scenes, you might find everything that makes that work, and everything that helps make sense of the play. You’ll see the workings that make it work.

An apocalypse does that in a sense. It lifts the curtain behind history in earthly reality to expose you to a heavenly reality and to a future that makes sense of what’s going on in the present. So in light of this knowledge of the heavenly world and the future that is made available only through a divine revelation, the readers are now able to see their situation in a new light. Again, empirically, what they see in the world is not all there is. There’s another reality that lies behind it that helps them to see their world in a new light. Both Daniel and Revelation are written in the context of struggle to live life in

a pagan environment under a pagan empire where some in fact are being objects of oppression and are suffering, but others are compromising and willing to participate in that pagan domination, pagan empire and system. What Daniel and Revelation do then is present a transcendent perspective, open up the readers' perception to see a heavenly reality and a future that should determine the way they respond to their situation in the present. So that's sort of what an apocalypse does, Revelation then, I take it, is trying to help the readers living in the first century, as I'll demonstrate later, living in this first century Roman Empire dominated by Rome, when they look out empirically, they see the emperor seated on the throne, they see Roman domination, they see all the good things Rome has done for the world. John in Revelation says let me show you another perspective, let me provide a heavenly, an eschatological perspective on what it is you are seeing so that you will be able to respond to it and live in it in a new light.

As a prophecy, the second literary feature of Revelation that we won't talk about a lot, we've discussed prophetic literature in relationship to Old Testament prophecy, but as a prophecy, Revelation then, in line with Old Testament prophets, and what you read Revelation carefully, John does claim to write in the tradition of and in line with Old Testament prophecies of the past, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, he takes up much of their writings and now utilizes them and integrates them into his own works. Revelation as a prophecy like Old Testament prophetic tests primarily, I take it, is forth telling, and not just or not primarily foretelling. That is, the book of Revelation as a prophecy is a proclamation of a message to the current readers that will help them deal with their situation. It's a call for people to take seriously their relationship to Jesus Christ, and a call for readers to follow Jesus Christ no matter what the consequences, not just a prediction of events to take place in the future. Any approach to Revelation that starts with that perspective that this is a prediction of future events has misunderstood its literary type. It's a prophecy, that is, it's a proclamation of the message from God, from Jesus Christ, to his people to get them to follow Jesus Christ in obedience no matter what the consequences. So it's a message for their situation, but also like Old Testament prophets, it's a message rooted in history.

Again, this is not fantasy literature, but however much it is rooted in symbolic language in this heavenly perspective, it's still about the readers' situation in a given historical context and historical situation. So we should expect Revelation to refer to actual events, actual persons, actual places in the first century but also in the future as well, however symbolically and metaphorically those might be described.

And finally, we've already said that the book of Revelation is also a letter. It clearly begins like a letter. It clearly ends just like one of Paul's letters. It's entirely possible, perhaps the author, given the importance of Paul's letters in Asia Minor, and the Greco-Roman world of the first century, given the importance of Paul's letters in the first century churches, perhaps the author is in a sense imitating Paul, and his letter format, because of the importance they played. But having said that, at the least, what this means as a letter, if we take this seriously as a letter, and I think we should, that means that Revelation is just as occasional as any of Paul's letters. That is, we must understand Revelation in light of the historical context and the historical cultural background that caused this letter to be written, this apocalypse to be recorded for the readers. We must read it in light of the specific problems that it was addressing. We must see Revelation as a response to very specific situations and circumstances and problems in the first century, just as much as Paul's letters were, just as much as Peter's letters, or just as much as the letter of James was. Unfortunately most ignore this feature of the book of Revelation, that roots it in its original historical context. But I would argue that we need to take it seriously.

From genre to guidelines for Interpreting Revelation

Now what does this mean for interpretation of the book of Revelation? And I just want to highlight a handful of what I think are principles that arise out of the literary genre that should guide us in reading it and much of what I'm going to say also applies to the only other canonical apocalypse and that is the book of Daniel. By the way, just as sort of an aside and I have a lot of these throughout the lecture, it's important to realize that while there may be other books in the New and Old Testament that include apocalyptic type of language, actually Daniel and Revelation are the only true

apocalypses, that is, that record an actual visionary experience of the author. Other places like Matthew 24 and 25, or other texts that are often called "apocalyptic" in a sense aren't because they don't really record visionary experiences of the author, although they might include eschatological language or apocalyptic type of language. Ezekiel is the other text that probably I think most clearly resembles an apocalypse, especially chapters 40-48 that do clearly record a visionary experience of an author. John himself draws heavily on Ezekiel. But much of what I'm going to say could apply to Daniel also, but it will be primarily focused on interpreting the book of Revelation.

The first thing to note that I think clearly emerges from the type of literature that Revelation is as an apocalypse, is that we must be alert to the symbolism of Revelation. Now, Revelation does, and Daniel does as well, refers as we've said, to actual events and actual persons. It describes actual events, I would argue in the first century, Revelation is trying to make sense of the reader's own situation. But it also refers to actual events that will transpire in the future, especially in the eschatological future, the wrap up of history. But in describing actual events, it describes them through metaphorical and symbolic language, it does not describe them literally. Reading Revelation is not like watching a CNN news documentary, or BBC documentary on some world event. Instead, it's more like looking at a painting or artistic impression. Revelation again communicates symbolically, it refers to actual events, but it refers to those events through symbols and images, not literally.

Revelation like a political cartoon

Probably, the closest modern day analogy to Revelation, and again this is not original with me, I found it in several works and I found it helpful, that is to compare Revelation to a political cartoon. A political cartoon, if you've ever read one, is a commentary on and is referring to actual historical events, political events and persons, but when you read a political cartoon, you'll notice that it uses graphic symbols and images. Sometimes, it uses exaggeration and caricature to get across its point. Instead of just a paragraph of prose narration of what's going on politically, a straightforward description, a political cartoon is a more effective way to get across a certain perspective

on the political situation. Sometimes the images are stock images that we know what they mean. So at least in the context of the United State of America and their political system, if you're reading a political cartoon and you see an eagle, you know that that symbolizes the United States of America. If you see a donkey or an elephant, those aren't referring to literal animals, they're symbolic of two political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. Even when physical persons are portrayed in the political cartoon, they're often exaggerated and caricatured so that you kind of get the point and you can identify who they are.

The point about political cartoons is while they refer to actual historical events, things happening in history and in time, the author describes them in highly graphic and symbolic language, so that you will get the point and you'll see it in a new light. That's what Revelation does. Revelation, like a political cartoon, is a commentary on historical events, things going on in the readers' day, and things that will transpire in the future, but depicting them in highly graphic symbolic language, so that the readers will get the point. It casts a new light on the situation to affect, not just intellectually, but aesthetically and emotionally, so that they'll respond in a different way. So Revelation communicates symbolically.

I was raised in the context that said you need to interpret Revelation literally unless there's really good reason not to. That should be turned on its head and in light of the kind of literature Revelation is, I think better is that we should interpret Revelation symbolically unless there's really good reason not to. So, first of all, is the need to come to grips with the symbolism.

In our next session, we'll look a little bit more at the detail of that and give some more examples and illustrations of how interpreting Revelation symbolically would work and how its symbols function and what they do and how we should read them.

Transcribed by Jen Straka
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 21

Apocalyptic Literary Genre #2

Genre Criticism and Word Studies

Characteristic Features of Apocalyptic Literature: Symbolism

We said that one of the characteristic features of apocalyptic literature, but especially the book of Revelation, is that it communicates symbolically. Yes, it refers to actual events and persons in history and also in the future when God returns to bring history to a close, but it describes them not literally, but describes them through the medium of symbolic communication and metaphorical type of language. So, one must be able to come to grips with the way that Revelation communicates through symbolism. One simplistic way of putting it, but one way to understand Revelation and the symbols, is to, number one, note the symbol itself, its contours, and how it is depicted. The second one is to understand the meaning of that symbol. What is meant by that symbol? What is communicated by it? What is the meaning of the symbol itself? And then finally, third, to understand what the symbol is referring to, what person or historical event is the symbol referring to. For example, in Revelation, we find numerous references to a beast. The beast is described as having seven heads, it has horns on it. It is portrayed as being the color red, so that is the symbol that is what John sees.

The next step is to ask, what might be the meaning of this symbol? What meanings are communicated by that? A seven-headed beast usually is associated with things like evil, chaos, and destruction. That would be the meaning conveyed by that symbol. Then one can go further and ask what is referred to by that symbol? What does the symbol of the beast that communicates destruction, evil, and chaos, what does it refer to or who does it refer to? Most likely, if I'm a first century reader reading the book of Revelation I will identify it as the Roman Empire, or perhaps the emperor who is currently seated on the throne.

To give another example that we've already looked at in Revelation, in chapter 9,

we saw this description of these locusts, the symbol is the locust, which is described as having crowns on its head. It has the head of a human being, the face of a man, the hair of a woman, the teeth of a lion, it has a tail like a scorpion. It can sting, cause suffering and harm. What is the meaning of the locusts, the symbol of the locust? It suggests ideas of carnage and destruction and widespread damage. It suggests might, strength, and power. But then when we ask what does it most likely refer to, there seems to be indications, in my opinion, in Revelation chapter 9 that the locust symbolizes or refers to demonic beings because of the fact that they come out of the abyss, which is often in Revelation the place of demonic and Satanic beings. Probably the locusts refer to demonic beings.

One final example, what about the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11, we find this description of two men who function as witnesses. Actually, fire comes out of their mouth to devour those who oppose them, yet they themselves are put to death at the end of chapter 11. At the end of the narrative of the two witnesses in this section of chapter 11, are raised in the end. What is the meaning of these two symbols, the symbol of these two witnesses? Probably it indicates the meaning of witness and truth, especially in the witness of the truth, especially in the face of conflict. What did the two witnesses refer to? Probably they refer to the church, the entire church that functions as a witness, even in the face of conflict with the Roman Empire.

So those are sort of examples of how symbols can function, that is describing the symbol itself, what the symbol is. The second, what it means, what connotation do the symbols seem to have. And then finally, what might the symbol refer to? Sometimes the third one what the symbol refers to can be a little more tricky.

To talk a little more briefly about symbols also, I think we need to realize that even the numbers in Revelation have symbolic value. That is, the numbers are there not for the mathematical information they communicate, or for the temporal information that the numbers communicate, whether its 3 and a half years or 42 months, or 1000 years. Those numbers are there, not so much for the mathematical or the temporal information they communicate, but instead for the symbolic values, the symbolic information that it communicates.

Symbolic Use of Number in Revelation

To start with a rather easy one, one of the numbers that is ubiquitous in Revelation is the number seven. Seven as most people recognize and can identify, seven indicates perfection or completeness. So you have for example seven seals, the cycle of seven seals, and seven trumpets, and seven bowls, are not so much there to indicate a literal number of only seven plagues with the seals, trumpets and bowls, but the number seven indicates the complete judgment of God upon the world.

Another one, the number 12 occurs in Revelation. The number 12 or sometimes in multiples, which is 144 is 12 times 12, or 144,000, the number you see occurring a couple times, would be 12 times 12 times 1,000, a number that indicates greatness, or a large amount, or completion again. The number 12 is significant because it is the number of the people of God, modeled after the 12 tribes or the 12 apostles. So, that when you find that for example the number 144,000, probably refers to the complete number of God's people. The dimensions of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21 are often portrayed as multiples of 12, 144 cubits or something like 12,000. So everything in the new Jerusalem is modeled on the number 12, and the number 12 is symbolic of the people of God. So 12 is not there because of the mathematical value as much as the symbolic meaning, it communicates: the people of God in its completion.

3 and a half years we find this number several times, especially in chapter 11, 12, and 13. In the center of the book you find 3 and a half years mentioned a couple of times, probably 3 and a half years is there once again, not to indicate a literal temporal time, 3 and a half years of 365 days each, and then the half year being half that. So the idea is not a literal period of time, but instead, 3 and a half probably symbolizes the idea of a short intense period of time, that gets cut off. So you have first year, number 1, year number 2, year number 3, but then a half a year, it gets cut off just as things start to get rolling and then all the sudden it comes to an end. It's also half of the number 7, which again, would suggest something that falls short of completion. So the idea of 3 and a half years then is not to depict so much a literal period of time, but it's to portray the time of the church's existence. It's a time of intensity, of intense persecution and opposition, but it won't last,

it will be cut off and cut short. In fact, I would also argue the dimensions of 3 and a half years are not to be added up into 7 but the dimensions of 3 and a half years or 42 months or 1,260 days, you find all those designations in Revelation. They all refer to the same period of time, starting in the first century until the second coming of Christ, the church's existence will be sometimes a turbulent one, a time of intense opposition and conflict with the empires of the world, but it will not last. It will be cut short when God returns to judge evil humanity and to vindicate and reward his faithful people.

Then, finally, the number 1,000, again is probably not there for its mathematical value, nor in a text like Revelation 20, for the temporal information it communicates. In chapter 20, instead of referring necessarily to a literal period of time of 1,000 years of 365 days or so, instead 1,000 again I think communicates the idea of completeness, or a complete or perfect period of time, and not so much a specific literal temporal designation. So even the numbers, I would suggest, should be seen symbolically for the symbolic information they convey, not taken literally for their mathematical or their temporal value.

In fact, I would suggest to interpret Revelation symbolically rather than literally is in line with how Jesus himself interprets two of the symbols back in chapter 1 of Revelation. It's almost as if Revelation chapter 1 in a sense introduces us or sets us up for how we should read the rest of the book. In Revelation chapter 1 John sees a vision, the vision of the Son of Man holding a lampstand, and the author, Jesus himself, commissions John at the very end of the chapter in verses 19 and 20, and Jesus Himself interprets two of the images from chapter 1, and John has this vision of the Son of Man and he's holding a candle stand. Now Jesus himself interprets that. In verse 20 he says, "the mystery of the seven stars, which is one of the other features of John's vision. He sees the Son of Man, he sees seven stars, and the seven golden lampstands. Now Jesus says, "the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." So do you see how the Jesus understood the seven stars are not literal stars, but they symbolize the stars that John saw. They symbolize

seven angels that belong to the seven churches. The seven lampstands that he saw in his vision refer not to seven literal lamps but they symbolize or refer to the church. So I take it that again unless there's a really compelling reason not to, everything in Revelation should be interpreted symbolically, not literally. Again, that doesn't mean that Revelation doesn't refer to actual events and persons and places, it does, but it describes them symbolically rather than literally.

The other feature of the symbolism just to mention in passing is much of John's language comes out of the Old Testament. In a later session we'll talk about the Old Testament's usage in the New Testament, New Testament authors using the Old Testament text and we'll discuss examples from Revelation. But many of John's images and much of the symbolism he picks up comes out of the Old Testament. So, John's language, including the numbers, should be interpreted symbolically rather than literally.

Importance of the Original Historical Context

The second principle I think that is important in interpreting Revelation is to understand it in light of its original historical context, that is, in the way in the other books of the New Testament would be treated. Revelation was written in response to and during a time of imperial domination. That is, the Roman Empire ruled over the world of that time, and Rome was also seen as being responsible for the well-being of its subjects and of the empire. Everything that they experienced they owed to Rome. Some of you have heard of the well-known Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. Rome had brought peace to the entire Greco-Roman rule.

But further than that, within the context of Roman rule, Rome worked with a complex relationship between politics, economics, and religion. The three were complexly intertwined, much unlike some of our societies, they were religion and politics, religion and society are kept separate. In that day the economic system of Rome, its political system and its religious system would have been closely intertwined. You could not participate in one without participating in the other. So Christians then were frequently tempted to be involved in the political and the social and economic life of Rome, and were imperil of also compromising with the religious idolatry of the Roman

Empire through not only their worship of pagan gods, but also worship of the emperor himself. Part of Rome's religious system involved worship of the emperor as the one who was responsible for your well-being and responsible for all of the things that the Roman Empire did for its subjects.

So if you were a Christian in the first century, participating in the political and the economic life of Rome often required participation in the religious system of Rome too. The author of Revelation sees this as idolatrous and involving one in worshiping pagan deities and pagan gods and even worshiping the emperor himself, which then would involve the Christian compromising their exclusive worship that belonged to God and Jesus Christ alone.

So John writes then to address the situation, again you can see that for Christians there are a couple of possible responses. Christians could choose to oppose and resist and refuse to participate in certain idolatrous religious practices, and then therefore suffer perhaps the consequences of economic oppression or persecution in the form of oppression, although the problems were usually caused at a more local level. Most of the persecution at this point would not have come necessarily from the top, from the emperor himself, but a lot of it would have come from local elites and local rulers in the different communities keen to curry favor with Rome and keep on good terms with Rome, they are the ones that would have seen the Christians' refusal to participate as showing ingratitude and even rebellion against Rome and its political, economic and religious system. Otherwise, many Christians might choose to compromise and think that somehow they could justify inclusion in and participation in the Roman system and even the idolatrous system and still maintain their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

So Revelation then is a response to that situation where John must address those and perhaps comfort who are undergoing oppression and persecution because of their faithfulness to Jesus Christ; but also to warn and address those who are in danger of compromising. It's interesting that when you read the seven letters in chapters two and three, the seven messages to the seven churches that John addresses that provide the backdrop for understanding Revelation, only two of them are suffering any kind of

oppression and persecution. The other five are all basically so ensconced and enmeshed in the Roman world that they are in danger of losing or have already lost their witness. So, Revelation is not just literature for the oppressed and persecuted, it's also meant to shock those who are compromising with Roman rule and the Roman religious system. So, one needs to understand Revelation in light of its historical and cultural context as a response to that, just as one would understand any of Paul's letters as a specific response to specific problems.

Revelation as Relevant to First Century Readers

Third is another principle that arises out of a couple things that John himself says, but specifically out of the literary genre of Revelation, is that any interpretation that John could not have intended or his readers could not have understood is probably to be rejected. Because, first of all, we've seen that Revelation is a letter, it's in the form of a letter. A letter was meant to communicate information to the readers that would respond to their specific situation. So as a letter presumably it is communicating information that John's readers could have understood and that John would have intended. To see Revelation as addressing twenty-first century technological realities is to take it out of the hands of the original readers for whom it was intended.

Interestingly, the book of Revelation ends in chapter twenty-two with an interesting statement that again suggests that it was meant to be relevant to the very first readers. Starting in verse ten, this is the very end of the book now, an angel addresses John. These are concluding exhortations as far as what John's to do with the book and how the readers should respond and how it should be read and responded to. Verse ten, "Then he [the angel], said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of this prophecy, the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.'" Now interestingly, this is exactly the opposite of what Daniel was told to do. He was told to seal up his prophecy because it was for a later time. Now John is told not to seal it up because the time is near, that is, these events are already being fulfilled or on the verge of being fulfilled. This is a message for his readers. John is not writing for some later generation, he's writing an apocalypse, a prophecy, in the form of a letter that is meant to address the situation of his

contemporaries of his readers.

So, again, to overturn a common misconception that I was taught, that Revelation basically was a book that is now being fulfilled and unfolding and could be understood by twentieth and twenty-first century readers, and that the first century readers would not have understood and that John probably did not understand what he was seeing. Again, that should be turned on its head. The first century readers and author were the ones who understood. If anything we're the ones who don't understand, and we have to do the hard work of trying to figure out what it was that John was communicating to first century readers struggling to live out their lives in the context of first century imperial Rome.

So, Revelation is a book that is not to be sealed up, but is a book to be understood and read and to address and be fulfilled in the midst of the first century readers. So when I hear interpretations that equate certain parts of Revelation with computer chips or thermonuclear warfare or the nation in China or someone else that immediately should raise questions and red flags in your mind, and those interpretations should probably be rejected.

It's interesting to me that people that will advocate understanding every other New Testament book in light of its original historical context refuse to follow that when it comes to interpreting Revelation; instead they jump right into asking how Revelation is apparently being worked out and fulfilled in our own day.

Focus on the Main Message: Plagues of a New Exodus

There are a couple more principles. Number one is to interpret it in light of its symbolism, to recognize that Revelation communicates symbolically. Second, to interpret it in light of its original historical context, and number three, to recognize any interpretation that John could have never intended and his first century audience could never have possibly understood is probably to be rejected. The fourth one is simply don't lose sight of the forest for the trees, that is don't get so bogged down in the details that you miss the main message of the text that you're dealing with. For example, the seven trumpets in chapters eight and nine, but also the seven bowls in chapter sixteen of Revelation, one could speculate as to exactly how these plagues will be fulfilled, when

they're going to take place, what events they could be associated with. One could get so bogged down in details that one misses the fact that these bowls and trumpets and the plagues that are associated with them, correspond very closely to the ten plagues in the book of Exodus as God delivered the Egyptians from the hands of Pharaoh in Egypt. So that when reading the account of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, the important point is not so much exactly how these will be fulfilled and what they will look like, I think it's very difficult for twentieth and twenty-first century interpreters to tell conclusively, but instead of asking what exactly were these or how will they be fulfilled, when will they transpire, what events will fulfill them, is instead to note that in the same way the message seems to be in the same way that God judges evil, God will suppress the nation and deliver his people from that in the first Exodus, so in a new Exodus God will once again judge a wicked oppressive nation and save and redeem his people in the same way that he did in the first Exodus, even if we can't figure out exactly what that will look like and exactly how those plagues and those judgments will take place. So don't lose the forest by getting too preoccupied with the trees. Yes, we need to look at the trees and try to figure them out, but don't miss the entire forest that they make up.

Good Resources on Revelation

Fifth, I think that more than any other book in the New Testament is a good piece of advice would be to use good commentaries. There are a number of very good commentaries on Revelation, or books that aren't just commentaries but are kind of introductions to it, I think that work by Richard Bauchum, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* published by Cambridge University press is one of the best single volume treatments of the book of Revelation that I've found. A recent book by Michael Gorman called *Reading Revelation Responsibly* is a very helpful introduction to reading the book and some of the pitfalls to avoid. A mid-level commentary by Robert Mounce in the New International Commentary in the New Testament is still a very very helpful guide and sane analysis of the text and there are more advanced commentaries on Revelation that are also very helpful, but these are particularly helpful guidelines in Revelation (Greg Beale, Grant Osborne, and David Aune). So, with a book like Revelation, I think one

needs to rely on good commentaries, others who have wrestled with the text.

Humility

The sixth principle I think is that a good dose of humility is necessary for reading Revelation. There's no place for dogmatic assertions, there's no place for unwillingness to listen or "I have it right" attitude, but instead given the type of book Revelation is, given the diversity of ways it's been treated, given some of the difficulties in understanding it, within the above framework of the suggestions I've made, I think any interpretation needs to be tempered with humility. I know I should have a seventh one, in a book like Revelation, which shouldn't end with six, but I don't, so I will end with six.

Evaluation of Genre Criticism

So, genre criticism, I think, is an important and viable tool in interpretation. Again, it gets us off on the right foot, it doesn't solve all the problems, each book has its own unique structure and way of developing, but genre criticism serves to get us off on the right foot, it gets us to ask the right questions of the text, and it gets us to expect the right information from the text, and not expect it to do something that it's not meant to do. And particularly because the New Testament and Old Testament are written in literary genres that may or may not correspond to anything that we have, it's necessary to try to come to grips with what kind of literary forms and literary genres made up the Old and New Testament, and how that influences the way that we interpret those books.

Lexical and Semantic Analysis

Now with genre criticism we have asked very broad questions related to the entire books, and how they're put together and how the genre of the book might influence the kind of questions we ask and how we approach the book in order to interpret it. Now what I want to do is get a little more narrow and look in the next couple sections at how we might interpret some of the details of the text. We'll also talk more about principles that transcend the different types of genre, although some of these will be applied in different ways to different literary types. But what I want to do now is talk a little bit about lexical and semantic analysis of biblical text, that is, now we want to deal with

issues related to the text itself; its wording, its grammar, the meaning of the lexical items or the words that one finds in the biblical text. How do we understand those?

As we've already mentioned, the New Testament and Old Testament texts are written in languages very different from our own in our modern day world. So we must come to grips with how we understand the meaning of words, how we understand the grammar of the text, and when we come to trying to understand the meaning of the words, this is what hermeneutics textbooks or biblical interpretation textbooks often call "word studies" or to use fancier terms, "lexical" or "semantic analysis." And again the problem is for most of us, especially English speakers and speakers of other languages, is that most of the words in our translations may not necessarily line up with or overlap or correspond in meaning to the Greek or Hebrew words that are meant to convey. That is, the Greek or Hebrew words may escape our understanding, or maybe only imperfectly or partially captured in our translations. So we need to consider the meaning of the words that we find in the biblical text. Let me make a handful of observations related to words and word meanings and then we'll consider how might that make a difference in the way we do lexical analysis or word studies. First of all, a word is basically a symbol that marks out a field of meaning or a range of meaning. That is, words seldom have only one meaning. If they did, language would become almost unusable. If you had to have one word for every single meaning, a language would become almost unmanageable. So usually a word usually marks out a field of meaning, it can mean more than one thing. But in some rare occasions, words might have one single meaning, but usually words have a range of meaning.

Trunk: on Words with Multiple Meanings

For English speakers, think of the word "trunk." The English word "trunk" could refer to the proboscis of the elephant's head we call an elephant's trunk, it can refer to the bottom part of a tree, the trunk of a tree, it can refer to the back compartment of a car, British speakers would call that the boot of the car but in English the trunk refers to the back compartment of the car used for storage. It can refer to a large box that one sometimes puts at the foot of a bed, the trunk used to store clothing or other items or

something like that. So, the English word "trunk" can seem to have a range of meaning.

What happens is usually then context will function to disambiguate meaning that is to point to only one of those meanings. Very seldom, except for a play on words or irony or something like that, very seldom will words carry more than one, or all of these meanings wherever it is used. So when I use the word "trunk" in a sentence, it never brings all of these meanings at the same time. Usually the context will indicate that I am narrowing it down to one of those. So if I use the word "trunk" in the context where I'm talking about a zoo, and animals you probably will know exactly what trunk means, a part of an elephant. So context generally limits one of those meanings, limits the word to one of those meanings in its context. Again it can't be read as all of those things.

Diachronics: Words Change Meaning over Time

A second important thing to understand is that words change meaning over time. One can think of a number of examples of this, one interesting example is from the English language that had a number of repercussions but the word "gay" in English, thirty years ago, forty, fifty years ago, to use the word "gay" would have been equivalent to call someone happy or cheerful, even one of our Christmas carols, "don we now our gay apparel" would suggest cheerfulness and happy, something like that. Whereas now, in modern day English it means something very, very different from that, referring to someone's sexual orientation. So words change over time, sometimes the changes are minor but in other times, as the example I just gave, it can come a\with a rather significant change having very significant implications on how you use that word. So, we can't assume then, that what a word means at a given point in time corresponds to what it may have meant in the past or how it may have been used at other times because words change. Not all the time, but often it does.

Words change in meaning, part of the reason for this is meaning is arbitrary, basically, except for some instances, most words mean simply what all the user decide it will mean and how they decide to use it. In other words, what does it mean for a group of language users at a specific point in time.

Synonyms

A third principle is that words relate to other words. We call these synonyms. What a synonym is, is two words that overlap in meaning. That does not mean they're completely identical in meaning, it simply means that there is some overlap, and so sometimes words overlap in meanings like having two circles that intersect, though not completely. Words overlap in meaning though they still may have meaning that is unique to them.

At other times words might overlap as hyponyms, that is, one word is the broader word, and another term is a narrower one. For example, the word "flower" would be the broader term, and a hyponym might be "rose." A rose is a type of flower, but it's a very specific, it's a hyponym of flower. So there's a variety in ways words can relate to each other, but again words aren't always this isolated entity, sometimes they relate to each other and overlap.

Another principle is that words are not the primary carriers of meaning. Understanding a text is more than just understanding the word meanings and adding them up. Words are not the primary carriers and bearers of meaning, however important they are. Instead, words are combined to make clauses, clauses are combined to create sentences, sentences are combined to create paragraphs, and paragraphs are combined to create entire discourses. So that we need to understand words are not the primary bearers of meaning. Yes, they do play an important role, but they function within a broader context.

It's also important to understand that the Bible was written in the common everyday language of the time, in Hebrew and Greek. In the past, some, especially with Greek, thought, especially back in the nineteenth century and even into the early twentieth century, you'd often hear people talking of Greek in terms of it being a special language, a biblical language, a language one scholar called a Holy Ghost language, that is that Greek, especially and sometimes even Hebrew, the language of the Bible was a special language suitable to and tailored specifically for communicating God's revelation. But through much research we've come to discover that the Old and New Testament communicated in Hebrew and Greek utilizing the common language of the day, based on

the discovery of papyrus and other literary artifacts from the first century, and around that time, demonstrated that the Greek of the New Testament is nothing less than the common, ordinary everyday language of the common people of the first century, which is why scholars often refer to it as Koiné Greek. It's not a special type of Greek, or a specialized Greek suited to communicating God's revelation, but instead God chose to reveal himself through the common everyday language of the people.

So when we refer to the Bible's inspiration, the fact that it's inspired, we should not confuse this with making the language do something it didn't do. Inspiration does not mean that the languages of Hebrew and Greek were somehow used in an unnatural, unordinary or specialized way. But again, the New Testament and Old Testament authors are communicating in the common ordinary language of their day.

Separating the Sign from its Referent

Another principle is that the meaning of the word should be distinguished from its referent, or what it refers to. That is, if I am speaking of a ship and talking about the Titanic and the sinking of the Titanic back in 1912, the word "ship" does not mean Titanic. The word "ship" would very simplistically refer to something like a very large boat, but I may be referring to the Titanic, but the word "ship" does not mean Titanic. So when you look at biblical texts, for example, the word "king" may be used in Old Testament texts to refer to David, but the word "king" does not mean King David. It does not mean a king, though the Hebrew word *melek*, that we would translate as a king or ruler, in certain contexts it could refer to a very specific king. So it's important to recognize that what a word means is different from what it might be referring to in reality.

Doing Word Studies

So, based on that, let's talk a little bit about the method of doing a word study. How does one go about doing a word study or doing lexical analysis? I want to simply summarize three stages that most interpreters agree, should be involved in doing a word study or lexical analysis. The first step is obviously selecting the word, it's not necessary nor does one have time to do a word study of every single word in the text that one is

dealing with, so it's important to select words based on whether they are problematic words. For example, there's dispute as to what the word *yom* or "day" means in Genesis chapter 1 and how we understand that. Maybe a word is a rare word, especially in Hebrew a lot of the words occur only once in the Hebrew Bible, so it's difficult without having a number of usages for one to compare in the Bible or even outside of it, sometimes that can be a challenge. So words that are rare or only occur once, words that seem to be significant, that is they occur frequently in the text or the author seems to base his argument on the word. Some words maybe more theological, like in Paul's letters "reconciliation" or "justification" or in the Old Testament the word "covenant." These are words that seem to have theological significance to them. Those are the words that you would select in order to do a more detailed study of those. Beyond just how an English translation translates them.

The second stage related to some of the things we've said about words and what they are and what they do, the second stage is to determine the field of meaning. What could this word possibly mean? What are the possibilities? What is the range of meaning? What could this word possibly mean in both Hebrew or Greek words? What are the possibilities? For example, sometimes a tool such as a concordance can help to simply look at how a word is used in the examples and to note how they differ and how different authors seem to use words, et cetera.

A very helpful set of tools for word study are theological dictionaries. Two that are more recent or more accessible to English readers would be a tool such as the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* edited by William Von Gemmeran, and then the New Testament counterpart, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* edited by Colin Brown are two works that are accessible based on Hebrew and Greek words. They are not exhaustive, they seem to focus on what they think are significant theological words as the titles of the dictionaries indicate, but they are accessible to English readers and will provide a lot of information on how the words are used. If you read Greek and Hebrew, you have access to a lot of other lexicons and tools that are of help. I would recommend avoiding other works, a very common one

was *Vine's Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. They may submit valuable information in there but there have been a lot of advances in resources that we have that are disposable but also updates and methodologies and linguistic principles that I think suggest we need to utilize. If we do use older works, make sure we check them against more recent word study tools. So utilize those tools to again be able to try to define what could this word mean. What are the possibilities that are available?

And then third, the third step is to determine out of the range of meaning and the possibilities of what is most likely the author's intended meaning in this context. Again, context functions to disambiguate meaning, out of all the possibilities, context will usually narrow it down to one of those, outside of possible double entendre or double meaning, or perhaps intentional ambiguity or a play on words, irony, those kinds of instances where the author often intends two meanings outside of that context. We'll usually limit the possibilities down to one meaning, and one needs to ask in this context, what most likely is the meaning this word conveying?

John 3 "Born again" or "born from above"

For example, in John chapter three, and verse three, where Jesus interacts at night with Nicodemus, you actually find this in verse two I think, just reading chapter three and verse three. Jesus begins discussion with Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees and Nicodemus asks him, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God was not with him." Now Jesus replies in verse three, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Some translations have "unless he is born from above." That is a Greek word that could mean either "above" or "again," and the question is: is this just an ambiguity that we can't be exactly certain which one John intended, or at least we should try to figure out which one of these John intended? Could this be an example of something we do sometimes see in the Fourth Gospel, and that is the author using words that intentionally have a double meaning, so that actually this word is probably indicating both. Is it possible that Jesus is saying in John recording Jesus' words that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are both born again and this birth should be from above.

It is very different from the physical birth that Nicodemus seems to go on to discuss next. Again, one wants to rely as well on the two tools that we just talked about, the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, and the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, but also commentaries are a good place to find help in performing word studies as well.

What to avoid in Word Studies: Fallacies

In discussing word studies and lexical analysis, it's sometimes important to discuss what not to do, and what to avoid. A number of works summarize a variety of fallacies or a variety of things to avoid, and I don't intend to repeat all that, but I simply want to highlight and summarize a handful of things to avoid when doing word studies. The reason I think this is necessary is because most students of the Bible find it easier to and perhaps have more tools at their disposal for doing word studies, and frequently you'll find students stopping there and not going much beyond making comments on word meaning. So it's probably easier to commit some of these mistakes and so I'll summarize just a handful of them.

Etymological Fallacy

The first one is don't be influenced or overly influenced by the history or etymology of a word. Scholars call that the "etymological fallacy." What that is is simply placing too much weight on what a word meant historically or the origin of the word as if somehow that has an influence on or bearing on what it means in a different time period. Now that may be the case, sometimes a word may not have strayed that much from its original meaning, or the author may intend to use it in a way that inflects its original meaning. At the end of the day what is important for understanding a word's meaning is not what it meant in the past historically, or in its origin, but what it means at the time it is being used. What does it mean to the author and the readers who are using it at a given point in time? So, just be aware especially in your own reading and relying on other works, be aware of statements such as "the root meaning of this Hebrew word is," which may not be wrong, but if it's used in a way to somehow suggest that this is what it therefore means at this time, is to commit this root or etymological fallacy.

Again, you think about it, most speakers of languages are not even aware of what words meant in the past or where they even came from. All they're aware of and interested in is what they mean, how they communicate today.

So, how do the language users use it at a given point in time? Scholars also call this a "synchronic" as opposed to a "diachronic" approach. A diachronic approach is interested in the history of the word, which is helpful and interesting, but a synchronic approach focuses on the meaning of the words at a given point in time in history. So most linguists would agree that synchrony, looking at the meaning of a word at a given period of time that you're dealing with, must take priority over diachrony, what that word meant historically.

An example from the New Testament that you frequently find referred to and others have drawn attention to this, is the word "ecclesia" for "church," comes from two words, a preposition "ek" meaning "from" or "out of" and "clesia," the noun form of a verb meaning "to call," so the implication is usually seen as the church is a group of those who are "called out" of their culture and their location to be a witness for Jesus Christ. The church is a group of called out ones and separated ones. However much that might be true, at least by the time of the New Testament, that word seems to have simply meant "an assembly." And it could be used to refer to different types of even non-religious assemblies in the Greco-Roman world. So to insist that it means "called out ones" because it may have meant that originally or that might be the constituent part of the word, seems to be over emphasizing the root or the history of the word over what the word meant during the time that the New Testament authors were writing.

So don't place too much weight on the history of the word, not that it's unimportant or not that a word can't ever mean what it meant historically, but again, the priority has to be what does this word mean at this given point in time in its context. Be aware of works that overemphasize the root meaning, especially more popular level works that often say something like "the root meaning of this word comes from a word that meant this originally," when they use that to determine what it means in a given context.

Overloading Meaning: Dump Truck Approach

Second, is don't overload a word with too much meaning. I often refer to this as the dump truck method, that is, you take everything a word can possibly mean, back it up to the use of the word in the context, and dump it all on there. Again this is particularly abused at a more popular level. But as we've already seen, whenever a word occurs in a text it doesn't necessarily and usually doesn't mean everything that it possibly could. You don't dump everything the word "trunk" could mean every time it appears in a text. Instead, as we've seen, context serves to disambiguate meaning, and functions to generally to limit that meaning to one of the specific things that it could possibly mean out of the range of meaning. So to take everything a word can mean, its range or field of meaning, and dump it onto the meaning of a word in any given place is to commit what I call a semantic overload, to overload a word with everything that it could possibly mean.

Don't Confuse a Word and a Concept

One final one in this session and in the next session we'll discuss a couple more, and make a couple other observations about word studies, is don't confuse a word with a theological concept that is found in the text. Generally, a theological concept and meaning is found in the broader context, and not only in the words that are often associated with them. In other words, if I see the word "church" in a context, not everything that we associate with church, its leadership, its organizational structure, elders and deacons, pastors, its function in worship and evangelization, all of that is not inherent in the word "church," there is not to be dumped on the word "church." So a word is to be distinguished from the broader theological concept that it might be referring to.

Another way of putting it is if I want to study Matthew's understanding of the kingdom of God and Jesus' teaching of the kingdom of God, I don't limit myself to wherever the word "kingdom" occurs. Matthew teaches about God's kingdom, Jesus teaches about his kingdom, apart from just the usage of the word *basileia*, the Greek word "kingdom." So avoid confusing the meaning of a word, or avoid confusing a word with a theological concept that is found in the broader context and with which the word

might be associated with.

In the next session we'll highlight just a couple of more fallacies to avoid and then give an example of how might one do a word study. We'll look at the Greek word "flesh" in Galatians chapter five, and just very briefly look at how doing a lexical analysis of "flesh" in Galatians five, what that might look like and how that would contribute to understanding that passage.

Transcribed by Jen Straka
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics. Lecture 22

Word Level Meaning

Word Study Fallacies

Anachronism

Another fallacy or misstep in doing word studies, the fourth one, is sort of the opposite of number one. The first one we discussed was what is often known as the etymological or root fallacy where the origins or the history of the word is given too much weight in determining what a word means at a certain time. The opposite is to go the other direction in what is often called "the anachronism" that is reading a Greek or Hebrew word in light of a later meaning. Now once again, its, this is not to say that understanding modern Greek and modern Hebrew meanings don't help at all or have no influence at all, on what, or might not shed some light on what a word might have meant in its original context, but again to assume that a later meaning of the Greek or Hebrew word, is necessarily what it meant in its original context is certainly a fallacy. Again, what is important is what that word meant, given time and history for our purposes, in biblical Hebrew, or first century usage Greek.

For the average student though, perhaps more difficult or what they might more prone to do that do not have access to the original languages is to perhaps read Hebrew and English, the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words in light of later English translations for example. So we may translate Greek and Hebrew words and think necessarily that the way we have translated it, the meaning of that word in our modern day English, can be read back anachronistically into the ancient text. Or, furthermore, the fact that many of our modern day English words are derived from sematic or even Greek words such as "anthropology," comes from, is the base from the Greek word *anthropos*. We talk about pneumatic tools that are run by air. It is from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means "wind" or "air" or "spirit." So, many of our words in English are derived from ancient roots in Greek or sometimes other languages.

Sometimes the danger is not only to read ancient words in terms of the English

words we've translated with, but also to interpret a word into Greek, in terms of our modern day derivations of those words. For example, one easy example again that I've culled from a couple of other sources that have recognized this and not only read about, but have also heard this committed in pulpits, is one of the most well known, as its actually quite silly example from 2 Corinthians. Paul's discussion of and his instructions to the Corinthians regarding their giving is in chapter 8. Chapter 8, and verse 9, I think is the one I want. It is the text where Paul tells the Corinthians and instructs them to give "because God loves a cheerful giver." Perhaps some of you have heard this, the word "cheerful" is the Greek word, *hilarion*, from which we get the English word "hilarious." I've seen others point to this, but I've heard examples of preachers who say therefore what God really wants is a hilarious giver to the extent that we laugh or are ecstatic. The problem is that, that's reading the Greek word *hilarion*, in achronistcally in light of our English word hilarious, which now means something very different from how Paul was using the term.

So beware of reading later meanings of words back into the original Greek and Hebrew word meanings. And especially for most of us English speakers, especially if you don't know Greek or Hebrew the danger of reading the Greek or Hebrew text in light, or Hebrew word in light of the English word we use to translate it thinking that what the word means in English is what it would have meant in Greek. Or, when, certain English words are derivatives of earlier words in thinking that English words are our words again, approximates what it means, in what the Hebrew word meant in its original context.

I heard he had given you an example of a student, in a class I took, that misunderstood or could not understand why Paul would use the word "hope" or the word we translate "hope." Why we would call our salvation, and especially our future salvation, a hope. He could not understand that, based primarily on what the student was doing was confusing the Greek word that we translate "hope" with what we usually mean by hope when we use it English. Usually we use the word hope as something that we wish will happen but we aren't certain whether it will or not. Whereas the Greek word that is usually translated hope, at least in Pauline texts, frequently refers to something that

is certainty that one can stake one's life upon. So it's kind of the opposite of number 1 which is reading earlier meanings into the Greek or Hebrew texts. The opposite is reading the later meanings back into the text, again the meaning of the word, in its context, at that point in time, must be terminative.

Reinventing the Wheel

A fifth fallacy, or at least a fifth thing to avoid, is what I call "not reinventing the wheel." That is to realize that much hard work has been done in lexical analysis. That does not mean that there is not still a lot of work to be done, there is. We're uncovering new material or learning new methodologies and new ways of studying words, so there is much to be done and certainly it would be wrong to conclude that the final word has been said. Yet, at the same time, when much work has already been done and conclusions are fairly firm, I am a big one of not expending energy by doing something that has already been done. I'd rather use my energies on other areas that haven't been done. So, just be aware of not reinventing the wheel and simply rehashing and reproducing work that has been already been completed.

Don't be Obsessed with Word Level

Finally, number six, don't become obsessed with words. That is, as we have already said, words combine to make clauses and clauses combine to make sentences, and sentences combine to make paragraphs, and paragraphs combine into entire discourses. So don't become so obsessed with words but to realize that words are not the ultimate bearer of meaning or carriers of meaning. So, don't focus on words to the detriment of other methods.

Example Word Study from Galatians 5: Flesh

Now having discussed briefly issues that are related to how we understand words, what they are and what they do, and understanding common methodologies for approaching them and some of the fallacies to avoid, let me give you just one example of how that might work from Galatians chapter 5, the well-known flesh versus spirit text, where Paul contrast the deeds of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit. I want to focus in on that word "flesh" in Galatians chapter 5, which is the Greek work *sarx*. But the word

sarx, English translators in Galatians 5 frequently translates it with the English word "flesh." But, this word could be chosen for a couple of reasons. Again, the first step is to choose the word. I've chosen this word for a couple of reasons. Number one, it appears to play a significant role in this context in comparison to the word "spirit." But also, English translations differ in the way they translate it. Some English translations use the single word equivalent in English, "flesh," but other translations such as the original NIV translate it as "sin nature." Also, there is a possibility of misunderstanding this term. If I translate it with the word "flesh" in English, should that lead me to the conclusion that Paul is talking about the physical flesh or the physical body or somehow complicit in sin or the body itself is sinful or evil? So the word "flesh" here, in Galatians 5, would seem to provide a fruitful term for study.

Second, as far as the field of meaning, what could this term possibly mean? How is it used in particular in the New Testament and in first century Greek? If you consult a few of the tools I mentioned earlier and other New Testament lexical type tools, you'll see that the word can have a fairly broad range of meaning and different meanings and functions. For example, the word "flesh" as it does in English can refer to the physical flesh to the fleshly part of the body that covers the bones or it could be used in reference to the entire body. Paul, a couple of places, uses an idiom, such as "flesh and blood," referring to the entire physical being, the entire body, and one's physical existence. So it could refer to the physical body, physical existence. It's used in a couple of places when Paul refers to "my own flesh," relating to his ancestors and his relations, physical relations.

But it also could be used, a fourth possibility, is sometimes you see it used as humanity in oppositional rebellion against God. Or humanity as susceptible to sin as opposed to God, which is more of a spiritual or metaphorical usage of a term that is usually used to refer to physical flesh. Now, obviously, the first thing to note is that it cannot mean all of these. That is, when Paul uses the word "flesh" in Galatians 5, or *sarx* the word we translate "flesh," it does not means all of these at the same time. So, the

context most likely will disambiguate the meaning, that is to point to one of its meanings as the appropriate one in this context.

Notice also the contrast with "the spirit." This would suggest that Paul is not, primarily, especially if spirit means Holy Spirit, the contrast is not primarily between physical versus spiritual. But that Paul probably had something else in mind. In other words, he is not against the physical flesh. He is not anti-flesh or against the physical body and sees the physical body as somehow evil or sinful in it of itself. Instead, it is better to understand… Well, let me go back to another example then. The original NIV translated it as "sin nature." Interestingly, the new, the 2011 version NIV has reverted back to the single word "flesh." But the original NIV translated *sarx* in Galatians 5 not everywhere, but in Galatians 5 in contrast with Holy Spirit, walking in the spirit, translated "flesh" as "sin nature." However, to many, this may suggest that sin nature as some antithetical part of my being or some separate impulse or some separate part of me that produces sin or something like that. Perhaps because of potential misunderstanding of "sin nature," only were unsatisfied with that definition and the 2011 version of the NIV has switched to use the word "flesh."

I think a better understanding of the word when you look at it in its context and relying on some other tools for help, is that here the term "flesh," as we translate in English, refers to my entire self, my entire physical, spiritual makeup, my entire self as weak and susceptible as sin. It refers to my entire self as under the influence of this present evil age and relying on the resources of the present age. So to rely on the flesh, then, in this sense, to rely in the flesh, then who I am, my entire physical and spiritual being as belonging to and under the influence and relying solely on the resources of the present evil age. My entire self is susceptible and weak and susceptible to sin, that is what produces the vices listed in Galatians 5. So probably, something along that line is what Paul is asking the readers to avoid when he says the deeds of the flesh are these. That is, when I rely on the resources of the present evil age, when I rely on myself as part of this present age and susceptible to sin, and weakened toward sin, inevitably I will produce the

deeds of the flesh. However, he asks them to walk in the spirit in the new covenant of the Holy Spirit and to produce the fruits of the spirit.

So, words studies are important. It's important to understand the meaning of key words and key lexical features in the biblical text, while keeping in mind the different dangers and fallacies that could be committed, and to avoid them. Again, ultimately to realize that words are not the ultimate bearer and carrier of meanings but that again words combine to make clauses and clauses combined into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs come together to produce an entire discourse. So if one only does word studies, you've only dealt with part of how a text communicates meaning.

Grammar and Context

Which then leads us to the next thing to consider, in interpretation and hermeneutics, and that is the issue of grammar and context. I want to make a series of observations related to how we analyze the grammar of a text and how do we analyze the broader context. Again, I am basically directing this to those who do not know Hebrew and Greek, those who are Greek-less or Hebrew-less. Obviously, if you know Greek and Hebrew, you have access to a lot more resources and are able to go into a lot more depth than I will discuss here.

But, beyond just understanding the meaning of words, there is a need to understand then how words are put together to form phrases and clauses and sentences and how those are put together to form paragraphs, and how paragraphs then relate to each other and are put together to form entire books or documents or discourses. What I what I want to do is to focus for a moment on grammatical analysis and make some observations, both in how you might employ grammar in a limited way in trying to understand the text, especially with only access to an English translation but also how you can evaluate other tools that do discuss the grammar of text.

First of all, with when it comes to grammatical analysis, that is, I am using the word grammar, fairly loosely but looking at how words are combined into sentences and how sentences and clauses get combined. We want to look at the grammar of passage and how it works. Here probably a more formal equivalent translation is of help. Even a

formal equivalent, that is a literal translation, will not capture completely and perfectly the grammar of the Hebrew and Greek text but it will hopefully bring you closer to it than other types, especially more dynamic equivalent types. If one wants to do a grammatical study, it would help to have at least one or more formal equivalent or literal translations at one's disposal, especially if you don't know Hebrew or Greek. Also, commentaries can be of great help in alerting you to grammatical issues and how those might be significant for interpretation.

Grammatical Guidelines

Let me just give you a couple of guidelines, and again due to my area of interest and focus, I will focus on the Greek language and grammar and how that may influence the way one interprets the text, especially by means of evaluating tools that might make grammatical interpretations.

Greek Verbs: Aspect versus Tense Approaches

One important thing to recognize is the difference at least in both Hebrew and Greek between the tense systems of those languages. One must also include the differences with the language of modern day spoken English, the translations of the Greek and Hebrew text. Especially with the New Testament Greek, what you will find is that the English verb system is primarily, though not exclusively, but primarily temporarily oriented. That is when we think of tense, we think of the English verbs indicating past, present and future. With both Hebrew, perhaps, and especially Greek, the time of the action, past, present and future, was not necessarily indicated by the tenses themselves but with the other things in the context.

Especially with the Greek tenses system, what was indicated is what scholars called aspect, or how the author chose to look at the action, how the author chose to view the action, irrespective of when the action took place or even how objectively it actually occurs. The Greek tenses simply tell us how the authors chooses to view it, how did the author choose to look at this action.

Explanation of Greek Aspect

I just want to make a few comments on two of the main tense in Greek. One of them is what is called the aorist tense. You'll see commentaries and other works describe the aorist tense, and what is known as the present tense. The genius of these two tenses has often been described with an analogy that, again this is not new to me, I am borrowing it from a couple of others, but one could compare aspect in Greek tenses. That is how the author wants to look at the action with the analogy of a parade. That is, if I am in a blimp or a helicopter, and let's say there is a parade that takes place, I'll use another American example, if there is a parade that takes place on July 4th to celebrate Independence Day, and that parade begins at nine o'clock and ends at 12 o'clock. I want to make it clear, I am referring to the same parade with what I am about to say. If I am a news correspondent flying above the parade in the helicopter, I see the parade in its entirety. I don't see it necessarily as it develops and unfolds. I am not interested in how long it took or how it develops or its different parts. I just see the whole the things, I see the parade in its entirely.

However, taking the same parade, if I am an observer on the street corner, I can see the same parade from a completely different perspective, from a completely different aspect. I look at it as it develops and unfolds. I can stand right on the street corner and see the different bands and the different floats moving before. Again, it is the same parade but whether I am looking at it as a whole from a helicopter or whether I'm an observer on the street corner seeing it develop and unfold, seeing its details, those are simply different ways of looking at the exact same parade.

Aorist in Greek

The same is true with New Testament Greek. The aorist tense could look at the action as the whole as if the author stands back and looks at the events, whether it was a real brief event, whether it happened instantaneously, whether it was repeated, whether it took place over a long period of time. The aorist tense would be like if the author stands back and looks at the action as a whole. The present tense would be as if the author decides to enter the action and see it internally as it develops and unfolds in front of him. That would be similar to the present tense. Again, whether the action was short or long or

repeated, that can only be determined by the context. All the present tense said was the author looked at the action from its details and how it developed and unfolded as oppose to the aorist tense that just said “there it is” and looked at it in its entirety.

Often, the aorist tense in Greek is considered the default tense. That is again, if you turned on your computer and you start to type in your word processing program, there is often a default size of font, often 12, unless you want to click a different size font, a 8 or a 10 or something like that. Again your computer will have a default printer. That is the printer it automatically chooses. You don’t have to select it, it is the default printer, unless you want to choose something else, that’s the one that will come up.

The aorist tense in Greek that you can find referred to in textbooks and commentaries, the aorist tense was the default tense. That is, the tense the author would use unless he had some reason to use something else. This perspective on Greek determines the way we analyze the language. Again, if you are a non-Greek or non-Hebrew reader, you are reliant mainly on commentaries and other tools to help you. But this helps us I think to avoid misunderstanding of Greek tenses. For example, you still find this often, although we are starting to learn to avoid it. You’ll still often find things in commentaries especially in more popular Bible studying tools, you’ll see things like the aorist tense was used to indicate the action was once and for all, it was urgent, or it was final. You’ll see things like that.

However, again if the aorist tense was the default tense, probably, we shouldn't as students make anything of the aorist tense. We can probably safe to move on from it. We should avoid commentaries that put a lot of stock in the aorist and make those kinds of statements about the aorist as instantaneously or once for all or indicated some special type of action. Actually, the opposite is true. The aorist tense was the tense used when the writer didn’t want to say anything specific about the action. It was the default tense. So be aware of yourself making too much of the aorist tense and be aware of commentaries and other tools that might make too much out of the aorist tense.

Present Tense

The present tense you'll often see described in commentaries and other tools even popular biblical studies. You'll often see the present tense described as, the present tense is used when the action is continuous, or habitual, or ongoing a long period of time. However, again, the present tense is simply used when the author wants to look at the action as developing or unfolding, no matter how long or how short the action actually transpired. I've done some work with the present tense and I've found that sometimes the present tense is used in very short actions and sometimes used in very long actions. You can't tell, except from the context. All the present tense does is as if the author enters the action to see its makeup, how it is developed. It's a close-up look. It is a more close-up perspective of the action than the aorist tenses.

What that means, for example, is that sometimes the author might use the present tense to simply draw attention to an action in contrast the default aorist that just summarizes it. The author might use the present tense to focus more specifically or draw more attention to it. So what that means is you need to avoid comments on your own or beware of comments and commentaries and other tools that say the author used the present tense so he means a continuous action, repeated action, an ongoing action, or a habitual action or something like that. The present tense itself does not indicate that or whether an action is ongoing or habitual, you can only tell that from the context.

So be aware of using the present tense to draw illegitimate conclusions. Be especially aware of commentary and other tools that place a lot of stock on the present tense meaning that the action is ongoing or something like that. Again, often, in comparison to the aorist tense, the present will function when the author wants to take a little to perhaps focus on a little more detail than if he would have used an aorist tense.

Conditionals

Another example that you'll find in grammars to be aware of, just to give you one other, is conditional statements. You're aware of, you frequently use or read, conditional statements. It's an if-then statement. If this, then that. So if I say, if the student studies Greek diligently, then she will receive an "A." The main part of the sentence, "she will receive an A", is conditioned on the first part, "if the student studies Greek diligently."

The fulfillment of an action "she will receive an A," is conditioned on the "if" part, "if that person studies Greek diligently."

Greek has an condition known as a first class condition construction. You'll often find commentaries and other tools say that when there is a first class condition, you'll see that language, first class condition, you should translate it "since." That is if the "if" part actually means that it is already happening. So since you are studying Greek, you will receive an "A."

So you will often find that commentaries and other tools of locating first class condition sentences in Greek and therefore drawing the conclusion that it is actually happening. It should be translated "if", it's not strong enough, but you should translate it "since." The problem with that is that there are too many instances where that isn't the case in the New Testament. And so, for example, Matthew chapter 12 verse 27. I think it is. Jesus is in conflict with the Pharisees who have accused him of casting out demons in the name of Satan. And Jesus responds by saying, "If I cast out demons by the name of Beelzebul, then by whose power do you cast them out?" That's a first class sentence, if Jesus said, "if I, Jesus, am casting out demons." That's a first class sentence. So should we translate that "since"? Is Jesus saying, "Since I am casting out demons"? There are all kinds of examples like that so just beware of commentaries that place a lot of wait on first class conditions and say it should be translated "since." The point of all this in a sense that Greek is a language like any other language and it is illegitimate to project too much precision into it, or to expect too much out of it. Yes, it is a completely adequate means of God's communication and revelation to his people in the first century. But at the same time, it is certainly illegitimate to treat it in a way that is unnatural. My point is, be aware in your own analysis, and be aware when you read commentaries and other tools of those that would demand too much precision of the language and make it do things that it is really not meant to do. We may put too much stock in little grammatical nuances. But again, you have to use commentaries and other tools because you're Greek-less or Hebrew-less, which is fine, but you have to use other tools to help you make grammatical observations but be aware of those that over analyze the parameters.

Translation

One example that we've already looked at that might helpful in understanding how grammar can make a difference and we talked about this in relationship to translation. But translation is an issue and this text is actually a grammatical one. That section in Ephesians chapter 5, in verse 18, we find a well-known imperative to not be drunk with wine but to be filled by the Spirit. If you have a rather literal wooden translation, you'll see that what follows in the English translation is a series of participles, at least in English they are often translated with a form of the verb with "-ing" in the end. So you'll see a series of participles after verse 18. So he says "don't get drunk with wine, which is debauchery but instead be filled with the spirit, [literally] speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks to God the father for everything." All those participles, "singing," "speaking" and "giving thanks," they all go back and modify the command "to be filled with the spirit." I think they are simply explaining and describing what that means and what does it looks like. Interestingly, though, and again this is where English translations differ. What do we do with verse 21, which most English translations seems to translate as a separate verse and some of them even begin a new paragraph. But actually verse 21, submitting to one another, verse 21 the verb "submit" is another participle in this string of participles that probably go back to the command "to be filled with the spirit." So a better way to read this text then would be "don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the spirit" which means "speaking to each other in songs and spiritual song, singing and making music to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, and submitting to one another." So submitting to one another is part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. So grammatically, what you do with that verse and even comparing English translations might make a difference in how you interpret this text.

Connectors

Another thing to pay attention to, especially in English translation, with English translations this can even be done but it's at times a little more accurately with the Greek text and that is to pay attention to connectors such as the "but's" and the "and's" and

"therefore's" and "whenever" or "because" or "for." Those words function to connect or even clauses or sentences or paragraphs. It is important to understand the force of connectors. Again, the "therefore's" and the "but's" and the "because of" this or something like that. Try to determine what that says about the relationship of the words or paragraphs or sentences to each other. That is part of helping to trace the flow of thought through the passage.

Again, to consider different literary types, this is probably more significant in particularly in Epistolary literature that often depends on tightly knit argument that moves from line to line or verse to verse or whatever. Again, with narrative literature, we are mainly interested in connection between paragraphs and how the story develops. So sometimes the detail grammar of the verses themselves and the sentences are not as important as what is going on with the story at the paragraph level.

The other thing though with connectors, and this isn't the only way to identify relationships between sentences, sometimes you have to still identify what's the relationship between this verse and the one that comes before or the one that comes after it. What is the relationship of this paragraph to the previous one? But even with connectors, even when you have the help of connectors, like a "therefore" or a "but" or a "because" or an "in order that" or something like that, even then, it is difficult to tell what are they connecting. Are they simply connecting two words? Are they connecting sentences? Are they connecting paragraphs? All I am saying is you need to work with the text and try to figure out the function of each section. What is this sentence doing here? What is the verse doing here? How does it work in the entire paragraph?

A good example that is even revealed in the English translation is Romans chapters 5 and verse 12. This is a section that begins a comparison that Paul makes between Christ and Adam where he compares and contrasts what the act of Adam in sinning, what that did to the human race, which now is corrected and reversed in the one act of Jesus Christ, the obedience of Christ, that is his death on the cross. This comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ is introduced by an interesting construction. Most English translations say "therefore" so I am looking at the NIV

version and it says “therefore sin entered the world through one man.” Other translations might be a little more wooden and literal and translate it closer to the Greek text which is “because of this,” literally “because of this, just as sin entered into the world” and he goes on to the comparison.

The question is, what is the “because of this” indicating? Well, obviously, it is showing that something has happened and previously that is a cause of this comparison between Adam and Christ. Something Paul has just said, “because of this” because of something he just said, now he launches into a comparison between Adam and Christ. But the debate is, what is Paul referring to? Because of what? Is Paul referring back, for example, to the previous verse? In verse 11 of Romans 5, Paul ends by saying, “not only is this but we also now rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.” So is it because of that statement or is the “because of this” or “therefore” refer to chapter 5 verse 1-11. Does it refer back to the entire first eleven verses of chapter 5? Or does it go back earlier? Perhaps it goes back all the way back to chapter 3 verse 21 where Paul begins explicitly to discuss justification by faith? Or does it go all the way back to chapter one and in verse eighteen which is the beginning of the body of the letter to the Romans? So, sometimes it’s difficult to tell exactly what do some of these lines such as “therefore” or “because of” or “for” or “whenever” or “consequently” or words that are sometimes going to be difficult to know what it is connecting back to, how far should we go back. That’s all part of hermeneutics and interpretation and trying to put the text together to make sense of. One can wrestle with the grammar and the connection of clauses and words and paragraphs and things like that.

Literary Context

To move on from grammar and to discuss briefly and to broaden out from just words, looking at how words are combined into sentences and paragraphs, to broaden out and look at the entire literary context. So more broadly, you need to ask the question and look at how does it fit within the broader context or literary flow of the entire book. Or more specifically, if I am dealing with the text in the New or Old Testament, how does it relate to what goes before it, how does it grow out of it, how does it prepare for or relate

to what comes after. You need to be able to explain how your text fits within the context, a very simple illustration of how this is important and how it is ridiculous to ignore this even within our own age is that none of us goes to a movie store or a Red Box or something like that and you check out a movie we've never seen. We take it home and pop it in in our DVD player and then perhaps we choose scene selection and the menu "scene selection" comes up and we check and choose scene 17 and maybe when we get to scene 17 and we fast forward into the middle of it and then we watch ten minutes of it. I would expect that you would be left confused and having no idea of what in the world is going on. You want to know how the entire story develops. You want to know how the plot or argument unfolds and develops and so you can understand any given section in the movie. The same is true with the biblical text. I think one of the most important things you can do in hermeneutics or interpreting the biblical text and one of the most viable aspects is to be able to explain how your text contributes to the argument that is going on and to explain how your text fits where it is. What's it's doing there? What would it be missing if it wasn't there? What is it contributing to the argument? How does it fit with or grow out of the previous section? How does it prepare for what comes after?

Discourse Level Features

And again, there can be a variety of type of relationships. Often depending on if you are dealing with narrative literature or whether you are dealing with epistolary literature. There can be a number of types of relationships between the paragraphs and the broader contexts, the broader sections of the text. There might be more of a chronological relationship, you'll find this particularly in narratives although we said even in narrative things are not always arranged chronologically, but certain events might be arranged according to chronology. At times, certain sections might explain something that comes before. Your text might be an illustration that comes from something that has come before it. Your text might be the cause of something that comes before or after or may be a cause and effect relationship. It might be a question answer relationship. Your text might be answering a question that was raised in an earlier text. Your text might be arranged according to the particular or general. That is, your text might give the

particulars of a general statement or might be a general summary of some particular example. So there are all kinds of possible relationships, comparisons and contrasts. Your text might be a contrast or comparison to something that may come before or after. So just be alert to a number of possibilities of how, and more important than these labels is simply be able to explain what is your text doing here in this context. How does it grow out of what comes before? How does it relate to what comes after it? At times, this can be the most important facet of interpreting biblical texts. Sometimes we will misunderstand the text or at least not understand it clearly until we understand how it fits within the broader context.

A very simple example that many others have pointed to as well, but it is an easy one and an easy entry point into thinking about context is the example from Philippians chapter 4 and verse 13. You probably have heard it quoted in a variety of different ways. In chapter 4 verse 13, Paul says "I can do everything through him who gives me strength," depending on your translation. So we take this text and we utilize it for justification for various things. I can take an exam that seems to be looming large and is too difficult and I don't feel prepared for because I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me. I can get along with difficult family members or relatives or friends because I can do all things in Christ. Usually we apply it to areas within our life, a variety of areas that we find difficult, but we can rely on Christ's strength to help us to overcome these obstacles or accomplish these tasks that appear impossible. I don't want to deny that is indeed true, but I want to ask what does this verse mean. How does Paul seem to be using it? How does it contribute to the argument? What comes before it, particularly, and after it? Notice chapter 4 verse 13, if you back up, and I'll start with verse 10, Paul says, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying it is because I am in need." So he is responding to the concern of the Philippians. "I am not saying this because I have need." Not because I want you to give me something and he says, "for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is like to be in need. I know what it is it like to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being

content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want." Here's the secret of being content in every situation, whether you're hungry and in need or struggling to get by or whether you have much. It's "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." Chapter 4 verse 13 is referring to Paul's ability, Christ enabling him to be in any circumstance whether he has abundance or whether he is struggling to survive and eke out of an existence.

Importance of Context: Exodus 18

So sometimes your ability to place a text in its context will have a profound effect on how you understand the text and even help to avoid misunderstanding. Let me give you a couple of examples. I'll start with a couple from the Old Testament of how understand the context or how the argument develops and how that may make a difference in understanding the biblical text. The first example I want to take and utilize in the Old Testament comes from narrative, and that is the book of Exodus. Particularly, Exodus chapter 18 is the story of Jethro, Moses's father in law, who is visiting him. Jethro comes to Moses and sees Moses is the leader of the Israelite nation and one of his responsibilities is to function as the judge. Jethro comes to visit Moses and sees him acting as a judge and Moses is, according to Jethro, Moses is basically wearing himself out and tiring himself out because he is trying to handle too much. Everyone's bringing these cases large and small, significant and insignificant to Moses to settle and decide. He is functioning as the judge. So Jethro sees this and observes this and basically concludes that this really isn't good Moses. You are wearing yourself out by trying to do too much. You are taking on all these cases, large and small, and settling them and you can't do this and you can't do it well. So Jethro's solution is you need to delegate the minor cases to other qualified judges and you just take the big, important ones. And that's what Moses does at the end of chapter 18 and brings that to a conclusion.

And the question is: why is this story in Exodus? There has been a number of suggestions and this story could be doing a number of things. I don't want to say that what I am about to say is the only thing that it's doing, but one of the more common suggestions historically, from the historical primitive approach sees this story as

describing the origins of Israelites' judicial systems and this is how it came about. So it is a storytelling or describing how the judicial system in Israelites' system emerged.

At least in more popular literature, a very common explanation, is chapter 18 of Exodus tells us or is an account of the importance of delegating responsibilities. So, chapter 18 basically instructs Christians that we should not try to do things on our own. The instruction is the how to delegate authority and delegate responsibilities in the business world or in our other endeavors or even in church situations and ministry contexts or organizations. This is about delegating responsibilities and we find in the instructions the why and how to do it.

However, to me, I think the key to understanding this story, and chapter 18, is to place it within again, it's broader context. To ask how it relates to what comes before and how it fits in to the narrative and the context that has gone on. One thing you will notice is, again ignore chapter and verse divisions which can be very important. We said before, chapter and verse divisions are not there to indicate key breaks or sections. They're basically there to help us all get to the right place in the text. So ignoring chapter 18, what is interesting is chapter 18, the story of Moses and Jethro and Moses getting worn out by all these cases and Jethro having to tell him not to do that and give the lesser cases to someone else and to take the main ones for yourself, this comes right after, at the tail end, of a story that recounts Israel's battle with the Amalekites in the end of chapter 17.

If you remember, that story is interesting too because Israel engages in a rather military type of strategy. Moses is standing on the mountain and watching this battle and as long as he keeps his arms up and hands up in the air, Israel wins but you have this interesting language of Moses is tired out. He gets worn out and tired. When his arms drop, Israel starts to lose. When he gets them back up, they win. But he can't hold them up, so he ask two individuals to basically prop his arms up and hold them up so that Israel is victorious over the Amalekites. This is interesting. You actually have these two stories then, where Moses is portrayed as very human and very weak. He is too tired. He can't handle the cases. All the judicial cases in chapter 18, are wearing him out. He can't do it. In chapter 17, the battle of the Amalekites, he can't even hold his hands out, it wears him

out. He has to have someone to help him hold his hands up. So you have this interesting picture of Moses being worn out and tired out and being weak. He can't do it. This is interestingly, when you place it in it's even broader, context, later on in chapter 20, Moses is the one who is going to ascend on Mount Sinai and bring the law down in the context of the flashing and thunder and lightning et cetera et cetera. Even before that, if you go back before that, this comes in as part of the story of Israel delivering Israel out of Egypt. So he is the one who gathers them and rallies them out of Egypt. He parts the Red Sea by lifting his staff. He supernaturally provides provisions for them, he provides water and the rock et cetera for the Israelites. So it's interesting that Moses is portrayed in almost supernatural terms throughout the narrative of Exodus. Starting with the deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea, through the wilderness and all the ways Moses is an instrument of supernatural provision. His staff seems almost to have supernatural qualities to it.

But now, in chapter 18, as well as this battle with the Amalekites, in chapter 17, Moses is portrayed as this weak person who gets worn out and he can't do it. And the question is: why would the author portray Moses in these terms when he's almost been a superhero? In fact, one commentary observed that up until this point, Moses had been portrayed in supernatural terms. Now he is portrayed as a weak and as a very human individual. He can't even hold his arms up to win this battle. He can't handle all these cases, it's wearing him out. How do we understand this story in chapter 18 in light of this broader context?

In the next session, I want to return back to this story and we will try to answer that question. How does chapter 18 of Exodus, this portrayal of Moses, portrayed as a very weak human being, how does this function in a broader context of Exodus? How does that make a difference in the way we read it?

Transcribed by Cheng Quang and Paul Leary
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 23

Importance of Context in Interpretation

Exodus 18 and its Context

You're not ready to move on in the process of interpretation until you can account for what your passage is doing in its context. How does it grow out of what comes before and relates to what comes before? How does it prepare for what comes after it? What contribution does it make to the flow of thought in the argument? What would be missing if it were not there?

We looked at chapter 18 of Exodus and ended by noticing that in chapter 18. This is the account of Moses having to appoint judges and that is Moses' function as the judge of Israel. His father-in-law Jethro had to point out to him that it was wearing him out as he couldn't handle all these cases. That story was juxtaposed with another story: the battle of the Amalekites where once again Moses is portrayed in rather weak and human dimensions and in human terms. We asked the question: why is Moses portrayed as a weak human being who can't do it and who can't handle things? When you look at the broader context all the way back to God delivering the people out of Egypt through the Exodus even into chapter 20, a couple chapters later, Moses is the one who ascends Mt. Sinai, receives the law, comes back and gives it to the people. The question is why does the author portray Moses in the midst of where he's been almost portrayed as a superhero, now he's portrayed as a weakened individual who gets worn out trying to handle all the cases in Israel? He also gets worn out, he can't hold his hands up in the battle against Amalekites.

The next feature to consider is when you back up even further than the battle of the Amalekites in chapter 17 starting with verse 8. When you look at the first seven verses of chapter 17, we find the story of Moses providing water from the rock and for the Israelites. We also find a scene that is repeated in Exodus of the Israelites grumbling and complaining because of their perceived misfortunes as they're making the trek across

the desert to the Promised Land. They complained and wished they could go back to Egypt.

What is intriguing is, and I think the key to understanding this, is verse seven at the very end of that story of the water from the rock and Israelites grumbling verse seven says, and "he," referring to Moses, "called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelite quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" But now it's interesting that the narrative doesn't answer that question, it kind of leaves you hanging. What did they think? Was the Lord with them or not? Did God answer that question? In my opinion these next two stories, the story of the Amalekites and also the text that we're considering, chapter 18 and the story of Moses, not being able to handle all the cases in Israel is an answer to that question. You see by portraying Moses as a weak human being who can't handle things, it's as if it the author is trying to portray that God must be with his people because it's not Moses, Moses is a weak human being. All these things that happened must be attributed to God, God must be in the midst of his people because Moses certainly can't do it.

So by taking chapter 18 and by placing it in its context, it's not a story about delegating authority, and how to run a business, it's not primarily even about the origin of Israel's court system but within the broader context it seems to be part of this notion of portraying Moses in a weak moment as a weak human being who can't do it all in order to answer that question in the narrative: is God with us or not? Is God really among us? God must be among the people because it can't be Moses, he's just a weak human being.

Psalm 15 and Context

One other example that we've already looked at, but just another very brief example in the Old Testament of how context of the argumentation of a text works, we've already looked at Psalm chapter 15, a well-known entrance song. This is rather straightforward but still a good example. It begins by raising a question: "Lord who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your Holy Hill? And the basically the rest of the psalm answers that question. Starting with verse two--"He whose walk is blameless and who does what is right, who speaks the truth from his heart, and has no slander on his

tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."

Now there are a number of things in this text that we could also examine as far as the historical background. What does it mean to lend money without usury? There's a couple of other details but overall within the context, this follows a question answer format. The question in verse one is: who may dwell in your sanctuary, who may ascend the holy hill? The rest of the psalm answers that question.

New Testament Examples of the Significance of Context

Let's move on to a handful of New Testament examples again where literary context is important and makes a difference in the way you read a text, depending on your ability to put the text together and understand how the different parts are functioning in relationship to each other. By the way, it's important when we ask the question of context not just to say and I read this in both academic and popular literatures that the context suggests this or this means this because of the context. That's not enough. One needs to ask, what in the context? Don't just say the context says this, or the context demands this. Show me in the context what it is that requires this or suggests you have read it accurately or correctly. So to move on to the New Testament, one example that I want to use is found in the Gospels. I'll give you one example from narrative in the Gospels, a couple from Paul's letters and one from Revelation as well, to show how a context might work.

Matthew 4 in its Context

In Matthew chapter 4, the very beginning of the book if you follow that of the literary flow in the context. This comes right after in chapter 2 we read of the accounts of the early life of Jesus but the author skips immediately to Jesus' adult ministry. So there's a gap, and you remember first century narratives in the Gospels aren't trying to give some exhaustive account of the life of Christ. But in chapter 3, it skips right to introduce Jesus' adult ministry and with chapter 4 he embarks on his ministry. In chapter 4 we find this

interesting summary statement right at the end of the chapter and I'll start with verse 23. This is Matthew chapter 4 verse 23: “Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. The news about him spread all over Syria.”

What I want to focus on is that phrase “Jesus came preaching the kingdom and teaching the kingdom of God and healing all diseases.” This summary seems to set you up for the next several chapters, because in chapters 5 through 7 we find an account of Jesus’ teaching that we know is the Sermon on the Mount. Then following chapters 5-7 are chapters 8 and 9 in which we find an account we’ve already talked about this before with form criticism in chapters 8 and 9. Here we find a collection of healing stories or miracle stories, where Jesus heals different diseases. He even heals nature itself. But we find a collection of stories where Jesus heals different individuals of their diseases. So what is going on then? I think verses 23 and 24 especially verse 23 of chapter 4 is sort of the summary statement. Jesus teaches and preaches the kingdom of God, and he also heals diseases and sicknesses. And then chapters 5 through 9 give a detailed account of those two events: the preaching of the kingdom of God and the healing of diseases. So chapters 5-7 is an account of Jesus’ teaching and preaching regarding the kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount. Then chapters 8 and 9 are an account of Jesus healing disease and sickness among the people.

Then intriguingly at the very end of chapter 9 verse 35 of Matthew, notice how he summarizes once again. He says, verse 35, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.” So once again in those two phrases in 4:23 and 9:35, you have a summary of Jesus preaching the kingdom of God and healing every disease. In between you have lengthy accounts of Jesus teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus healing various diseases and sicknesses in chapters 8 and 9.

So Matthew has carefully arranged this section and the rest of Matthew as well. To just give one example: Matthew has carefully arranged this section with a summary and

an expansion, a summary of two ideas: preaching the kingdom and healing, an expansion of both of those, and then another summary that kind of acts as a bracket between those two large sections: chapters 5 through 7, the Sermon on the Mount and chapters 8 and 9, the healing of various persons with sicknesses and diseases.

Galatians 1-2 in its Context

To give a couple examples in epistolary literature, particularly in Paul's letters, Galatians chapters 1 and 2. In Galatians chapters 1 and 2, Paul is launching an argument to demonstrate his gospel. We've already looked briefly a chapter 1:1-5 and how Paul expands a typical epistolary salutation and introduction to indicate the key ideas that are going to occupy his attention and to sort of prepare the readers for what he's going to say. But one of the things Paul does in chapters 1-2 is include a rather lengthy narrative account of certain things surrounding his conversion experience.

So in chapter 1 especially, starting verse 13, he begins: “You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age.” And he goes on and narrates other events surrounding his life in Judaism but also his conversion. Then he tells of his interactions with some of the apostles in Jerusalem, such as Peter and James and John after his conversion, and how he interacts and makes a couple trips to Jerusalem and how he interacts with the other apostles.

The question is what is the purpose and intention of this narration or this narrative section in Galatians chapters 1 and 2? And again we need to ignore the chapter division of chapter two because it's a continuation of what he’s been arguing for in chapter 1. But again I think the key is in chapter 1:11-12 where we find Paul’s thesis statement, or the summary statement of what he's going to argue in chapters 1 and 2. He says in verse 11: “I want you to know brothers the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man or human being nor was I taught it, rather I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.” That is the thesis or the main point that Paul is going to argue.

Perhaps this may be one of the areas that the false teachers, those so called

Judaizers, that Paul seems to be responding to in Galatians, this might be something they were calling into question: that Paul is really not a genuine apostle, he is completely dependent on human beings and human teaching, and had derived his Gospel which they think is an illegitimate one. That Gospel was that the Gentiles can become God's people and can be justified by faith solely by faith in Jesus Christ apart from having to submit to the Mosaic law. Some would say that that Gospel is a fabrication by Paul, it was taught by human beings and Paul's apostleship is not a legitimate one. So now Paul asserts his thesis in 11 and 12: "I want you to know, my Gospel does not come from any human being I wasn't taught it by human beings but it came solely as a result of a revelation of Jesus Christ."

Now I think the rest of chapters 1 and 2 are going to develop and argue for that. So when Paul begins to explain his life is under Judaism, when he says: "Concerning my life of Judaism I persecuted the church of God. I was advancing beyond all my contemporaries of Judaism in obedience to the law. I was zealous for the law." He's again, demonstrating that nothing in his previous life prepared him for the Gospel. So he's trying to cover all his bases. How could he say, that his previous life under Judaism did not prepare him for the Gospel? Because, in fact, it was just the opposite, he was persecuting and trying to destroy the church of Jesus Christ as he was advancing in Judaism. So nothing in his previous life prepared him for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing during or after his conversion.

His conversion was not solely a resolve, not a reflection or being taught by human beings, but a revelation of Jesus Christ. Then in his life after Judaism after his conversion he makes it clear: "I never consulted any of the apostles immediately. And when I did consult the apostles first of all they never added anything to my Gospel, but second they actually gave me the right hand of fellowship, they acknowledged the validity of my Gospel." So again this whole narrative of Paul's life as a Jew and what happened at his conversion and these trips to Jerusalem where he finally does interact with the apostles, these are all meant to argue his thesis in verses 11 and 12, that "I did not receive this Gospel from any human being, nothing before my conversion, during it, or after my

conversion calls that into question." Everything that took place instead, demonstrates that his Gospel could have come in no way other than a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

So again, an understanding of the context helps us make sense of some of this narrative as to: why does Paul talk about his prior life in Judaism? Why does he discuss a couple trips to Jerusalem? Why does he discuss his interaction with the apostles? Why does he have these mentions where he says: "then three years later I did this," then in chapter 2 verse 1: "14 years later." Again, because he's trying to argue for that point: my Gospel did not come about by human beings it was not taught by a human being, it was not fabricated by himself, but it came only by revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 13 in its Context

Another example in 1 Corinthians 13, and I won't read this, but this is a rather straightforward one but there's a couple of things to look at in more detail. Chapter 13 is the famous love passage. Indeed, it does have a poetic quality that perhaps allows it to be utilized in different contexts in that it extols love, the virtue of love, not defining what it is, but describing its characteristic features. We often utilize it in various contexts, the most common one is to hear it read at a wedding as the type of love that a husband and wife should show towards each other. I certainly don't want to say that's invalid. My wife and I had this text read at our wedding as well.

But again we need to realize and what becomes obvious, when you read chapter 13, if you widen and broaden your vision, is it comes within an argument or a context where Paul is dealing with a problem in the Corinthian church with how they've treated spiritual gifts. So chapter 12 and verse 1 begins: "Now concerning spiritual gifts." Which again, to look at the context more broadly in 1 Corinthians, this is often a way where Paul signals different topics or different problems and issues in the Corinthian church that he takes up. I think we said in a previous session that Paul is responding in 1 Corinthians to problems. After he's established the Corinthian church, later on he has been made aware of a series of problems that have arisen by both word-of-mouth, someone has orally communicated some of these problems, but also by a letter. The Corinthians have also composed a letter apparently, and sent it to Paul making him aware of some of these

problems. So what Paul does in 1 Corinthians is take some of these problems and deal with them.

One of the ways that he usually indicates the shift to a new topic or problem is by this phrase: “Now Concerning” or “Now about spiritual gifts.” So chapter 12 introduces us to or indicates/broadcasts Paul's intention to deal with the problem of how the Corinthians were treating spiritual gifts., Just to go into very little detail, when you read chapter 12 it appears, and when you look at the background of the Corinthians, that one of the things they were doing is they were emphasizing certain gifts at least some of the Corinthians were. Some of the people in the Corinthian congregation were emphasizing spiritual gifts as an indication of their status spiritually, and I would also suggest politically, economically or socially. Their ability to manifest certain gifts especially speaking in tongues was not only an indication of their spiritual status but would've been utilized to further distance them socially from each other. So certain Corinthians who were of high social status and esteem were further bolstering that by indicating their spiritual status through the ability to speak and spiritual gifts, hence causing further division.

We’ve seen that issues like the patron-client relationship division between the wealthy and the poor seem to lie behind a social-economic division lies behind a lot of problems in Corinth, and that is probably what lies behind the problem in chapter 12. Their ability to speak in tongues, ecstatic speech, ecstatic tongues, seems then to have indicated their arriving at a certain spiritual plane or spiritual status, but also their social status as elite members of society, hence further distancing themselves and causing division from the poor members in the congregation.

So that’s what Paul has to address in chapter 12. He begins to address the issue of how spiritual gifts are not to be utilized as an indication of division but instead he uses the imagery of a body, that the Corinthian church is to be seen as a body with all the parts having equal validity. So Paul is trying to level the playing field basically in chapter 12, to say that there's no one gift that shows the Spirit more than any other. There is no one gift that is more of a sign that someone has the Spirit than any of the other gifts. So that is

why he has this long list of gifts and interestingly he puts tongues at the end of that list, to again, perhaps to balance or neutralize what the Corinthians are doing. So in response to the tendency of the Corinthians elevate one gift, tongues, as a sign of their true spiritual status and even social status, Paul levels the playing field by using the imagery of the body and by doing other things. He tries to level the field and say: No gift is more important than any other. There can be no hierarchy where one gift shows the Spirit more than any other. They all equally demonstrate the Spirit. The church is a body where all members play an equal role.

Now, what is interesting, is chapter 12 ends with verse 30: "Do all have the gifts of healing?" response "No." "Do all speak in tongues?" "No." "Do all interpret but eagerly desire the greater gifts?" Now chapter 14, if you skip 13, Chapter 12 merges very naturally into 14. He goes on and says: "Therefore follow the way of love and eagerly desire the spiritual gifts." Which is what he just ended with and in 1 Corinthians 12:30 he says: "Eagerly desire the greater gifts." Now he tells them again in 14:1: "Eagerly desire the greater gifts." And what he does, is in chapter 14, very briefly he highlights the gift of prophecy as the gift that the Corinthian church should be eagerly desiring. And the question is: why does he do that? Probably because prophecy is a gift that is immediately intelligible to the entire church. Prophecy would be of immediate benefit to the entire church when it gathers together. It's important to see that in chapters 12-14 Paul is primarily addressing the Corinthian congregation as they gather for worship.

So in chapter 14 Paul encourages them: when you gather for worship you should pursue the gift of prophecy, again why? Because it is immediately intelligible and understandable by everyone there. Tongues are not. In my opinion, Paul is not necessarily denigrating tongues here, he's just saying, when it comes to worship, Paul would prefer that they do not speak in tongues because it's not immediately intelligible. Aside from having someone to interpret it, it is the primary benefit only for the person speaking it and does not immediately benefit all the readers unless it's interpreted. Therefore Paul would rather the Corinthians pursue speaking in prophecy, or prophesying, because it's immediately intelligible and understandable to everyone there. It imparts an immediate

benefit.

Now how does chapter 13 fit into all this? Basically, I think chapter 13 is the key to how the Corinthians should utilize their spiritual gifts, that is, if the Corinthians have the kind of love that Paul describes and depicts in chapter 13 that will be demonstrated by chapter 14, that is, they will pursue not tongues or other gifts that, in a way, would promote their social and spiritual status or they would not pursue gifts that are only of benefit to themselves. If they have the kind of love in 13 that is patient, it's kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it's not proud, it's not rude, it's not self-seeking, it's not easily angered, it does not delight in evil, if they have that kind of love then they will pursue the gift of prophecy in chapter 14 because it is immediately intelligible. It has a benefit for the entire congregation, not just for the person exercising the gift.

So chapter 13 is an important text and again I don't want to say it can't be used in other contexts, but within 1 Corinthians, it comes right in the middle of two chapters 12 and 14, that address the issues of spiritual gifts. What chapter 13 does, is indicates the means and the way that the gifts should be operated. If they pursue the type of love in chapter 13, then they will pursue those gifts that are of benefit to everyone, not just themselves. They will stop using the gifts in any selfish manner.

Colossians 3 in its Context

Here is one more example in Paul's letters. Colossians chapter 3 and verses 1-4, we find a section that could potentially be misunderstood in terms of making Paul out to be far more mystical then perhaps he really is because in 3:1-4 he says: "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with him in glory." When I read a text like this and I wonder: what does it mean to "seek the things above and not the things on earth"? I've often heard this text explained in almost escapist terms, that the Christian is one who lives their life in a heavenly reality and the earthly reality really doesn't matter at all: it's insignificant at best or at worst it is evil and to be avoided. This text has sometimes been used to argue for

separating from anything that is physical and worldly. But again, I think the key is to understand how it fits within the context. First of all, chapter 3 is the introduction toward the beginning of the primary ethical section of Paul's letter to the Colossians. Not that he hasn't dealt with some ethics or imperatives before, but now chapter 3 to the end of Colossians is heavily exhortational. You find a lot of imperatives and the ethical section of Paul's letters is like what we've seen in some other letters and we've discussed the epistolary format of letters. But with this text in particular, it's necessary to understand it in light of what comes before and after it that is to place it within the broader argument and context.

The first thing you'll note is chapter 3:1-4 of Colossians comes right on the heels of a section where Paul has dealt or responded rather poignantly to this false teaching that he's dealing with back earlier under historical criticism. In this course we've talked a little bit about the possible nature of this false teaching, and I won't go into that again. But just assuming there was a false teaching is in the latter part of chapter 2, Paul seems to particularly respond in detail to this teaching and what he does is he exposes the moral bankruptcy of this teaching. He demonstrates his problem with it. It is not just theological but it's also ethical. Ultimately Paul is convinced that this teaching and what it has to offer the Colossians is actually bankrupt. It ultimately cannot overcome sin. It ultimately cannot promote a life pleasing to God or promote a life in Christ.

In fact, notice how it ends, the last thing Paul says in Colossians chapter 2 and I'll back up to 21 where he says: "Why do you follow these things of the world and submit to its rule." Verse 21: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, these are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value for restraining sensual indulgences." But the question then is: what can restrain it? What does promote true worship? What does restrain sinful indulgences? What does promote a life pleasing to God? What does promote that? Chapter 3:1-4 is the answer. That is: "Because you've been raised with Christ, seek the things above and not the things on earth. Instead

set your minds on things above where Christ is now seated and where you are seated by virtue of being united to him." But that still raises the question: what does it mean to seek things above and not the things on earth? How is that a response to this bankrupt teaching? How does seeking the things above and not the things on earth restrain sinful indulgences? How does it promote godly living and a lifestyle pleasing to God?

Well, this is where the rest of chapter 3 is necessary. The rest of chapter 3, and all the way to chapter 4 and verse 1, I think, further spells out what that means. So, chapter 3:1-4 is kind of a summary that will now get unpacked in the rest of chapter 3 and the first verse of chapter 4.

Notice Paul begins with a series of vices. We talked earlier about the fact that Paul often used typical or common forms in his day and one of them was a vice list. A vice list was simply a list of things to be avoided and Paul includes one here starting verse five. Notice how he described it, he says: "Put to death therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature." So this is what it means to not set your mind on earthly things. When Paul says: "Set your minds on things above not on things on earth," what does that mean? Here it is, he says: "Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexuality immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry, because of these the wrath of God is coming." Then later on he says: "Rid yourself of anger, rage, malice, slander," and that whole vice list. That's what it means to not set your mind on earthly things. It means to not pursue and not be characterized by these kinds of vices.

But then what does it mean to set your minds on things above? Well, Paul transitions into verse 12 into a virtue list, a list of those things that God's people should embrace. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with each other, forgiving each other." Then he goes on to give a series of commands: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Whatever you do whether in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." So this is what it means to set your minds on heavenly things. So setting your minds on heavenly things and not on earthly things, has nothing to do with somehow escaping to

some spiritual existence or ignoring or downplaying things in this life or refusing to do anything physical or belonging to this world. Paul makes it clear in the rest of chapters 3 and 4 that what it means to set your minds on things above and not on earth is to live life appropriately here on this earth in the present. It's to pursue those virtues that are characteristic of life in Christ, that are characteristic as he says in verses 10 and 11, characteristic of the new self, that is being renewed in the image of the creator. That's what it means to set your minds on things above, to live consistently with that. It also means to avoid and not set your minds on things on earth, and to avoid the things on earth means to refuse to participate in those vices that are characteristic of this present sinful era, to pursue those vices that are destructive and do not promote godly living.

So by being able to place Colossians 3:1-4 in its context, helps us to understand it, but also helps to avoid misunderstandings and make it say things that Paul clearly was not intending. It's part of his ethical exhortation.

Revelation 6 in its Context

One final passage to give an example from the book of Revelation, and the reason I do this one, is to show that context works in Revelation as well. We often think of it as a collection or series of kind of disjointed visions and all these strained images and visions. Sometimes we fail to put them together and see that at times that there is a co-contextual coherence throughout the book. The book is put together very carefully and you don't just have a collection of scattered unrelated visions and symbols and images. So I want to look at one section, just very briefly, that I think is a fairly clear and that is chapter 6.

In chapter 6 we see a series of seven seals and even in chapter 6, to kind of put chapter 6 in its context, chapter 6 begins with these seven seals. The first four seals are the four horses. Most are familiar with the four horsemen of the apocalypse and we see them in paintings and artistic depictions and even book titles. But this account of the seven seals in chapter 6.

First of all when you place it in context to go back and discover this chapter grows naturally out of chapter 4 and 5, where John sees a vision of throne in heaven and one seated on the throne. But the one seated on the throne is also holding a scroll at the

beginning of chapter 5. The scroll, without going into detail, probably contains God's plan of bringing about both judgment but also bringing salvation and establishing his kingdom in the world. So, by establishing his kingdom that also entails judging this present world to make way for the establishment of his rule in the kingdom.

In chapter 5 then, John is found weeping in despair, because there's nobody worthy to open the scroll until finally he does see someone and that is the Lamb. So then in addition to God seated on the throne, all of a sudden the Lamb, Jesus Christ, emerges and he is worthy to open the scroll that has seven seals on it, the sealed scroll.

So starting with chapter 6, we begin to see the scroll unsealed. That scroll emerges in chapters 4 and 5 sets the stage for what's starting to happen in chapter 6. Now the scroll is being unsealed, and as each seal is taken off, God's judgment, remember the scroll contains God's plan for judgment and salvation. Now in chapter 6 I think we begin to see the preliminary judgments. As that scroll begins to be unsealed with each seal a preliminary judgment that comes from chapters 4 and 5 that comes from the throne begins to be unleashed upon this earth.

Now the very last seal of chapter 6, which is actually seal number 6, the seventh seal comes later, I don't want to talk right now about why that's the case, but what I do want to emphasize is in chapter 6:12-17, we find the last seal of chapter 6, which is seal number six. We see it opened up, and notice what happens, starting with verse 12: "I watched as he opened the sixth seal and there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black, like sackcloth made of goat hair. The whole moon turned blood red, and stars in the sky fell to the earth as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place." Probably again this is an indication of the end time judgment. Now we're at the end of the world. Here is the final, ultimate judgment where God pours out his wrath and his judgment upon rebellious humanity.

But notice what it says then to go on in verses 15-17: "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free person hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They call to the mountains and rocks 'fall

on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.'" So they would rather have the rocks and mountains fall on them then have to face the wrath of God's judgment and the wrath of the Lamb.

Then verse 17: "For the great day of their wrath," the day, this is the final judgment at the end of history, the great day of the outpouring of God's wrath and the Lamb's. "The great day of their wrath is come and who can stand?" Again notice how chapter 6 ends with that question: "God's wrath has come, who is able to stand it?"

In my opinion then, chapter 7 provides the answer to that question, who can stand? In chapter 7 you find this account of the sealing of the 144,000 which, without going into detail, I would argue is symbolic of the church as God's people who are depicted as an army who goes out to do battle and is in conflict though they do that by their suffering witness not taking up weapons. But the point of chapter 7 is to demonstrate those who were sealed with the seal of God though they are the ones who will be able to stand in the day of God's wrath, they are the ones will not suffer the wrath of God.

So chapter 6 is not just a discrete vision that is unrelated to anything else but again chapter 6 grows out of chapters 4-5: the vision of the throne and the seven sealed scroll. We see the scrolls unsealed in chapter 6 and the preliminary judgments happening. That scroll from chapter 4 and 5 is now beginning to be unleashed, God's plan is now beginning to transpire, because of how Jesus Christ has enacted it. Then chapter 6 ends with the question: who can stand when God unleashes his judgment? Especially in the day of God's wrath who is able to withstand? Chapter 7 then pauses to answer that question, that those who were sealed with the seal of God, they are the ones who will be able to stand in the day of God's wrath.

Summary on the Importance of Context in Interpretation

So those are just a number or series of examples of how understanding the literary context of the New or Old Testament text can make a difference in the way one interprets it. Again to summarize, number 1: it is very important that you place your passage within its literary flow, within the context by asking whether you're dealing with a single verse or entire paragraph or text is asking how does it contribute to the flow of thought? How

does it relate to what comes before it? How does it flow into what comes after it? What role or function does it play? What would be missing if it were not there? Be able to explain what it's doing there. Until you've done that you have not understood the text yet, you are not prepared to move on in the process of interpretation. In fact I would say this is far more important than even doing word studies and some of the other detail work, as important as that is. Ultimately, I think you'll derive much benefit from being able to place the text within its broader context by asking what it's doing there.

But second what we said is: don't just bandy about the context, or say context demands this, or context requires this, or the context suggests, or I hold this view because of the context. You need to be able to isolate what in the context indicates that this is the way I should read the text. So pay careful attention to the broader context of the Old and New Testament text that you're dealing with whether it's a verse at the verse level or sentence level or paragraph or broader section. Be able to understand what it's doing there.

How the Old Testament is Used in the New Testament

Alright, I want to move on. In the next couple of sessions and discuss another important feature of biblical interpretation and that is: how New Testament authors utilize the Old Testament, that is how Old Testament texts are picked up by New Testament authors and how we understand that, how we analyze and explore what New Testament authors are doing when they utilize an Old Testament text. Most of us are aware of that because, you don't have to read very far into the New Testament. You can't even get past the first two chapters of Matthew without finding a series of Old Testament quotations and as you read through the rest of the New Testament. There are a few books that it's not as prominent, but over and over again you are confronted with quotations of the Old Testament. So clearly, New Testament authors are interested in how the Old Testament relates to their own writing into the new revelation that has now come through the person of Jesus Christ. So we want to take a little bit of time to explore how we handle the Old Testament usage by New Testament authors.

Promise (OT) and Fulfillment (NT)

The first thing to recognize is that the Old and New Testament stand together in their broader canonical context, that is, the Old and New Testament stand in relationship to each other as promise and fulfillment. In the New Testament we find over and over again the New Testament and it's authors drawing on the Old Testament for their vocabulary, for their concepts, for their structures, as to how they understand God's new unique revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. The New Testament authors understood this new revelation in continuity with the Old Testament and God's revelation through the Old Testament. So the Old and New Testament within our Christian Bibles stand in a canonical relationship, a relationship of promise to fulfillment.

So what that means is, we need to be aware of how the New Testament draws on the Old Testament texts and how it is seen as the fulfillment and climax of what was promised in the Old Testament, and how the new covenant revelation in the person of Jesus Christ is seen as the fulfillment of God's revelation under the old covenant scriptures. What we find is both Jesus himself in the Gospels, but the New Testament authors also, extensively drawing on the Old Testament. But again we're going to see that they do so in a variety of ways and that in order to understand the New Testament text and the meaning of New Testament text, it's necessary to understand the underlying Old Testament texts that now appear as sort of subtext in the New Testament. So another way of putting it is: the New Testament needs to be read in constant inter-textual relationship with the Old Testament. We're going to see that the Old Testament is utilized in a variety of ways. The New Testament authors don't use one single way or method the Old Testament text. We'll talk a little bit about the variety of ways that the Old Testament is used in the New Testament.

So I want to divide our discussion of the Old Testament in the New into two separate sections: number 1, we will spend a little bit of time discussing issues surrounding the use of the Old Testament in the New and what are the main questions that we should be asking and the main questions that have been raised. How should we go about studying the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament? What are the variety of ways that the Old Testament could be used by New Testament authors? How

does that affect the way we interpret New Testament text. And then the second, in the second session, we will actually work through some specific examples to illustrate how these principles of function and work and to illustrate the method for approaching the use of the Old Testament in New Testament.

How Should We Study the Old Testament in the New Testament?

So first of all, how should we go about studying the Old Testament in the New? What are the most important issues and the most important questions surrounding study the Old Testament in the New? It's interesting that although this has been important for some time, it's actually been in the last 20 and 30 years where Old Testament in the New Testament studies have really taken off and taken a hold. There are a number of works available in book form. There are all kinds of books that treat, in general, the Old Testament in the New, or treat specific books in the New Testament and how they've utilized the Old Testament. There are several books that discuss methodology and I want to draw on some of those in our discussion. But what are some of the issues involved? How should we go about studying the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament?

Preliminary Questions to Ask

First of all, to begin with just a handful of preliminary observations is that as New Testament study of the Old Testament as the New Testament begins to take off, a series of questions were usually seen as important and in some respects they still are and you will still see treatments of the Old Testament in the New Testament asking these questions. But kind of at the start some of the basic questions that were seen as important to ask any place in the New Testament that is utilizing Old Testament text is to ask a series of questions such as this: what text form does the New Testament author seem to be utilizing? Was the author primarily drawing on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament or was the author drawing on the Septuagint? The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. As Greek became the common language, obviously it became necessary to translate the Old Testament into to the common language of the day. So the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, appears to have been the Bible of many early Christians. Frequently in Paul's letters you'll see him quoting an Old

Testament texts that seems to be very close to or reflect the Septuagint, the LXX or the Greek translation of the Old Testament. So that in studies of the Old Testament in the New, students were often very interested in what text form was Paul, Matthew, Peter or John or whoever drawing upon. Were they apparently quoting from the Hebrew text that would resemble our Masoretic Text or was he drawing or quoting a text that resembled the Septuagint, the Greek translation? What difference did that make? Was there a difference in whether Paul quoted one or the other? Would it make a difference if he quoted the Septuagint or the Hebrew text? So that is one of the questions that scholars are interested in. That is, what was the text form that the New Testament author seems to be drawing on.

Second, does the author use the Old Testament with the awareness of the Old Testament context? In other words, when an author, a New Testament author, quotes an Old Testament text is he only focusing on that verse? Does he seem to be aware of the entire context? So, for example, if Paul quotes something from Isaiah chapter 42 and maybe verse 2 is he aware of the entire context of chapter 42 or even more broadly? Obviously Paul did not have chapters and verses in his Bible, I don't think, so I'm using chapters and verses for our benefit. But was Paul aware of the entire context surrounding that? Or are New Testament authors simply seizing on individual texts, and just kind of going through and pulling out snippets of text here and there just to prove their point?

An example might be in Matthew 1:23, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin will be with child." Is this just the author snatching a text out of the Old Testament without awareness of the broader context in which it occurs? Or is he aware of the context of Isaiah 7 and even more broadly than that?

So that's been a question scholars have asked: do New Testament authors use the Old Testament when they quote sections of the Old Testament whether just a verse or a few verses are they aware of the broader context in which that occurs? Or, are they just kind of using the Old Testament like a language arsenal? Do they just find passages in sections that seem to support what they say?

Third in relationship to that, if number two is true, if they do use text with

awareness of the old broader context the third issue has always been interesting: do New Testament authors respect that context? Do they use the passage consistently with the original meaning of that context? Or again, are they just violating the context in using or being aware of a context by using the verse in a way that violates or does something very different than what the verse meant in its original historical context. So do New Testament authors respect the context of the original meaning of the Old Testament passages they are quoting from or alluding to?

We'll stop there and in our next session we will pick up the question again of: what are we to make of the New Testament authors use of the Old Testament? What are some important issues and questions that have been raised and which we need to think about when we consider the New Testament uses the Old Testament? Then we'll move into consider some examples of how that works.

Transcribed by Tim Jordan
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 24

Old Testament in the New Testament

Categories of How the OT is in the NT: Quotation, Allusion, Echoes

A fourth issue or question that students studying the Old Testament usage in the New Testament have been interested in asking, is the use of rabbinic techniques. In an earlier session, again, we talked about some of the ways that early rabbinic literature interpreted the Old Testament using techniques such as midrash pesher, that is, to take a text and then to unpack and explain it. Sometimes using the language, "this is that." This is what was spoken in an Old Testament text, seeing the Old Testament fulfilled in their own day or arguing from the lesser to the greater, or connecting texts based on similar wording etc. So, many have asked the question whether New Testament authors are simply following the standard principals of interpretation and interpretive techniques of their day. And if so, what distinguishes the way a New Testament author utilizes the Old Testament as opposed to the way rabbinic interpreters treated the Old Testament as well. And then finally, one question that students have raised is: can we treat the Old Testament in the same way? Are we permitted to treat the Old Testament in the same way that we find New Testament authors treating it?

These are important questions, but other questions have also been raised more recently about how we understand the use of the Old Testament in the New. One of the issues has been how we classify or categorize usages of the Old Testament in the New. Generally, students of the New Testament have isolator classified three possible usages. One is what is known as direct quotation, that is where an author explicitly signals his use of an Old Testament text, that is, he explicitly indicates that he wants his readers to pay attention to an Old Testament text. Usually the direct quotation is indicated by using a quotation formula, something like, "just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet," or "this took place to fulfill what was spoken of in Isaiah," or "just as it is written," some formula

that indicates the author's intention to quote from or to point the reader to an Old Testament text. Then usually what you find is a quotation of the Old Testament text that is kept in tact usually.

Second is the category of allusion. Some New Testament students have drawn attention to allusions that is, in distinction to number one, where the quotation is explicit being introduced by a formula, it's usually kept in tacked in the New Testament text itself. In an allusion, the author does not signal his intent to point you to an Old Testament text, but instead he usually takes the wording and the structure and the concepts and weaves them into his own discourse. So that it's still rather clear that an Old Testament text, especially if one has the requisite knowledge of the Old Testament. It is clear that the Old Testament text is being referred to, but the author does not explicitly signal that with a quotation formula such as "just as it is written," and the author instead usually weaves the language into his own discourse. That is known as an allusion. Although a little more difficult to identify than a quotation, still the similar structure or the similar vocabulary, similar corresponding meaning suggests that the author intends to point the reader to a prior Old Testament text.

For example, a good example of an allusion is Ephesians 1:20-22. In Ephesians chapter 1:20-22, we find Paul not explicitly quoting from an Old Testament text, but we do find language in this text that is clearly evocative of Old Testament texts. So here's how he describes Christ. He says referring to God's power that worked in Christ in verse 20 which God exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him on the right hand in the heavenly realms. That language of seating him at the right hand recalls the vocabulary language of Psalm 110. Then he goes on to say that he's been seen above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every title that has ever been given not only in the present age but in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet, which reflects vocabulary in Psalm chapter 8. So without quoting the Old Testament, by taking its language and even its structure and weaving it in his own discourse, the author by way of allusion tends to point us back to key Old Testament texts to understand the person of Jesus Christ in Ephesians chapter 1.

A final and third category is what is often labeled as an echo. Some would say an echo is a more subtle reflection of the Old Testament that may not even be intended by the author. Sometimes it is only a word or two, but the idea is it echoes in the mind. It's not as clear as an allusion. One could see these three as kind of on a scale from the more explicit to the more subtle. The more explicit being the quotation, the more subtle usage as being echoes. Again, often they're almost a whisper of an Old Testament text and some would say it's not clear that the New Testament author is intending to refer to this Old Testament text. To give one example that some others are pointed to and drawing attention to, in Philippians 1:19 the apostle Paul is describing his circumstances in prison. This document is often known as a Prison Epistle. But describing his circumstances in prison in chapter 1 verse 19, Paul says this: "Yes, I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the spirit of Jesus Christ, that what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."

It's interesting that phrase "will turn out for my deliverance" appears to be almost word for word as it is found in Job chapter 13 and verse 16. So there's been a lot of discussion as to whether Paul intended this allusion, or this echo of Job chapter 13 because he doesn't appear to be interested in Job anywhere else and doesn't appear to specifically reflect Old Testament texts in Philippians chapter 1. So some have wondered, was this reference that the author intended to quote Job or is this more of an echo, a subtle usage that the author may not have intended and should we even make a big deal out of this in interpreting the text?

Along with identifying these three usages, quotation, allusion and echo, when it comes to allusions and echoes in particular, students have been interested in asking, "how do we know if there's an allusion or an echo?" And usually, the question is answered by saying "did the author intend it?" And so, students have also constructed criteria for determining whether the author has actually alluded to an Old Testament text.

For example, is there similar wording in the text? Does the author of the New Testament, when he appears to be alluding to Old Testament texts, is the wording similar enough between the New and Old Testament to justify an allusion? Is there similar

structure between the Old and New Testament texts? Does the author refer to the text elsewhere? If one proposes or thinks that the author might be alluding to something from Isaiah that can certainly be buttressed and justified. Further, if one could demonstrate that the author appears to have been aware of Isaiah or using Isaiah elsewhere in his book. Have others noted a similar reference? Have other New Testament commentaries also noticed a similar Old Testament or the same Old Testament reference? That is, have others also heard an allusion or recognized and allusion? Obviously this last criteria doesn't allow for new insight for discovering allusions that no one else did, but students have been interested in terms of how to figure out how do we justify it? Quotations are a little easier, but when the author does not begin with a formula, "just as it was written" or "this took place to fulfill what was spoken by Jeremiah" or something like that, how do we justify it? Well, again things like similar vocabulary, similar structure, similar meaning. Does the author refer to the text elsewhere, or seem to quote it or allude to it elsewhere? Those are the kind of things that have been pointed to.

Establishing Levels of Certainty

At the same time, in addition to these criteria, these criteria are usually used to establish the level of confidence that the New Testament student can come up with or the level of confidence that they can achieve, that they have actually identified an Old Testament allusion. So sometimes you'll see New Testament students talking about whether an allusion is certain, and again this is not so much with quotations, the author clearly signals quotations. But whether an allusion is certain, that is, if there's enough similarity of wording and structure and function and there's evidence that the author has used other Old Testament texts, especially other texts from the same book, then some students say we can be certain that the author intended an Old Testament allusion.

The next category would be probable. That is, we can't arrive at a level of certainty but there's a high level of probability that the author is indeed intending to refer back to the Old Testament texts without the author present to tell us, obviously we can only suggest probability. The third category is possible; some have said some allusions should be put in the category of possible. We can't really be certain, nor can we establish

a high level of probability it's only a possibility that the author really intended this. And then finally there are allusions or echoes that are unlikely. That is some proposals for Old Testament references are really unlikely, there's just not enough there in either context to justify seeing an Old Testament allusion. So usually these categories mainly appeal to the level of confidence that we can achieve as to whether we have isolated genuine allusion or echo or something.

Inter-textuality

To add one more comment, recently studies have also been interested in the kind of recent phenomenon of inter- textuality, and how that affects the way that we read the Old Testament in the New. Just two foci in that regard, number one is the focus in inter-textuality and the focus on inter-textual studies is not so much on the author. Most of the issues I've just raised have been focused mainly on authors attempt and historical background, whether the author is intending to point us to New Testament texts. Inter-textuality does not restrict the connections to the Old Testament to only what the author intended. But instead, whether the proposals Old Testament allusion is productive and makes for an insightful or valid reading, or adds fresh insight to the text and makes sense in the context. So the focus isn't on the author and what the author intends, the focus is primarily on the reader identifying a possible correspondence and whether that produces a productive reading of the text.

A second feature of inter-textuality is that of dialog. That is by the New Testament texts appearing to allude to an Old Testament text, a relationship is set up in which the interpreter is invited to explore a series of correspondences between the two texts, and to ask what difference does it make to read the New Testament texts in light of the Old Testament texts. What meaning does the Old Testament texts carry over in the New texts? And how do the New Testament texts transform the Old Testament texts? And so the goal is to explore possible interactions between the Old and New Testaments in dialogue with each other, and to ask what that does.

Analyzing the Old Testament in the New Testament

So how do we go about in studying the use of the Old Testament in the New, analyzing the use of Old Testament texts by New Testament authors? Let me just very briefly make some suggestions based on our previous discussion and then we'll move on to consider some explicit examples. First of all, I would suggest that one of the more helpful tools is to survey commentaries and other works who draw attention to allusions. Not in usages of the Old Testament, not that that is the final say but at least it helps us to understand and see what other interpreters of the Old Testament texts have seen and drawn attention to. That should be qualified though, the more I do that it appears that sometimes commentaries simply repeat and rely on what other commentaries before them have said. They may not have done their own work, they may just be assuming what others have said. But a good place to start is with commentaries and tools that will help point your attention to possible Old Testament allusions. Quotations are more easy to identify, but allusions, even echoes, or subtle uses of the Old Testament you'll find more help sometimes in commentaries.

But further than that, I would say second, simply be aware of and listen to the New Testament text. Have your ears open to hear possible correspondents between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This assumes a knowledge of the Old Testament. The more you know the Old Testament, the more you are aware of the Old Testament texts and their contexts, the better position you will be to hear resonances in the New Testament text.

Third, identify the type of reference as much as possible whether it's a quotation, whether you're dealing with an allusion, or whether more subtly you're dealing with an echo.

Fourth, consider the form of the text. I think it is valid to ask "is the author drawing primarily in the Septuagint, or is the form of the Old Testament text mainly the Hebrew text, and does there seem to be a difference? Does that seem to make a difference of how you see the Old Testament in the New?"

Next, what is the meaning of the Old Testament text in its original context and setting, historically and literally? What appears to be the original meaning of the intention

of the Old Testament text? The next one is: how the Old Testament text was interpreted in early Judaism by early Jewish and Rabbinic interpreters? Ask, for example, in the Dead Sea scrolls, other rabbinic literature, even the pseudepigrapha and apocalyptic literature, and here you have to rely on commentaries and other specialized works on the use of the Old Testament in the New ask: how was this Old Testament text apparently interpreted and utilized in early Jewish and Rabbinic interpretation?

The next is to consider how the New Testament author has utilized the Old Testament texts. How does it function in its New Testament context? What meaning does the Old Testament text bring into the New Testament? That is, I like to ask the question, what meaning would be missing in the New Testament text if I did not read it in light of its Old Testament subtext that the author appears to be drawing on? How has the author utilized it? Again, does it appear to be a straight forward prediction-fulfillment, or is it more of a typical/analogical, or utilized perhaps by way of illustration or something like that? How does the author seem to be using the Old Testament text? What is the functioning of its context? Further explore the insights of inter-textuality understanding the concept of dialogue, explore possible interactions between the two texts.

This may be an example of a phenomenon that we talked about with the author's intent, when you begin even to find or discover more subtle uses of the New Testament. Even when you start comparing Old and New Testament contexts and see connections, sometimes it's very difficult to know whether the author intended any of those or not. Sometimes it may simply be an issue of the type of thing we talked about with the author's intent. Is it the kind of thing where, if the author were present regarding this Old Testament text the author might say, "no I wasn't but now that you identified that or now that you raise that issue, that certainty makes sense and I would accept that as a valid insight into my work." Or again the author may intend to allude back to a Old Testament text, but as you explore it you may see certain connections that again, if you were to ask the author, the author might say "no, I did not intend those connections, but now that you observe those, that makes sense and I would accept that as valid insight into my text."

So, I would agree that although I still think that we have to ask the question of what the author might have intended, as far as alluding to Old Testament texts, that probably we can't restrict ourselves to that. That has to be our starting point, but we might find subtle allusions or connections between texts, that we can't be confident that the author intended but still make sense in the texts and are valid. Given what we know about the author, and given what we know about the Old and New Testament texts and their contexts, that may be a valid understanding of the reading of the texts. So, another question is to ask whether the New Testament authors seem to use an Old Testament text consistent with or similar to the way it was used in Rabbinic Judaism and in early Jewish interpretations.

But then again, ultimately I think the sixth question to ask or the sixth principal is to explain how an understanding ultimately of how the Old Testament text makes a difference in the way you interpret the New Testament text. So again, it's not enough just to recognize possible connections and allusions and echoes and quotations, but ultimately one wants to ask, what difference does this actually make in interpreting the New Testament texts?

So those are just kind of a collection of issues or questions that I think are valid and important to raise in understanding the New Testament use of the Old. Again the Old Testament is significant because New Testament writers, as they conceptualize how Christ brought fulfillment, they utilized examples from Old Testament. They utilized Old Testament texts and understood how ultimately the Old Testament was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. As I said, there are a number of works to help you in the form of commentaries. One recent compendium of research of the Old Testament research as to the New is a book edited by Don Carson and Greg Beale, called *A commentary on the Old Testament use in the New Testament*. It is a series of essays that covers each book of the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, and discusses works from chapter to chapter and discusses quotations but also allusions and sometimes echoes to Old Testament texts and how theologically and Hermeneutically that makes a difference in the way one interprets a New Testament text or that passage that is being dealt with.

Examples of the Old Testament in the New Testament

So, what I want to do now is examine a couple of New Testament passages that clearly utilize the Old Testament in their own composition. My focus is primarily going to be on allusion, though I'll deal with a couple of quotations. But I primarily want to focus on allusions or echoes, as examples of the use of the Old Testament. The texts will be taken up and its wording and structure that were woven into the composition where the author does not necessarily signal his use of an Old Testament by a quotation formula. I want to look at an example from the Gospels, and then we'll look at a couple of examples from the Epistles, both Paul and those that are known as the General Epistles. We'll look at an example from Hebrews and then look at a couple of examples from the book of Revelation that probably more extensively than any other book that alludes to the Old Testament, although it never signals it by a quotation formula. Another reason I've done this too, is in the past most studies of the Old Testament in the New have focused primarily on direct quotations where the author signals his intent to point to an Old Testament text with a quotation formula. But recently in the last 20 years or so, there has been more of a resurgence of drawing attention to allusions and echoes, which are more subtle usages of the Old Testament.

OT in the NT: Gospels--Matthew 2

Let me start with the Gospels, and I want to turn back to Matthew Chapter 2. We've already noted that in Matthew chapter 2, the author quotes extensively from the Old Testament. This functions to explain the movement of Jesus in his early childhood. You find the Old Testament used to justify the different geographical movements of Jesus, in chapter 2 starting with the fact that he's born in Bethlehem. Then when he goes to Egypt and back, you find Old Testament quotes in Matthew used to explain the geographical movements of Jesus and to justify the early childhood of Jesus, to show that early events were nothing less than a fulfillment of Old Testament texts.

One of those that we looked at, in chapter 2 in verse 5, were the author quotes or has the Jewish leaders quote from Micah chapter 5 verse 2, that is, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. This appears to be as close as anything for a rather straight

forward prediction-fulfillment. But another text that we raised in chapter 2 verse 15 of Matthew, the author quotes from Hosea chapter 11 verse one: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" when which you go back to Hosea chapter 11 verse 1 doesn't appear to be a prophecy at all of the life of Jesus Christ. In fact, it simply seems to be just a historical report of how God preserved and dealt with his people and how he loved his people Israel. So chapter 11 and verse 1 of Hosea seems to be a reference to the nation of Israel, and there's really no hint in that verse that this is a prophecy of a coming Messiah or anything like that.

This raises the question, why does Matthew use it here in chapter 2 in verse 15 of Matthew? Why does he use Hosea 11:1 to refer to an early event in the life of Jesus Christ? Most likely, it is because Matthew is using it more typologically or analogically, that is, he sees an event in the old covenant where God deals with his people and preserves and loves his people now being repeated in a greater way in light of fulfillment in Christ. So Matthew doesn't seem to be claiming that Hosea 11:1 was actually a prediction, or there's a second level of meaning or that there's a prediction in there of a coming Messiah that now Matthew has discovered. Instead, Matthew seems to be saying that God's preserving his son, his greater son Jesus Christ in Egypt in Matthew chapter 2. Jesus seems to fill up or repeat a pattern that is established in the Old Testament when God preserved and kept his greater son or his son which is the nation of Israel.

Furthermore, when you read Matthew carefully it becomes clear that Jesus is seen as recapitulating and actually fulfilling the true destiny of the nation of Israel. Israel was God's son in the Old Testament, but now Jesus Christ as God's greater son, recapitulates the story of Israel but now brings it to conclusion. He fulfills and accomplishes what Israel failed to do. So, because of that assumption, the author can take an Old Testament text, as referred to Israel, God's son, and now apply it to his son Jesus Christ to show that in the same way that God preserved the son in the Old Testament, in the age of fulfillment God once again is acting to preserve his son, the new Israel, and the fulfillment of Israel's destiny which is the person of Jesus Christ.

But beyond that, to draw your attention to more subtle or allusive uses of the Old Testament, I'm convinced virtually everything going on in Matthew chapter 2, especially the early verses, has an underlying Old Testament story or subtext going on. So for example just to highlight, to start with the easiest one, when you read this story about a baby who was born and who's life was threatened by an oppressive, evil king who wants to kill him, who makes on order to kill all the baby boys in the kingdom, and then the baby boy is preserved and kept in Egypt, and even the mentions Egypt, what does that recall? It doesn't take a whole lot of reflection to recall the original Exodus story where Moses, Israel's deliverer, is born as a baby and the Pharaoh tries to kill him and issues an order for all the baby boys to be put to death; yet this one is preserved. This one is preserved in Egypt, and so it's difficult not to see the correspondences so that, I think Matthew intentionally is crafting this story, though it is historical and I take it as a reflection of what actually happened, Matthew is simply making clear the correspondences of that story to the original Exodus. To demonstrate that now, once again, God is raising up a deliverer in a new Exodus to rescue and deliver his people.

In fact, in verse 20, remember when Jesus goes to Egypt because Herod's trying to kill him, after Herod dies an angel appears to Joseph in verse 20 of chapter 2 of Matthew and says, "those who are seeking his life are dead." Interestingly, that is almost verbatim of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Exodus chapter 4 verse 19, those who are seeking Moses' life to kill him. Now they're dead, so Moses doesn't have to fear for his life. So again, Jesus is being portrayed as a new Moses, who as Moses in the Old Testament, was their savior, deliverer and rescuer of his people. Once again God in a new Exodus is raising up Jesus as the deliverer and savior of his people.

Just very quickly to mention, the notion of the star over Bethlehem in association with a Messianic king, a Davidic king, probably recalls Balaam's oracle in Numbers chapter 24 and verse 17. It says that a star will rise, even though Matthew doesn't quote that text, he seems to be alluding to it and weaving it into his own story.

Another interesting part of the story is the account of the Magi, the so-called "wise men." "Wise men" probably is not as good a term as magi. In other words, these are

foreign astrologers most likely who come to visit Jesus in Matthew chapter 2. What is intriguing about this is to ask, what might be significant about Matthew having the magi coming to visit Jesus? We saw that in contrast to Luke, who has shepherds come now Matthew has these magi, these astrologers, now coming to visit Jesus and they give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What is the significance of that? In my opinion, Matthew is still working with Old Testament texts. That is the Old Testament still forms kind of the underlying subtext that is informing Matthew's own story. The text I want to draw your attention to is Isaiah chapter 60. Isaiah chapter 60 is part of Isaiah's vision or prophecy of future restoration of Israel and God's people. Remember, they have been carted off into exile. God will restore his people God will restore the people to their city, to their land. Chapter 60 of Isaiah is an anticipation or prophecy of that. As I read it I want you to keep your ears open to possible echoes or resonances with the Matthew text.

So Isaiah chapter 60, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you." Sounds like the rising star shining over Bethlehem, indicating the arrival of the Messianic king. "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you." Verse 3, "nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." This reflects the magi coming to the star, the light of the star, to Bethlehem. "Lift up your eyes and look about you; all assemble and come to you; your sons will come from afar, your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth of the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah."

Let me skip down a little bit. Verse 8, "Who are those that fly along the clouds, like doves to their nests? Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish." All these are images of the glory that will surround the restoration of Israel. Verse 10, "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the

nations , their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. Now the glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and cypress together, to adorn the place of the sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet."

One other text I wanted to read. Kind of skipping ahead to verse 16, "You will drink the milk of the nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer and Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze, I will bring gold and silver in place of iron…" So notice this imagery of the kings and nations bringing wealth to Jerusalem as it is restored. In my opinion, Matthew is picking up that story from Isaiah chapter 60 that he is clearly alluding to Isaiah 60 by having four dignitaries bring their wealth, gold and frankincense and myrrh. By bringing that wealth to Bethlehem as they come and visit the Messianic king, the deliverer, it's as if Matthew is saying that Isaiah's promise of restoration, the restoration of God's people, the coming age of salvation, the coming kingdom of God, the new creation, has already been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. That is demonstrated by foreign dignitaries; these wise men bringing their wealth to worship Jesus in response to a light, the rising light of the rising star.

So without quoting Isaiah chapter 60, I think Matthew has clearly indicated his intent to allude to other Old Testament texts such as Isaiah 60 to demonstrate how they are now being fulfilled in the coming of the person of Jesus Christ. So Isaiah 60, as well as the whole Exodus motif are important subtexts for Matthew's own story of Jesus, as he weaves a number of texts together to demonstrate how Jesus, his life, especially his early childhood in chapter 2, brings to fulfillment and brings to a climax a number of these texts.

OT in the NT: Epistles—Gal. 1

To move on to some examples of epistolary literature, especially Paul's letters, I'll give one very brief example in Galatians chapter 1 then look at a slightly more extensive example in Ephesians chapter 2.

Galatians chapter 1 and verse 15, we've already looked at this text in relationship to its literary context and how in chapters 1 and 2, Paul is arguing that his apostleship and the gospel that he preaches is not something that comes through human appointment or human teaching, but is solely dependent on a revelation through Jesus Christ. One of the things Paul says in that context in chapter 1 verse 15 is: "but when God who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me." Now the question is, why would he mention being set apart at birth? That seems to be an interesting thing to say here. Why didn't he just say, "God called me, God appointed me to be an apostle"? Why does he mention that he was set apart at birth? Is this simply Paul's pro-life perspective coming out? Is Paul simply emphasizing the dignity of human life, even at conception, that therefore this is an important text for supporting anti-abortion or pro-life? I certainly don't want to deny this text could have a bearing on that. But the significance of this passage, I think, is not so much Paul's judgment on when human life begins, but instead this statement is actually one that Paul finds in the Old Testament.

I want to just look briefly at two texts that Paul may have been thinking of. Chapter 1 and verse 5 of Jeremiah is the first one. In Jeremiah chapter 1 verse 5, at the very beginning of the book, Jeremiah is establishing his credentials as a prophet and discussing his call as a prophet which will justify and provide justification and authenticity for what he is about to say in the rest of the book. In verse 5 he says, I'll back it up to verse 4, "The word of the Lord came to me, Jeremiah, saying 'before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."' Another interesting text to back up a book is in Isaiah chapter 49 verse 1. We see similar language in reference to the servant. Several of these chapters, the most well known one being chapter 53 in Isaiah, are addressing the servant. Chapter 49 verse 1, "listen to me, you islands. Hear me, you distant nations, before I was born the Lord called me. From my birth, he has made mention of my name." Especially in light of the verse 5 text, this language in Galatians 1:15, is primarily an Old Testament allusion,

meant to portray Paul as conceiving of his own commission in line with the Old Testament prophets.

But Paul sees his apostolic calling as having the same authority as an Old Testament prophet. In trying to argue his case here; that his apostolic commission and his gospel did not come about by human beings he alludes to an Old Testament concept of a call narrative. We've found in Isaiah 49, this idea of God setting him apart at birth, or setting him apart while he was still in the womb it is the language of prophetic commission so that Paul conceives of himself in line with Old Testament prophets, or in light of Isaiah 49 perhaps, and the functioning of the servant himself. So this is one part of Paul's argument I think that would be missed if we were not aware of the Old Testament background. Paul appears, not through a direct quotation, but by alluding to an Old Testament text to establish.

OT in the NT: Eph. 2 and Circumcision

Another example of slightly more extensive is how Paul appeals to Old Testament texts through allusion, through weaving its wording and structures into his own discourse. It is found in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 through 22. I'll just read part of this, because again, it is important to hear what's going on in order to open our ears to hear resonances with Old Testament texts. So in chapter 2, starting with verse11: "Therefore, remember that formerly, you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who are 'the circumcision.'" Immediately, we notice an Old Testament allusion, not to a specific text, but to the notion of circumcision, which is a very important feature of the covenant back in the Old Testament.

So the idea of circumcision already evokes an Old Testament idea and concept, if not a specific text. Then he goes on and says, "remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from the citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise." There's another term, "covenant." Notice it's plural as well. It probably clearly recalls the major covenant made between God and Abraham.

God and David, the Mosaic covenant, so again by just the word "covenant" the author evokes an entire section of Israel's history and the covenant that God made with

them. "Without hope, and without God in this world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law." This is a clearer allusion back to the Mosaic law with its commandments and regulations. "His purpose was to create in himself one new man, [one new humanity] out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross." Skip down to verse 17, "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have the access," another Old Testament term of "access" in the temple, "access to the father by one Spirit."

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." I'll stop there. But let me draw attention to a couple of other things besides circumcision and the law and covenants is clear and refers back to Old Testament concepts, if not specific texts. But, for example, notice the repeated reference to preaching peace to those who are far and those who are near. That language, in Paul, "those who are far off" seem to be Gentiles who are now included within the new people of God. But this language of peace, Christ being our peace, preaching peace to those who are far and those who are near, evokes language from the prophet Isaiah.

For example, in Isaiah chapter 52 and verse 7, a text that many of us have heard, notice in 52 verse 7 the author says, "How beautiful on mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaims peace. Who bring good tidings and proclaim salvation." But even more significant is chapter 57 and verse 19 of Isaiah. He says, "creating peace on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace to those far and those near." Now Paul picks up this language of "preaching peace," or "peace to those far and those near," and weaves this into his own context. But furthermore, notice this reference to creating one new humanity. This probably reflects the new creation language found throughout the book of Isaiah. Especially in 43 verse 19, we find God creating new

things. It is in Isaiah chapter 62 verse 2 as well, and chapter 65 and verse 17 would be another one where the author indicates a new creation, "I will create a new heaven and a new earth."

So you have this new creation language in chapter 62 and verse 2, "the nations will see your righteousness and all will praise your glory, and you will be called by a new name." So this language of newness and new creation are probably now reflected in Paul's creation of a new humanity. The idea of foreigners being excluded, Isaiah chapter 56 and the first part of verse 3 refers to the exclusion of foreigners or the inclusion of foreigners in Isaiah chapter 56 and verse 3. Again all of this is in the context of Israel's restoration and their future act of God's restoration. He says in 56:3, "Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord's say, 'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.'" So Isaiah 56 anticipates that at the time of restoration, even foreigners will not be excluded. So now Paul indicates a time for those who were formally foreigners and aliens, who are now included in the people of God.

Even the reference to Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone in verse 20 is a reflection of Isaiah chapter 28 and verse 16, the founding one of the chief cornerstone of the restoration of Jerusalem. Furthermore, is it also possible having heard all of these resonances from Isaiah in all of these illusions and echoes, is it possible that the reference in verse 20 to the foundation of this household being the apostles and prophets, might be an allusion to Isaiah 54? In verses 11 and 12, I believe, or 11 and 13, the restoration of Jerusalem is seen in terms of foundation of the different building blocks and stones, where the foundation has been identified as a very precious stone. We saw earlier, interestingly, the Qumran community interpreted this section of Isaiah 54, as referring to foundational Qumran community.

Is it possible that with all these other allusions to Isaiah that maybe Paul is alluding to Isaiah 54 and the restoration of Jerusalem with its foundations? Now he sees this being fulfilled in the establishment of God's household and church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So, Isaiah's program of restoration, then; the new creation, and the restoration of God's people, includes Gentiles. Now this is fulfilled

in the death of Jesus Christ and the creating of a new humanity, and a new people of God consisting of Jew and Gentile, the church. The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile hostility is removed, and there is peace and reconciliation. All of this Paul conceives as nothing less than the fulfillment of what Isaiah was already prophesying. The promise restoration is now being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in creating this one new humanity.

So once again, by reading a New Testament text in light of the possible Old Testament background, the possible Old Testament subtext in the case of Ephesians in chapter 2, although Paul never quotes from the book of Isaiah, he seems to take up its language, its images, its structures and weaves them into his own discourse to demonstrate how the death of Jesus Christ and the new humanity, the people of God, the church made of Jew and Gentile, is the fulfillment and the climax of the restoration that Isaiah anticipated throughout the chapters of his prophecy.

Hebrews 6 and the OT

A final text in the letters that epistolary sections of the New Testament that I want to talk about briefly, is Hebrews chapter 6:4-6. And I'll read that again because one needs to hear the New Testament text in order to be able to hear the resonances with the Old Testament. And likewise you need to hear and be aware of the New Testament text to hear echoes and resonances in the New Testament text that one reads. But Hebrews chapter 6:4-6 is actually probably a more well known of a series of five rather severe warnings that occur throughout the book of Hebrews. We find one in chapter 2, in chapters 3 and 4 and in chapter 6, then there's a couple more in 10 and 12. But sprinkled throughout the book of Hebrews are these rather severe warnings and I don't want to discuss in a lot of detail why the author does that, it's basically related to the situation that he's addressing.

But we find these series of warnings and perhaps the most well known warning is found in Hebrews chapter 6:4-6. So I want to read it and then we will kind of introduce it and then we will begin to explore how might the Old Testament background help us to understand this text? Because as we read it, it will be clear that the author does not quote from the Old Testament and in fact there have been very few who have acknowledged or

found in it the Old Testament references in this passage. So there's a lot to explore. Does this text seem to reflect Old Testament passages? How might that make a difference in the meaning of this text and the way we read it? Hebrews chapter 6:4-6 is the third one of warning passages where the author basically warns readers "don't turn back from the gospel, don't turn your backs on the new covenant salvation that Jesus Christ has brought. But embrace Him in faith no matter what the consequences."

So he is trying to get the readers not to walk away from Christ or the gospel. They have apparently believed in him and are presented with "don't turn your backs, and go back to Judaism. But embrace Jesus Christ in faith no matter what the consequences." Here's the warning in chapter 6:4-6, "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they then fall away, [or better, who then fall away], it's impossible for them to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

What I want to focus on in the next session, are the list of descriptions of that are being depicted. That is, these persons are being described in 4 through 6 as tasting the heavenly gift, they've shared in the Holy Spirit, they've tasted the powers of God's word, they've tasted the powers of the coming age and then they have fallen away. Those are the parts or elements of these texts that I want to focus on, and ask how the Old Testament might help us to understand that. So in the next session, we'll try to explore the Old Testament's possible background in this description of Hebrews 6:4-6.

Transcribed by Jessica Safford
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 25

Old Testament in the New Testament

Hebrews 6 and OT Backgrounds

In talking about Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Old Testament background I also want to make it clear that I'm not interested at this point in solving the whole Calvinist/Arminian debate and how this text is approached though I think the Old Testament background can help provide some avenues for raising those questions and answering them in fresh ways but that's not my main purpose. My main purpose is to demonstrate the possibilities of an Old Testament background for these phrases that we have read in verses 4-6 of Hebrews 6 and how that might make a difference in the way we read the text.

Now, when you read Hebrews chapter 6 two important points to begin with before exploring the Old Testament background is one that we have already mentioned and that is Hebrews 6 is simply one of a series of learning passages throughout the book of Hebrews where the author tries to convince in a very compelling way his readers not to turn their backs on Christ and the gospel, the new covenant of salvation that has been brought with Christ and to go back to Judaism but instead to press on and embrace Christ in faith no matter what consequences that might bring. In chapter 2:1-4 that is the first warning passage and there is another one in chapters 3 & 4 then chapter 6 and then a couple more later on.

But to the second observation number two is one facet of these warning passages at least the first two and the last two is that the author appears to compare his readers to the Old Testament people of Israel. This is especially true of the Old Testament people of Israel during the time where they were led out of Egypt and wandered through the wilderness and the desert to the promise land. If you remember the story goes when they get to the promised land the very land that God promised them all the way back to Abraham. Now God's fulfilling his promise they come up to the land and at Kadesh

Barnea they send twelve spies in ten of them come back and give a bad report. Israel refuses and rebels. They don't go into the land though God commanded them to and promised that he would give them the land. They refused to believe and they rebel and they don't go in. That story, much of that story, lies behind all the warning passages in chapter two and also the one in chapter three and four. In chapter ten and twelve you find references to Israel's story especially during that period of time as they trek through the wilderness to Sinai to receive the law and onto the promised land where they rebel and don't go in. The question is whether the example or the warning passages in chapter 6 likewise use an Old Testament example. I would suggest that it does. In fact, I would suggest that this story of Israel leaving Egypt and making their trek to the promise land through the desert up to the promise land and their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea forms the background for all of these statements in Hebrews 6:4-6. All of these allude to the Old Testament, although they're describing the modern day readers of Hebrews. He is alluding to and couching those terms and descriptions of the readers of Hebrews in terms of the descriptions of what the people of God experienced as they made their journey through the desert up to the promised land.

So, for example, the fact that they are described, we'll take these in order, as enlightened for those who have once been enlightened elsewhere I think the author makes it clear this refers to receiving the truth receiving knowledge of the truth of the gospel. But this language of being enlightened probably reflects and again if you've had your ears opened to the Old Testament subtext this probably reflects the pillar of light that guided the Israelites that's referred to several times. I'm appealing not only to the original Exodus story in the text from Exodus but subsequent descriptions and records in the Psalms and Jeremiah chapter 9 you often find rehearsals of how God has dealt with his people in a rehearsal of the history of Israel and how God had dealt with them. Many of them rehearse and describe important events surrounding the original Exodus in leading the Israelites to the desert up to the promise land. So based on all these descriptions probably when the author refers to being enlightened it's an allusion to the pillar of light that guided Israel in the desert. When he says, "they have also tasted the

heavenly gift" I think that's a little bit easier and probably reflects the giving of manna. Manna that falls from heaven is again in the Psalms and other texts that rehearse the history of Israel. In Exodus it is described as a gift from God and is described as something that comes from heaven. So tasting the heavenly gift corresponds to the Israelites tasting the manna that comes from heaven as a gift of God.

Now the next one might call this theory into question by the fact that they have shared the Holy Spirit but what is interesting is that you do have a couple of references to the Holy Spirit causing some of them to prophesy. One chapter that is an interesting passage is Isaiah chapter 63. Isaiah chapter 63:10 seems to be referring to or rehearsing God's mighty acts on behalf of the people of Israel. In 63:10, it is very interesting. Let me back up and just read a couple of verses, "He said, surely they are my people [God is referring to Israel], "sons who will not be false to me and so he became their Savior. In their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them." That is a reference to the Exodus. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old," which probably refers to taking them through the desert. "Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit." So apparently the Israelites rebellion and refusal to maintain their covenant relationship with God are depicted in Isaiah 63 as grieving Spirit that God had given them. So, even the reference to the Holy Spirit reflects their experience of the Israelites in the desert. Their experience with the Holy Spirit, the fact that they tasted of the Lord God reflects descriptions of Joshua the law giving the law on Sinai.

"The powers of the age to come" is interesting in that in the Old Testament text the miraculous side even what Mosses did in front of Pharaoh and the magicians and later on parting the Red Sea and other miraculous provisions in the desert are often called "signs" or are often called "powers and wonders." So that once again the experience of the people that the author of Hebrews is addressing is now seen as an analogous experience of the Israelites who also experience various powers and miracles and wonders. Yet they have fallen away it says in Hebrews 6. Yet they fall away which

probably would then reflect the rebellion or falling away at Kadesh Barnea when they refused to go into the land of promise that God had commanded them to take.

One very interesting text to note some of these correspondences is intriguingly I think to the book of Nehemiah and chapter 9 is a rehearsal and again there are other texts we can point to a couple in the Psalms. But in Nehemiah chapter 9 we find one of those rehearsals of God dealing with his people Israel and especially in verses 9 and 10. Actually he begins in the beginning he starts with God's appearance to Abraham, but starting with verse 9 of Nehemiah again Nehemiah is rehearsing the might acts of God, "You saw the suffering of your forefathers in Egypt; you heard the cry at the Red Sea. You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all of his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled the pursuers into the depths, like a stone into the mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire [to enlighten or] to give them light on the way they were to take." So I'll stop there. This is followed by the giving of the law et cetera.

So there are other accounts similar to this that use the language that you find in Hebrews 6:4-6. So that I would propose that what the author is doing is trying to explain the situation of his readers to highlight that in spite of the situation of the Old Testament, God was demonstrating the point is seems to be a textual relationship between the two. What the author wants to do is bring his readers not to do the same thing that their ancestors did. Their ancestors also experienced all these things such as the heavenly gift, the provisions of God and enlightenment to guide their path. They tasted the good word of God. While they experienced all these powers and miracles they shared and participated in the Holy Spirit, yet they still rebelled and refused to believe and they suffered the consequences. The author of Hebrews is saying new covenant readers who now have been confronted with Jesus Christ they have also experienced all these things, enlightenment through the Gospel, the heavenly gift, all these miraculous powers and tasting the good word of God and participating in experiencing the Holy Spirit. Now they

are likewise in danger of committing the same mistake as their ancestors once did. So the author is warning them don't commit the same mistake, but instead, embrace Christ and follow him in obedience no matter what the cost.

So in my opinion Hebrews 6:4-6 I think it takes on and can be seen in a fresh light when one in the light of the Old Testament again this might not be completely compelling the fact that the author had utilized the Old Testament example in the passage. Second, the fact that the Israelites of the wilderness generation and those who left Egypt made the trek through the wilderness up to the promise land refused to go in play a crucial role in Hebrews suggesting to me the validity of reading chapters 6:4-6 in light of those events as well that again the author is drawing a comparison perhaps typologically between his New Testament readers and the Old Testament people of God warning them not to recapitulate their experience.

Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament

The last text I want to consider is a series of passages or a couple of passages from the book of Revelation mainly looking at the last two chapters the final vision in Rev. 21 and 22:5 and a short warning at the very end of the book 20:18-19. Chapter 21- 22:5 is at a long extended vision as the climax of the book it actually forms a counterpart to chapter 17 and 18. The author sees another city which symbolizes a woman Babylon which probably stands for Rome. The destruction the prostitute Babylon is removed in order to make room for the bride new Jerusalem for another city portrayed as a female so this is kind of the climatic vision of the whole book. This is the final reward the final salvation of God's people in new Jerusalem in new creation in chapter 21:1-22:25.

Now interestingly this text provides a rather fruitful field of study for looking at the Old Testament in the New because it is so saturated with Old Testament texts. The author never quotes from an Old Testament passage yet there are a couple of texts that I think come close and can be seen as indirect quotations where the author follows word for word keeps the text intact even though he doesn't introduce it with a quotation formula. This is so saturated with Old Testament texts that one scholar said interestingly and I think he's virtually right: if all the Old Testament allusions 21 and 22 were removed

you would have virtually nothing left maybe a verse or two left. We will see the author weaves together a number of texts from the Old Testament into his own climactic vision. We've already seen what you often find New Testament authors doing is taking a number of texts sometimes referring to the same event, the same concept, the same ideas and weaving them together rather than only following one text. So in Revelation 21 and 22 John gathers together a variety of Old Testament texts especially from prophetic literature but once in a while from narrative and weaves it together in this grand of climactic and prophetic vision of God's intention to reward his people and bring about a new creation as the goal of his redemptive activity on behalf of his people.

What I want to do is just look at a few examples of it would take us hours and hours for us to go through all the New Testament or Old Testament texts that lie behind John's vision. So I want to only mention a couple of them. Some of them are obvious and some of them are not so obvious. Sometimes demonstrating how Old Testament texts are brought up utilized and even transformed and changed. So we'll just go through the text and highlight some of the main features sometimes referring just to one or two texts, at other times we'll see how entire sections of Old Testament texts are utilized as a model or basis for what John sees and what he writes.

Revelation 21:1 and the Old Testament

The first one which is rather an easy one and there is very little debate. It is the very first verse of Revelation chapter 21 where John says, "..and I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away and the sea was no more." We'll look at that phrase, "and the sea was no more," as well but the first part of Revelation 21:1 seems to be a direct reference then to Isaiah chapter 65 and the reference to the new heaven and the new earth because the old passed away. John intends us to understand chapter 21 within the framework of Isaiah's transformation of the establishment of the new creation. So what that suggests immediately is the entirety of chapters 21 and 22 had a physical earthly quality to it stripped of all the effects of sin and the things that plague this present earth at the same time 21 and 22 reminds us with this quote, this allusion to Isaiah 65 that the ultimate destiny of God's people is not a

heavenly one, but it is an earthly one which is exactly God's intention for humanity going back to Genesis chapters one and two.

But what is more interesting is that cryptic phrase at the end of verse 1 "and the sea was no more." So you have new heavens and new earth emerging in place of the old heavens and new earth but then he also adds on," and the sea was no more." Why was it important to say that "the sea was no more" in John's vision his eschatological finale in chapters 21 and 22? The most common suggestion is that the sea was wrapped up with notions of chaos and notions in the ancient world even in the Old Testament and even in other literature the sea was the place of evil. It was the place of darkness. It's chaos where you frequently find the sea monsters and beasts associated elsewhere in Revelation in chapter 13 the beasts which is a chaos monster of evil emblematic of evil chaos and hostility comes up out of the sea. So the sea is frequently seen in revelation in light of other texts to indicate this as symbolic of chaos and evil.

So what that means first of all is that we shouldn't read this text as necessarily the literal removal of the sea. I've talked to some people that love the ocean. They read this text and get concerned that there is not going to be in the ocean in the new creation. I don't know if there is or not, but I'm not going to use this text to justify it because the sea here is probably being used symbolically in reference to ideas of evil chaos of that to which is inimical and hostile to God, his people and the establishment of God's kingdom. So it has to be removed so that God's people can enjoy life and enjoy their reward and God can dwell in the midst of God's rule God can reign supreme.

However, I think there is more to it than that. What is interesting going back to that observation that if you took the Old Testament texts there is virtually nothing left. When I read this I wonder, does this reference to the sea being no more also have an Old Testament background? And my answer to that question is I think that is does. One of the keys is a number of these texts in the first 8 verses of chapter 21 go back to the book of Isaiah. So when I first read this phrase I started looking through Isaiah because that is a common text that John seems to allude to in these first 8 verses and elsewhere as well in chapter 21 and 22. So I began to wonder is it possible that this sea was also has an Old

Testament allusion perhaps in the book of Isaiah. What you begin to notice in Isaiah is that number one, one of the key features in Isaiah is that he draws on Exodus to model for how God will restore and save his people once again in the new Exodus. Part of the new Exodus is referenced to the disappearance of the sea over and over again you have references, not all of them are directly relevant to what one finds in Revelation, but over and over again you have references to the drying up of the sea, drying up of bodies of water that probably reflect the drying of the Red Sea. The removal of the sea was a barrier to Israel crossing over eventually into their land and the sea was a barrier to that hostile barrier and needed to be removed or separated so the people could cross over onto dry land.

A more specific reference is found in Isaiah chapter 51, 9 and 10. This is one of the most compelling backgrounds for what one reads in Revelations. Again I am drawing on the notion that John seemed to appeal to Isaiah over and over again in verse 1 of chapter 21. Over and over again he keeps going back to passages in Isaiah. Is it possible that the sea should also be read in light of 21:9 and again when God returns in the future he returns to Zion and brings salvation. Rev. 21:9 "Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength." Referring to Jerusalem the people of God, "O arm of the Lord; awake, as the days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces?" Rahab being one of the sea monsters, "who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the great depths of the sea, so the redeemed might cross over? The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion singing everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Interestingly, in this text Rahab is in reference to the Red Sea. "Was it not you who dried up the sea or parted the sea is associated with Rahab the sea monster. Even in the original Exodus the Red Sea was already associated with Isaiah 51 with chaos and evil. The notions of the deep, as the home of the sea monster to that which was inimical to God people that which was chaotic and caused trouble. So in my opinion now in Revelation 21 and 22 when John says, "the sea was no more" I think that's part of this Exodus motif. What John is saying is new

creation again in a new Exodus he will remove the sea of chaos and evil that opposes God's people that is inimical to God's people that is a barrier to God's people passing over and enjoying their inheritance. God will remove that in the days of old as he did in the first Exodus where the sea was a barrier of hostility and chaos when God dried it up so the people could cross over and eventually enter the promise land. Now God is going to do that again in Revelation 21. He will remove the sea so that the people can cross over and enjoy their inheritance to which is now the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22.

In fact it is interesting that in Isaiah 51 we saw the result of crossing over and being restored in Zion is rejoicing and singing sorrow and sighing flee away. Notice later on after this statement the sea is no more, notice that "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, no more death no more mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things is passed away" that's exactly what happens in Isaiah 51. So I wonder if John means the sea will be no more I wonder if he's not reflecting this Exodus motif of the drying up of the Red Sea that indicates chaos and evil home of the sea monster that which is inimical and hostile to God and his people and as a barrier for them to enjoy their heritance removed and dried up so that God's people can cross over and inherit the promise land which is now the new earth.

Revelation 21:3 and the Old Testament

To move on to a couple of other texts, chapter 21:3 interestingly quotes a covenant formula: "they will be my people and I will be their God." This is probably an allusion to Ezekiel chapter 37:27 where you find the new covenant formula if you go back and read that you will find that the wording is very close to Revelation 21:3. But what is interesting is in Ezekiel 37 the new covenant formula is followed in chapters 41-48 by the measuring of the new temple so you have an angel taking Ezekiel on a tour measuring its gates and all the details of the new temple interestingly that's exactly what you find in Revelation following the covenant formula in 21:3 where he quotes Ezekiel 37. After that starting in verse 9 John now sees a vision of the new Jerusalem and relying on Ezekiel 41-48 an angel takes John not to measure the temple but now he measures the

new Jerusalem modeled after Ezekiel 40-48 in fact even though chapter 22:1-5 which says then the angel showed me the river of life the water of life clear as crystal coming from the land down the river a great stream on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing 12 crops of fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are healing of the nations. This language comes out of Ezekiel 37:1-12 so virtually this entire section starting with the covenant formula in 21:3 on to most of the rest of verse 21 and 23 where John measures the temple where he describes the water and the river of life from the throne from the throne of the tree of life giving leaves that are for healing, all of that reflection depends on Ezekiel 40-48. So Ezekiel 37, 40-48 seems to provide an important model for John's own conception and understanding of eschatological salvation and the restoration. Again, it's even in the same order, the covenant formula followed by a description of the temple in Ezekiel is reflected in Revelation where you have the covenant formula from Ezekiel 37 followed by the restoration in measuring not the temple but of the city.

Now again this brings us to the question that sometimes it's important to ask how an Old Testament text has been transformed. It's interesting that in distinction to Ezekiel as we've already said John doesn't measure a temple he measures the new Jerusalem. In fact in chapter 21 John says in his vision in verse 22 that "I did not see a temple in the city." So unlike Ezekiel that has a separate temple John doesn't see a temple the reason becomes clear is that because now the old creation has been removed. The old creation which was hampered by sin and evil, now the very thing that made the temple necessary in the first place now has been removed. God can now dwell directly with his people apart from the need of a temple. Therefore John doesn't need one the entire city the entire people of God are now one big temple that now God and the lamb dwell with them directly. So there is no need for a separate physical temple because of human sinfulness. How that there is a new creation, now that the sin has been removed now that evil has been removed now, that there is a brand new creation, God can now dwell directly with his people in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37 and 40-48. There is no longer a separate temple necessary so for that reason what Ezekiel says and does in the temple now John

translates that into the new Jerusalem because the entire city the entire people of God are a dwelling place of God in a temple making an additional separate temple superfluous.

Description of the New Jerusalem: Gates and Foundations

In John's final vision a further example in the same passage of the Old Testament which is not clear necessarily at first glance, as John begins to describe in Jerusalem in chapter 21 and especially starting verse 9 he describes it as consisting of 12 gates and upon those gates are written the 12 tribes of Israel and then 12 foundations which have the names of the 12 apostles of the lamb. Though he doesn't tell us which tribes or which apostles go with these foundations, he's not interested in that. He just tells us that this new Jerusalem consists of 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes the 12 foundations which have the names of the apostles. He also describes the gates consisting of 12 pearls and he also describes the city as consisting of streets of gold.

So one question to ask is: what is the background behind all this precious jewel or precious stone imagery in Revelation? First of all it appears that that is also one of the things you don't find in Ezekiel 40-48, the mention of precious stones. So where does John get that? You do find reference to precious stones particularly in Isaiah chapter 54 a text that we have already looked at. Here Isaiah describes the restoration of Jerusalem in terms of future in precious stones. Its gates are identified with precious stone, its foundations are sapphire different parts of the city of Jerusalem as its restored is unequaled with the different stones. So John appears and notices that the gates and foundations both appear in Isaiah chapter 54. So John in addition to Ezekiel 40-48 while he brought Isaiah 54 in to bring this idea of the restoration in terms of these precious valuable stones. But it's interesting as we've said John identifies the gates with the 12 tribes and the foundations with the apostles. What also John might be doing is something very similar to the texts we have already referred to the Dead Sea Scrolls in Isaiah Pesher where the Dead Sea Scrolls interpreted Isaiah 54 as a justification for their own community. They metaphorically identify the different parts of Isaiah 54 before. The gates and the foundations had been founding members of the community. Now John appears to be doing something similar by identifying some of the elements of the city

foundations especially the gates as far as founding members of the new community. With the new Jerusalem again the mention of the gates of pearl all comes out of Isaiah chapter 54. So Isaiah's chapter of the vision of restoration has now been picked up by John. You see what he's doing he's taking all these Old Testament prophetic texts and their visions of restoration and weaving them together in one grand vision to demonstrate how God's promises are anticipated in the old prophets now find their climactic fulfillment in God dwelling with his people in a new creation. Interestingly too, the author goes even further and identifies after mentioning that the foundations of Isaiah 54 actually the 12 apostles are the stones of the lamb. He goes on and further identifies them in the rest of this chapter with specific stones. Notice what he does the foundations of the city verse 19 of Revelation 21 the foundations of the city which he just said were the 12 apostles of the lamb. Interpreting Isaiah 54 now he goes on and identifies further the foundations that the city walls are decorated with every type of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, sapphire, then the fourth emerald, fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh crystalline, the eighth beryl, and the ninth topaz. I'll stop right there just so I don't stumble on the others. But you get the picture, he goes through the 12 foundations identifies them with specific stones. Where else in the Old Testament do you find 12 precious stones playing such an important role you find that on the ephod of the high priest. There are 12 stones on the breastplate of the high priest. You find that in Exodus 28.

You find that also in an intriguing reference in Ezekiel 28:13. You find a very intriguing reference to the precious stones on the breastplate of the high priest which interestingly are there in reference to the context of the garden of Eden. Now we'll return to that in a moment but my point here is by further identifying these foundations with the apostles of the lamb which John takes from Isaiah 54 by further identifying those 12 foundations on the stones on the breastplate of the high priest from Exodus and texts like Ezekiel, the author is clearly suggesting that all of God's people function as priests. All of them function as priests who worship God and perhaps also portraying the city of purity.

Streets of Gold

But to go back even to a couple of other comments, it's interesting that one of the precious metals play such an important role in Revelation is gold. The city is made of streets of gold. That's made its way into a lot of our popular language and our songs walking on the streets of gold. Interestingly, there are probably important references in the New Testament to this. Number one in connection with the 12 stones the high priests breastplate would signify the priestly nature of the people of God is gold plated. Gold had an important role in construction of the Tabernacle in the temple. So having gold play a role in the new Jerusalem especially the streets of gold this is a way of showing the incredible beauty of the city. But it is further emphasizing this place is the dwelling place of God. This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Temple. This entire city is now a temple where God dwells with his people, but to go back even further it's interesting that one of the very first references that we find to gold comes back in the very beginning and I mean the very beginning of the Old Testament in Genesis chapter 2. Here the author begins to describe the garden of Eden that is planted. Adam and Eve were to take care of it. Notice in verse 10 a river entering the garden "from Eden and from there separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land was good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there." Interestingly, he emphasizes the presence of gold in the association with the garden of Eden so probably again by having gold featured in the old Jerusalem in especially chapter in 22 where the author clearly relying on Ezekiel 37.

Tree of Life

Notice also in chapter 22 the author mentions the tree of life. John mentions the tree of life not just trees like Ezekiel, but the tree of life. The author wants to make it clear that by referring to the tree of life by even mentioning gold associated with the garden of Eden. It's as if the author wants to make clear that this is not just the old restoration of the temple, but this is Eden restored. What God had in store for those people in the garden is now finally restored and fulfilled God's intention for humanity now reaches its climax by the restored people in the new Jerusalem which is also

portrayed as a temple. Furthermore, the fulfillment of the garden of Eden to get a couple of other examples to bring us to the end of 22:4-25. In 22:4 the author describes the people as "They will see his face and his name will be on his foreheads." Again this is priestly language of being in the presence of God. Seeing his face is the goal of the worshiper in the temple. But also the idea of having his name written on their foreheads once again it refers to the priest having the name of God on their foreheads as they enter the temple. Again these are all kinds of Old Testament allusions going on to demonstrate God's intentions for humanity going all the way back to the garden of Eden. God's intention was to create a humanity in midst of which he will dwell in the covenant relationship. Now it reaches its goal and its climax.

One other interesting thing as well is that part of the vision John has is the new Jerusalem is an all-inclusive city unlike Old Testament texts where Israel was the focus of attention. Now Gentiles participate in this reality as well. It's interesting when John wants to talk about Gentiles' inclusion he draws on the Old Testament prophetic texts that most clearly envision Gentiles being included in the ultimate and final restoration of God's people and that is the book of Isaiah. So, for example, in chapter 21 he quotes a number of texts starting from verse 24 that the nations will walk by the light of the new Jerusalem and kings of the new earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut there will be no more night there which is an allusion to Isaiah. In other texts the glory will be brought into it yet nothing impure will enter into it. John wants to make clear that not only is this the fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic texts, but an anticipation of Old Testament texts such as Isaiah is also inclusive of Gentiles. So John has brought together a whole host of Old Testament prophetic texts sometimes colored with Old Testament narrative texts from the garden of Eden or from the Exodus and from the temple narrative. Now combine them into one vision of eschatological salvation.

Revelation 22:18-19 and Deuteronomy 4:2

God now provides for his people the final example I want to draw from in Revelation that comes from the very end of the book verses 18-19 chapter 22. We find this very interesting reference to the very end of the book after Revelation 22:5. In the end of the final vision you see a series of final instructions for how the book is to be received and how it is to be responded to. In verses 18 and 19 we read this: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of the prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city" which we just read about in chapters 21 and 22 described in this book.

Now usually these verses are taken as a reference to warning against tampering with the book of Revelation sometimes adding more books to the Old Testament canon or taking books away or with Revelation we shouldn't take books out or add sections. Usually when we think of verses 18 and 19 of Revelation 22 we often apply this to other cults, false religions that add to the Bible and they are guilty of adding to and that is doing violence to the completed canon of Scripture. So that is often how verses 18 and 19 are taken. Seldom do we ever give a second thought to whether this text applies to Christians or not. It is taken as applying to outsiders who are in danger of tampering with adding to or subtracting to the book of Revelation or the finished canon of Scripture.

However true all of that may be and however much John may have utilized this to some extent is actually tampering with the book by adding and subtracting to it, I think that we need to read this again in light of the New Testament background that is John is not the first one to talk about adding to and subtracting from the word of God from his book. In fact, I'm convinced he is drawing from language that comes right out of the Old Testament background book of Deuteronomy in reference to the Old Testament Law. For example, Deuteronomy chapter 4:2 and I'll read verse 1 as well Deuteronomy chapter 4 "Hear O Israel the decrees and the laws that I'm about to teach you, Follow them so that you will live and may go in a take possession of the land the Lord your God of your fathers is giving you." Here's verse 2: "Do not add to what I command you and do not

subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you." Furthermore, Deuteronomy chapter 12 in verse 32 we find something very similar Deuteronomy chapter 12 in verse 32 reads again in the context of the Mosaic covenant keeping the law. To back up, 29 and 30 was warning them that "The Lord your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by going after their gods, saying 'How do these nations serve their gods" We will do the same.' You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in fire sacrifices to their gods." Verse 32, "See that you do all that I command you; do not add to it do not subtract from it." In my opinion John gets this language of adding to and subtracting from the word of God. His book, his prophecy in Revelation 21 and 22 from the text of Deuteronomy which is in the context of obeying Mosaic law.

So what is interesting is that in both places when they are told to add and subtract that is the opposite of keeping it. In other words, the Israelites don't add or subtract to the law, but be careful to keep it. In other words, I think that adding and subtracting are not so much concerned with just adding words or taking words away literally with an eraser. Erasing some of the words or writing extra laws, but instead the adding to and subtracting have to do with failure to obey the word of God. Whether one adds something else in addition or as additional requirements or takes away from it, by refusing to keep it to add to and subtract from the law according to Deuteronomy somehow is bound up with the Israelites actually obeying it. So when we get to Revelation 22 verses 18 and 19 when he warns them against adding to and subtracting from it I think he is using it in the same was as Deuteronomy is. Don't add or subtract to the book that is do not substitute something else especially idolatry it's interesting that in chapter 12 of Deuteronomy it was in the context of not going after idols. So to add to the book might be to pursue idolatrous practices to take away from the book would be to neglect it and ignore it refuse to do it. So in either case when John then says, "I warn everyone and these are the words of his

prophesy do not add to them and do not take away," I take it that it is primarily referring to obedience to the book not adding to and subtracting is sort of a metaphorical way of saying don't pursue idolatry especially, perhaps, for the context for the readers of Revelation the worship of pagan gods and emperor worship would be adding to the book. Don't subtract from it by refusing to obey it and ignore it and shrinking away from it if someone is prone to do.

It is interesting too what I think adds to this is in verse 19 and verse 18, "I warn everyone who hears the words of this book," who would have heard the word of the book? It would have been Christians. This is addressed to God's people not the outsiders not to pagan observers or pagan worshipers or false teachers, false religious cults, this is addressed to God's people they are the ones in danger of adding to and subtracting from the word of God.

In fact, these verses 18 and 19, I think provide a book end with chapter 1 and verse 3 of Revelation to help make more sense chapter 1 in verse 3. John says, "blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy" which would have been the person who actually read it to the congregation. Most New Testament books would not have been passed around and everyone read them. It would have been read by someone and the gathered congregation would have listened to it.

Notice verse 3 again, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophesy and blessed are those who hear it and keep it. Keep the things written in it because the time is near." So chapter 1 begins with a blessing for the one who hears the word of God and keeps it and does what it says. Yet now the book ends with a warning and a curse for those same persons who hear the words of this book yet they fail to keep it. Those who do so are guilty of adding to and subtracting from the word of God. That is, those who hear the word read who refuse to put it into practice, to refuse to obey it and perhaps shrink back from it because of pressure from the Roman government or those who would instead substitute idolatrous practices by worshiping pagan gods and even the Roman emperor, they are the ones who are guilty to adding to and subtracting from the word of God at the very end of the book Revelation.

So actually this text again Christians should see in this text not a commendation of false teachers cults and other religions, but this is addressed to God's people. It reminds us of the danger of failing to keep the word of God. Instead, the necessity of not only hearing it, listening to it, doing what it says and conforming our lives to it.

Conclusion

So those are a number of examples of the New Testament ending with the book of Revelation. A number of examples where there is not only a challenge in identifying the Old Testament from the texts and the necessity of identifying the Old Testament texts that lie behind the New Testament, but the need to go further and ask, how does that effect the way I interpret the Old Testament texts? What difference would it make if I were to read Revelations 21 and 22 without all of those Old Testament texts in mind or lurking in the background. So one must move beyond simply identifying Old Testament passages and validating whether the author intended the allusion or not and justifying finding an allusion and wondering whether it is certain known problem. One needs to move beyond that and ask as well what might be the interpretive implication of this? What difference does it make to find an Old Testament allusion in the text as opposed to if I did not see one? What is the theological and what is the hermeneutical import of the Old Testament allusion?

So that brings us to an end our discussion of the Old Testament in the New and again an important facet of the interpretive process that again has the potential yielding important interpretive insights. In the next session then we'll move on to consider a couple of other features related to aspects of the interpretive process one of those being theological interpretations of the texts not just historically critically but also interpreting the texts theologically as the scriptures of the people of God and also asking questions about contextualization and application along with that. Then I intend to draw our discussion to a conclusion by doing two things by perhaps pulling together methodology. What would an interpretive method look like implementing all these principles? Then I will actually initiate that by working through a couple of biblical New Testament texts to show how these principles work.

Transcribed by Nicole St Martin and Ted Hildebrandt
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 26

Theological Approaches to Interpretation

Introduction to Theological Hermeneutics

We've been looking at different methods of interpretation related to understanding the text within its original historical context and asking questions about the author and the author's probable intent and what the readers might have or most likely would have grasped. We have looked at the text and its context being a very significant aspect of interpretation, looking at the wording and the meaning of crucial and important words and grammatical constructions and so on. What I want to do is look at a further important facet of the interpreting process and that is what I'll call "theological analysis." There's actually a whole movement today that seems to be picking up steam and that is something that is called "theological hermeneutics" or "theological interpretation." I don't intend to go into detail about what that is. Certainly there are some questions that can be raised about it, but what is valuable is it tends to recover the theological nature of the Old and New Testament and the theological nature of the enterprise of interpretation.

Part of interpretation is interpreting the Old and New Testament texts theologically. This goes back to the fact that Christians confess that the scriptures are inspired and they are the very words of God, therefore the Old and New Testament are more than, though not less than simply historical documents. They're more than just documents written and produced in a specific historical setting, but they are also highly theological. Therefore, we must ultimately read the Bible in a theological manner. By even calling it "Scripture," when we refer to the Old and New Testament as "Scripture," that entails a recognition that the Bible is a religious book. It entails the recognition that one cannot merely read it as just a historical document, although again it is that, but when we confess that the Old and New Testament are Scripture it is that they are the scriptures for the church. They are the documents that testify to God's redemptive dealing with his

people. We testify that it is God's revelation of himself in history, of his will to his people, therefore, any interpretation of a biblical text is incomplete until we interpret the text, the New or Old Testament texts theologically, that is, within its theological context.

Related to that also is the fact that we possess a Bible as Christians today, in which the Old and New Testament are conjoined into an entire book. Therefore, they stand in relationship to one another. So the Bible as it stands, and as we possess it, consists of the Old and New Testament, that now stand in relationship to each other, and in a sense then provide the entire context in which any given Old Testament book is to be understood. So we've talked about the historical context and the literary context of a book, but ultimately the final and ultimate context is the canonical context. Right now I don't intend to go into detail as far as justifying the 66 books that we find in our canon of Scripture in the Old and New Testament, but my assumption is the 66 books of the Old and New Testament that we have constitutes the word of God and the context for doing interpretation and therefore the entire canon of Scripture, is the ultimate context for doing interpretation. So the Old and New Testament books form a unity and come together and provide the ultimate context for interpretation and are, therefore, to be read theologically, that is, we confess that the Old and New Testament are the scriptures of the church and therefore that means that we read any text in light of its ultimate theological canonical context.

The church is the word of God to his people, and as his people, we confess that God has spoken through his word and continues to speak through his word as Scripture to his people. Therefore, it seems to me then, based on that, there are a number of important themes or principles to consider when interpreting the Bible theologically, or analyzing the Bible theologically. Again, I am assuming that one has done the work of interpreting biblical texts in light of its historical context and what we can know of the literary genre and the historical background, the historical cultural reference in the text, asking questions of the literary context and what the author most likely would have intended and what the readers would have most likely understood by the text, examining it with its literary grammatical, historical context, understanding the meanings of crucial words. That forms the basis for reflecting on the text theologically, but to make a number of

important observations, or to raise a number of important themes regarding a theological analysis of Scripture and then we'll ask what that might look like, and by giving a couple of examples of how one might analyze an Old Testament text and a New Testament text theologically, or from a theological perspective.

Unity and Diversity

First of all, a theological perspective operates with the unity and coherence of Scripture, that is, by focusing on Scripture as God's word, by focusing on it as canonical Scripture. We assume it is an essential unity, so we can understand that the ultimate canon forms the broader theological context, and provides the broad theological unity for understanding each New or Old Testament document. So the canon provides the broader theological unity to which each book belongs and contributes. So understanding the Bible theologically points to an understanding, the Bible as canonical Scripture points to coherent portrayal of God's redemptive work, and God's redemptive activity on the part of his people. But it's important also to understand that. Much of this owes itself to the fact that the Bible is both a divine book but a human book as well. We've discussed that concept back when we discussed inspiration, but understanding the book as a human document, we also confess that the Bible consists of a diversity within that unity. So individual books make up that unity, yet they reflect a diversity we saw that we've already seen that there are diverse literary types within the Old and New Testament, there are diverse authors that write out of diverse backgrounds. There is a diverse vocabulary, diverse perspectives, yet all of those come under the umbrella of the essential coherence and unity of the Old and New Testament so that doing theological analysis, at least from a Christian perspective, understands that the Old and New Testament texts are not at odds with each other. They do not contradict each other the books do not stand at odds with other books.

For example, Paul and James do not stand at odds with each other however much diversity exists and however different the perspective. Ultimately within the broader theological unity of the Old and New Testament canon, they do not stand in contradictory relationship. While confessing there are diversity of authors and literary types and

backgrounds, these documents, even, especially New Testament documents are as we have seen highly occasional, the responses to very diverse situations in history. We find multiple responses to different perspectives, but still, all of that, while exemplifying a coherence and a unity within the broader canon.

This perspective, I realize, is in contrast to more post-modern trends, to see a variety of voices that are diverse but even contradictory and refusing to acknowledge a meta-perspective or a meta-story that would account for all the others, so that there are multiple, even contradictory voices within interpretation, within the Old and New Testament canon. However a theological approach from a Christian perspective affirms the unity and the coherence of Scripture as the word of God to his people, as the final canonical Scripture consisting of the Old and New Testament that stand in relationship to one another.

Promise – Fulfillment Relationship

A second important theme, or principle that is significant for doing theological analysis of biblical text and related to the one we just discussed concerning coherence and unity of Scripture is that one also confesses and assumes the canonical relationship between the Old and New Testament. As we've already mentioned, the scriptures that we possess provide the ultimate context for interpreting any Scripture, and what we possess is the Old and New Testament conjoined in relationship to one another, and they stand in a relationship primarily and generally of promise and fulfillment. The Old Testament is seen as participatory of the final climactic revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. This perspective is found in texts such as Hebrews chapter one and the first couple of verses where the author says, "In the past, God spoke in various ways and through various means to our forefathers through the prophets, but in these last days, God has spoken through his Son." That verse establishes a relationship, an integral relationship, an organic relationship between the Old and New Testament, so the New Testament is seen as the ultimate fulfillment of what is promised and what is anticipated in the Old Testament.

So the scriptures then are a testimony to God's ongoing redemptive acts on behalf

of his people in the world. What this means, when we read the Bible as a unity that consists of a relationship between the Old and New Testament, that means that one must be sensitive to and be able to relate the interpretation of any text to the overarching theme or themes or the overarching story of the entire biblical text in the biblical canon.

It's a story that is rooted in creation in Genesis 1 and 2 where God creates a people and God enters into a covenant relationship with them and desires and determines to dwell in their midst and gives them the land as his gracious gift which they are to care for and that they would as God's image bearers, that they would spread God's rule and his kingdom. They will spread his glory throughout the entire earth and throughout all of creation. But it is also a story of how sin enters into that desired intention for creation and for humanity and wrecks that, or begins to unravel that part of the story and so the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament is how God now chooses Israel. God chooses Israel to be his people, he redeems them from Egypt, he then takes them out of Egypt and enters into a covenant relationship with them, takes them to the land he would give them, and intends to dwell with them through a temple and establishes his relationship to restore them and eventually his intention to restore all of creation, which was his original intent from Genesis 1 and 2. But, it's also then a story of how God intends to ultimately rescue all of creation and rescue the nation of Israel itself and eventually all of creation and all people, which reaches its zenith in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God now begins to establish and fulfill his intention for humanity, and that was begun in creation, and was reestablished with the redemption and with God working through Israel. Now that reaches its climax in the person of Jesus Christ, His death, his resurrection, and his establishment of a new people of God who will obey him and who will spread his rule and his glory throughout the entire earth.

But again this story is one that reaches its ultimate climax in a new creation and a renewed earth. It is a renewed heavens where God's intention for humanity, where God's story is fully and perfectly realized and fulfilled. So given this overarching narrative, or overarching story, or these overarching theological themes then, theological

interpretation asks, how does each part fit into and contribute to this whole, as one is studying a biblical book or a biblical text. A theological analysis asks: how do the different books, how do the different texts fit into the story of God's redemptive dealing with his people and ultimately all of creation? How does each text, how does each book contribute to that, and fit within those themes and that story?

What that means is first of all, that the New Testament is ultimately read in light of the Old Testament. But furthermore, ultimately, the Old Testament will be read in light of the New as well. As we will see that does not mean that we do not study the Old Testament in its original historical contexts and ask what it would have meant to the original readers. We let the text have its own integrity and understanding of the historical context, but ultimately, once again, we confess that the Old and New Testament stand, in its ultimate context, in theological relationship.

So it's valid then to read the New Testament in light of the Old Testament and the validity of that move is rather obvious because we've looked at the use of the Old Testament and the New. The New Testament authors themselves, and Jesus himself demanded that this new revelation be seen in light of and with continuity with the old covenant revelation as bringing it to fulfillment. But I think it's also legitimate when one has done his exegesis and the interpretation of the Old Testament texts, to understand and explore how it gets fulfilled in the New Testament, how it reaches its climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

A Theological Approach

So a theological interpretation works with at least these two themes so far, the unity and coherence of Scripture that the broader Old and New Testament canon form a unity that must be considered when interpreting any individual book. Second, the Old and New Testament within the New and Old Testament canon stand in theological relationship with each other. Again this does not ignore the distinct contribution of each text, or it does ignore or undermine the unique contribution that each individual author makes in its historical context. It does not ignore how the text functions for its readers etc. and its place in salvation history and it's working for God's purposes. But it does

recognize again that each text is a part of a larger canonical whole, as we have already said. The final canon of Scripture ties together the Old Testament and the New Testament in a relationship which now testifies to God's ongoing redemptive activity on behalf of his people and on behalf of all of creation. So in light of the meaning of a text in its historical context, then one needs to ask, what role does it play within the broader canonical and theological context? What role does it play as a part of its overarching story of God's redemptive work for his people in history and ultimately for all of humanity and the entirety of creation? So it is important to understand when we think of context and interpreting Scripture in context, we've examined things like it's broader literary context and understanding texts and its historical context, but now I'm arguing for ultimately understanding a text in light of its theological context, that is, the context of the broader canon of Scripture and how it fits in this ongoing story of God's redemptive activity in the world and for his people.

Christologically Focused

A third important principle, or theme, is that Christian theology is Christologically focused, that is, ultimately the focus of, or the climax of God's redemptive dealing with humanity comes in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' teaching, Jesus' death and his resurrection, all of these are seen as the fulfillment as the climax of God's redemptive activity on the part of his people and all of creation. So this overarching narrative or story that we talked about finds its climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

We've already seen, especially when we talked about the Old Testament usage in the New, that for New Testament authors, the primary lens through which they would have interpreted the Old Testament was the person of Jesus Christ. They saw Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Scripture. Perhaps they took their cue from Jesus himself who said things like, "I have come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them," or in Luke 24 how he discussed with the two individuals on the road to Emmaus, he discussed how everything in Scripture was fulfilled in him so that one, when one reads the Old and New Testament, we ultimately have to understand how everything reaches its climax and

fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Even New Testament authors took a couple of Old Testament texts and understood them and how they got fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So theological analysis will ultimately demonstrate how everything finds its fulfillment in the person of Christ and his life and teaching, his death and his resurrection.

Matthew 1:1: a Theological Reading

For example, when you even open up to the very first verse of the New Testament, at least in the order in which we have it, the very first verse demands that number one, that we read the Old, New Testament in light of the Old Testament. At least Matthew's book demands that we read it in light of the Old Testament. Second, it assumes that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the main Old Testament story. So chapter one, verse one in Matthew begins like this, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham." Now there are three things interesting about this verse. Number one, this notion of the genealogy of Jesus Christ probably recalls a material from Genesis or similar language of Genesis, the order or the beginnings of, so Jesus is actually rooted in the Old Testament story beginning with creation, beginning with Genesis 1 and 2. But notice the explicit references to son of David and son of Abraham, which immediately takes one all the way back to the covenant that God made with David and Abraham in the Old Testament. David in 2 Samuel chapter 7 David's kingdom is promised, or his throne is promised to be a perpetual one, his throne will be established forever. Then in Genesis chapter 12, Abraham is the one who is chosen to become great, but who would ultimately be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. So Jesus now is placed within this broader story, he picks up the main themes of the broader story going all the way back to creation, to the covenants made with David and Abraham. Now he is seen not just to continue that story, but to fulfill it and bring it to its intended goal and climax. So Jesus fulfills the promise to Abraham. He fulfills the promise to David. He is the son of Abraham. He is the true Davidic king who now fulfills both of those promises.

Jesus and the Sacrificial System

We also see for example in the New Testament that Jesus is seen as the ultimate sacrifice in fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices and sacrificial system. You don't

have to read too far into Hebrews to see how this is important to the author to demonstrate that Jesus is the ultimate once-for-all sacrifice. He doesn't merely abolish and put to an end Old Testament sacrifices, but again brings them to their true goal and intention and to their fulfillment. He is the final and perfect high priest. The book of Hebrews portrays Jesus as the ultimate high priest. Although the author of Hebrews portrays Jesus as in a different line of high priests than in the Old Testament, yet Jesus is the final and ultimate high priest who offers up that sacrifice.

Jesus is portrayed as the Passover lamb, for example in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 7 for example, Jesus' death is understood in Old Testament perspective. So 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 7 the author says, "get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast as you really are, for Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." So again the author draws on Old Testament features of the Old Testament overarching story of God dealing with his people, and now finds parts of it fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He is our Passover lamb.

He also inaugurates a new covenant and fulfillment of Old Testament and prophetic text such as Jeremiah chapter 31 and Ezekiel chapter 36 and 37. Jesus now brings that promise, the promised new covenant. He initiates a new exodus where he now is the deliverer and savior of his people from bondage to sin. His resurrection from the dead is the installment and fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament so he inaugurates a new creation, you remember the text in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 where the author says, "if anyone is in Christ," literally, "there is a new creation." In other words, Jesus Christ himself inaugurates a new creation, anticipated in texts like Isaiah 65, so that now we can already participate in that new creation by virtue of belonging to Christ. So while every text has its own integrity and must be understood in light of its original historical context, at the same time, it must be read ultimately in light of how it gets fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and how God's redemptive activity ultimately reaches its fulfillment and climax in Jesus Christ. So a theological analysis of the Old and New Testament reads the Bible and reads the text Christologically. It is Christologically focused.

Again, I'm not talking about doing the kind of wild allegorizing that some did in the past to read something in the life of Christ and every literal detail in the Old Testament. Still, ultimately, one must be sensitive to how any given text and book functions within the broader canonical context where the Old and New Testament stand in relationship to promise and fulfillment where Christ is the fulfillment and the ultimate revelation of God to his people that climaxes and fulfills his revelation under the old covenant.

Sensitive to the History of Interpretation

A fourth principle or theme is that a legitimate theological approach to interpreting scripture, to interpreting the Old and New Testament will affirm and recognize the importance of history in interpretation. As Christians we confess that Scripture, and we talked about this when we discussed inspiration, testifies to God's activity in history, to God's acting for and on behalf of his people in history. Therefore ultimately, we understand the Old and New Testaments historically, that is how God has acted in history to bring about his intention. The overarching story is one of God's mighty acts in history redemptively. This approach tempers both historical critical approaches. We talked about the historical critical approaches or historical criticism several sessions back. It tempers historical criticism but at the same time tempers modern literary and postmodern approaches. So, for example, it tempers historical criticism in that theological analysis of the text must make room for the supernatural, it must make room for the intervention of God into history on behalf of his people. It must make room for the universal significance of the death of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ's death and the cross was not just a mere example of someone sacrificing for what they believed in, or was a historical accident, but it understands the historical and universal significance of the death of Christ. It confesses his resurrection. It confesses that God himself has become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, and that the biblical story portrays and testifies to a God who exists and a God who intervenes throughout the Old and New Testament on behalf of his people.

So in contrast to some historical critical approaches to the New and Old Testament

text, which read Scripture in a closed continuum of cause and effect that refuse to acknowledge anything that has no analogy to the present day that again reads the Old and New Testament from a completely natural standpoint while still advocating or confessing the value of a historical critical approach of focusing on history, that God is dealing with history and at the same time, a theological analysis that tempers historical criticism by recognizing and affirming a God who acts and intervenes in the affairs of history. It confesses a God who intervenes to do things like raise the dead and become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. It also tempers literary and postmodern approaches in that the historical understanding of the Bible affirms theologically that God intervenes in history. God acts in historical events on behalf of his people. This tempers literary and postmodern approaches because it reminds us that our historical approaches, especially when literary criticism only considers literary dimensions of the text and refuses to relate those to historical events, theological approaches can temper mere literary approaches or approaches that devalue the author and the text and the author's intent and the historical background such as in some postmodern approaches. These types of approaches as we've said, however valuable they are, need to be revised or at least tempered in light of a theological analysis of the text that confesses that God has acted in history and that we're dealing with more, however much literary criticism draws our attention to the aesthetic value of the text a theological analysis reminds us that the God acting in history cannot be ignored.

So however much a postmodern approach serves to chase and prod in interpretation and reminds us of our limitations, it still reminds us of the need to understand, in an attempt to uncover the meaning of God's historical acts on behalf of his people as well as his mighty acts in history as the creator and the ruler of the entire world. Our faith is ultimately rooted in past acts of God in history. So a theological analysis is historically rooted.

The final thing I want to say is that when it comes to theological analysis of Scripture, theological analysis uses the major themes in terms of the Bible itself. In other words, a theological analysis begins with the Bible's own terms and own themes that

arise from an interpretation of the biblical texts. Some of those terms or themes might be creation, covenant, promise, blessing, judgment, redemption, kingdom or kingship, temple, faith, priesthood, reconciliation, justification, these are the terms and themes that emerge out of the biblical texts themselves and describe the theology of the Old and New Testament. So, primarily, a theological analysis begins with the terms and themes of the biblical text itself, and of this overarching story.

This is different from what is often known as systematic theology that is using systematic theological categories, broader categories that function primarily to, to categorize, or to summarize the major teaching of the Bible on any one theme, as considered important by the theologian. So, systematic theology will use categories of philosophical inquiry and other categories and understand how the Old and New Testament as a whole and all the data, how it speaks to those categories. It examines how it can be arranged and organized logically to speak to a variety of categories that are usually deemed important. The kind of theology we think of and talk about systematic theological textbooks or a systematic theology, but instead we're primarily beginning with the larger biblical theological text and the overarching story and the themes and the terms that emerge from that and then tracing those themes throughout the Old and New Testament, recognizing how they develop from the Old to the New Testament and through the text. It recognizes how each book or text contributes to that theme, and how that theme or the terms function in different places in the Old and New Testament. So, a biblical theology or a theological analysis of the biblical text begins with the terms and the themes that emerge from the text itself.

Again, rather than thinking systematic theologically, I don't want to say that's not valid, I think it obviously is, but at this point, we're asking the question of what the text itself contributes to what are the main themes and ideas that emerge from the text and then how does that fit within the overarching story of God's redemptive activity as testified in the entire canon of the Old and New Testament.

Summary Approach

So, how do we interpret a biblical text theologically? What role does theological

analysis play when in one's interpretation? Well, the first step, obviously is to apply sound principles of interpretation to the biblical text that we've talked about asking what was most likely the author's probable intention by placing the text in its historical and cultural context. We examine the text in light of its broader literary context, looking at the literary features of the text, also examining its vocabulary, its grammar, and trying to understand the text on its own terms, and what it most likely meant in its original historical context. So sound interpretive principles, or sound interpretation is the first step, or the foundation or basis for theological analysis.

But the second step that I would suggest is that one should identify the major theological themes in your text that is out of a study of the text, by considering the main themes or the main terms. I've already suggested the themes or terms that emerge out of the Bible, such as, creation, covenant, blessing, faith, justification, reconciliation, kingship, redemption, etc. etc. Sometimes, how the Old Testament is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament is a key for New Testament text as to what some of those main theological themes are. Actually when we discussed the use of the Old Testament in the New in the last couple of sessions we were in essence doing theological analysis. We were understanding how the New Testament picks up Old Testament texts and those themes and develops them and shows how they get fulfilled in the person of Christ. So the first stage then is to identify the main theological themes, and then to ask how are they developed in your text? What contribution does your text in the Old or New Testament that you are studying, relate to this theme, and how does this theme function within the text that you're interpreting. Let me say, at this stage it might be helpful to read a number of important Old or New Testament theologies that will introduce you to some of these themes, and to isolating themes in different books, and demonstrating how themes get developed and try to understand what themes emerge and how they're developed. What do they contribute to your text, and recognize the historical setting from these themes are emerging and what issues they are addressing.

The third step is to ask, how does your text then, fit within the broader canonical account, or story of this overarching story of God's redemptive dealing with creation and

with all of humanity. What does your text contribute to that story, where does it fit? Where within this grand narrative of God's dealing with his people that begins all the way back in the creation narrative and gets developed through God's dealing with Israel and climaxes in the person of Jesus Christ, where does your text fit within that story? Again, this is a story that ultimately achieves its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Where does your text fit within that?

Again we said, if that's the case, then one will ultimately read the New Testament in light of the Old Testament story to see how it fulfills it. Ultimately one will also read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament as well. Again, not that we don't allow the Old Testament to have its own integrity, and understand what it meant in its historical context, but ultimately to move beyond that place within its broader canonical context and ask how it finally gets fulfilled in the New Testament.

The final question one could ask, although this begins to take us more beyond interpretation of biblical text, but very briefly, one will ultimately want to ask how your text contributes to the church's broader feel for theological complexion, in terms of systematic theology. Again, the latter systematic theology must be based on the former on understanding the text theologically on its own terms. Theology or systematic theology usually concerns a coherent expression of the church's faith. It tries to systemize the Bible's teaching, the entirety of the Bible's teaching, in a coherent framework, in light of issues usually deemed important. Our focus has been more on what is often called biblical theology, that is examining the text in light of the themes and terms that emerge from the Bible itself, but also placing the text within the broader biblical, theological story of God's dealing redemptively with his people and with all of creation.

Analyzing a Biblical Text Theologically

Now having said that, let me give you a couple of brief examples of analyzing a biblical text theologically, and what that might look like. My intention is not to give you a full interpretation of the texts, but just to probe maybe not all, but some of the theological dimensions of these two texts. These two texts are ones that we already considered in other places or other contexts in our discussion, but I think they both

provide very good examples, and helpful examples of how theological analysis can work.

2 Samuel 7

The first one that I want to look at is 2 Samuel 7 and especially focusing on verse 14. We'll focus on some of the verses around it as well, but 2 Samuel 7:14. 2 Samuel 7, in its broader context is the prophet Nathan comes to David with a message, a prophetic message, and at the center of that is usually considered to be verse 14, where through Nathan, God says to David, "I will be his father and he will be my son." In fact, that is language that you see getting picked up later on in the New Testament, but the whole context of this is again God now speaking to David where he will establish a covenant with David and affirm his intention to establish his relationship with David on his throne forever.

Now when you look at the text to kind of follow the guidelines, there are a number of important themes that emerge theologically, such as temple. Notice the reference, especially some of the earlier verses in chapter 7. There is an emphasis on building a house or a temple for God, a place where he will dwell with his people. So 2 Samuel 7 reflects temple imagery, kingship, and especially the language of the Davidic monarchy. We find the covenant, although the word "covenant" is not used in 7:14. The language of, "I will be his father, he will be my son" is at the heart of covenant language. We also find language of the seed and descendants of David, so those are important biblical theological themes or terms that arise from the text itself. Notice also an important facet of this text is found in both verses 13 and 16, verse 13 "He is the One," in other words God tells David, David you will not build me the temple, but one of your seed, your offspring will build the temple.

So God said "your offspring who will build a house in my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Verse 16 then says, "your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me, your throne will be established forever." So what we find here is not just the emphasis on kingship and the Davidic monarchy, but that the throne will be, and David's kingship will be perpetual. At this point we're not told whether God is promising that the throne will be perpetual in terms that there will

always be a king on the throne, even if there is a succession, or whether there is going to be one king who will emerge that will rule forever himself. At this point, I don't think that it is stated explicitly.

But where does this fit, looking at this theme, these themes of temple, God's dwelling with his people, kingship, especially Davidic monarchy, Davidic Kingship, covenant, the covenant he makes with David, the emphasis on his seed and descendants, David's perpetual and enduring kingship and throne. Where does this fit within the broader canonical story of God's redemptive dealing with his people and with all of creation?

First of all, when you read the text, it's difficult to miss some of the allusions back to the Abraham story in chapter 12 of Genesis. For example, notice some of these connections or allusions, in verse 9 of 2 Samuel 7, he says, "I have been with you" God speaking through Nathan to David, "I have been with you David, wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all of your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on the earth." Another text that reflects the promise made to Abraham is where God says, "I will make your name great, and I will bless you, and you will be a blessing ultimately to the entire nations of the earth." But another one, verse 12, notice the language with the theme of offspring or seed. Verse 12, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring or your seed" which again, reaffirms and picks up the promise that God made to Abraham over and over, that his seed and his offspring being numerous. Now that seed or offspring has seemed to continue through the Davidic Kingship. But one other one, verse 10 "I will provide a place for my people Israel, and will plant them so they can have a home of their own," which again, probably reflects, and is a continuation of a promise made to Abraham to bring him to a land and to give the people the land.

So, the author of 2 Samuel 7, and God's speech to David through Nathan, makes it clear that the Davidic promise then, and the Davidic covenant is the primary means through which God's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled and established among the people Israel.

But there's another interesting connection, to context to read it in light of the ongoing story. Chapter 7 of 2 Samuel also, I think, picks up even if suddenly at times, language from Genesis 1 and 2, and the garden of Eden. Perhaps even that language in verse 10, "and I will plant my people Israel, and I will plant them, so they can have a home of their own," perhaps that imagery of planting recalls Eden-like imagery, but even then still placing the people in the land, although that goes back to the promise of Abraham. By giving Abraham the land, this is seen as the fulfillment of God giving the land and the earth to Adam and Eve, to take care of it and to live in it. But as we saw, because of sin they are expelled, so God giving Abraham the land, is meant to fulfill his intention for creation where God gives the land to Adam and Eve as a gracious gift. Now that promise is continued by God, once again, intending to settle the people in the land, which was his original intention in creation.

Even the language, of kingship, the fact that God intends in verses 13 and 16, of 2 Samuel 7, to establish David's throne and his rule forever, is certainly to be seen as the ultimate fulfillment of creation, where Adam and Eve are created in God's image to subdue and rule over all of creation. So now, the Davidic covenant and the Davidic king and monarchy are the means by which God's intention for humanity to rule over all of creation, it is now going to be fulfilled in his people Israel. So 2 Samuel 7 stands within this story and contributes and continues a story that goes all the way back and is directly linked to the Davidic covenant, but has also linked back to creation as well.

But to move forward, we also see that 2 Samuel 7 also provides the backdrop for much of the prophetic expectation of restoration. Without appealing to any text in particular, though one could appeal to Isaiah chapter 9 for example and Isaiah chapter 55, one could appeal to Ezekiel 36 and 37. But without referring to any specific prophetic texts, we find the prophets anticipating, over and over, a time when God will restore his people. Usually God's restoration of his people in the Old Testament is always seen in terms of God restoring the Davidic throne, and God restoring a king to rule over the people, and that usually goes back to, and assumes the Davidic promise, or the Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7.

Then finally, to move the story to its end, we find in the New Testament that Jesus is the ultimate Davidic king. He is the one who ultimately fulfills the promise made to David in the Davidic covenant, where his throne would be an eternal one, and an everlasting one. So in the New Testament, not only do we find references to the kingdom of God, and Jesus proclaiming the kingdom and inaugurating it, but we also see Davidic language applied to Jesus. For example, Matthew 1:1, he is the son of David, but we even find 2 Samuel 7:14 quoted, for example in Hebrews 1:5, where we even find "I will be his father, he will be my son," quoted in reference to Jesus Christ.

Then to push even further in Revelation 21 and 22, we find that the ultimate intention of God, of having a Davidic son, who will sit on the throne and rule over all creation along with his people, interestingly, the Davidic promise, the Davidic covenant gets applied to the people themselves in Revelation chapter 21. For example, in chapter 21, at the very beginning of the account of the new creation, this is rather interesting, while in the rest of the New Testament, it seems to be applied, usually, except for a couple of other places applied exclusively to Jesus Christ, notice what happens in chapter 21. Here we find these words, if I can locate them. Verse 6, "he said to me, it is done, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, to him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the springs of the water of life, he who overcomes will inherit all of this, I will be his God, and he will be my son," which is a repetition of the Davidic covenant formula. So not only is Christ the ultimate fulfillment of the promises made to David, but now his people as well, who belong to him, participate in and fulfill the Davidic covenant. This is the original intention of creation, that all of humanity, that God's people would rule over all creation as his representative. Now that finally reaches its climax, where through Jesus Christ, we also participate in the Davidic covenant and rule over the new creation.

So 2 Samuel 7 plays an integral role, not only in developing number of biblical themes such as creation, covenant, Davidic kingship and monarchy, seed, temple as the dwelling of God; but at the same time, it also plays an integral role in the overarching story of God's redemptive dealing with his people.

In the next session now, we will look briefly at the New Testament text, and look again at some of the theological themes that emerge from it, and how it might fit within the overarching story. Then we'll move on to consider, perhaps what I think, is the most crucial and important stage of biblical interpretation, and that is, making application, or some would call it "contextualization." So we'll look at that in the next session.

Transcribed by Karim Ghobriel
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 27

Application

Ephesians 1:11-22: A Theological Reading

The next text that we want to talk about in terms of theological analysis is Ephesians 2:11-22. I won't read the text in its entirety and we've already referred to it for other reasons. We dealt with it at some length in terms of the Old Testament use in the New which is directly relevant to analyzing the text theologically and understanding where it stands within the overarching story of God's redemptive acts in history on behalf of his people and all of creation.

But, I want to look at it again in a little more detail related to how we might read this text theologically. First of all, Ephesians 2:11-22 when you read it, you note a number of terms that emerge such as "reconciliation" is an important term, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into two entities that were formerly at odds with each other are now reconciled and brought together into a peaceful relationship and existence. The theme of the death of Christ, the theme of the people of God, again consisting of Jew and Gentile, and towards the end we find the theme of temple cropping up. So this is a story of God, through the death of Jesus Christ reconciling Jew and Gentile, two entities that formerly were at odds with each other, into a new people of God who actually function therefore as God's temple, as God's dwelling place. This theme actually within the book of Ephesians itself plays an important role in relationship to the very beginning of the book.

Back in Ephesians chapter 1, Paul tells his readers in this long section in chapter 1: 3-14 under one head that is Jesus Christ. So one of the things that Paul has done for his people through Jesus Christ is make known God's intent, his will, and that is that eventually God intends to unite all things to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth together under one head and that is the person of Jesus Christ. This assumes some type of dislocation in the present creation, in the heavens and the earth that according to Genesis

1 and 2 owes itself to sin. So sin has entered the world and caused a dislocation. It has caused trouble, has caused fragmentation in the world and has caused hostility. God intends to restore all things in creation, in the heavens and earth, under the one head which is Jesus Christ.

Now where chapter 2 comes in is we have already seen this taken place this has already been inaugurated. In chapter 2:11-22 is an example of how God is already bringing about reconciliation on earth by reconciling two formerly hostile and dislocated fragmented parts of humanity Jew and Gentile into a new one new humanity, into a people of God. Now we've already seen that by a sustained allusion to the text of the prophet Isaiah. Paul intends to see this uniting of Jew and Gentile through the death of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Isaiah's program of restoration. Isaiah's anticipation of the day of those that were far and near, of Jews and Gentiles, will be included as God's people. They will also come and worship God and become God's people. Now that has been restored or now is inaugurated through the person of Jesus Christ.

However, we also see this language of temple especially in the later verses of Ephesians 2 where Paul shifts starting at verse 19. He shifts from speaking of nationhood and being citizens of the people of God to a household, but then he moves onto temple. In verse 20 he talks about how Jews and Gentiles equally belong to God as part of his household "built upon the foundation upon the apostles and prophets" which may reflect Isaiah chapter 54 and the language of restoration of Jerusalem built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. "In him, in Christ, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a wholly temple in the Lord, and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

So, putting this all together Ephesians 2 stands within the broader biblical theological narrative. Ephesians 2 recognizes the reconciliation and people of God and the work of Christ and his death on the cross, emphasizing temple imagery. This all stands within the broader overarching theological narrative of God's intention to restore what was ruined at the fall. What caused the dislocation and fragmentation between God

and his people, between the people and other people? Now God expresses his intention to restore that throughout the Old Testament story in terms of a temple. The temple was the way God would restore his presence with his people and the prophetic anticipation in books like Isaiah where God expresses his intention to restore humanity, Jew and Gentile, into a new people of God and to rebuild his temple. In texts such as Ezekiel chapter 40-48 God's intention is to restore his temple so that he can dwell in the midst of his people, so he can have a new creation. That story now is beginning to be fulfilled in Ephesians chapter 2 where God has now, through the person of Jesus Christ, as the story reaches its climax, through his death on the cross. Now the problem of sin from Genesis 3 that has caused this dislocation and fragmentation and has caused problems in God's creation, now has been dealt with in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now God establishes a new humanity consisting of Jew and Gentile and now the humanity itself becomes a temple where God dwells through his Holy Spirit. So Ephesians chapter 2 plays a crucial role in this ongoing narrative but again it reaches its climax where most everything else does in the book of Revelation especially in chapters 21 and 22. There now you find the building of God, you find God's temple which consists of the people in Revelation 21 and 22 consisting of Jew and Gentile. The pillars are the 12 tribes of Israel and the foundations being the apostles of the Lamb of the church consisting of Jew and Gentile. It is a place where nations now come and stream into the city under new creation and the key features now God in covenant relationship dwells in the midst of his people, his people temple. So, Revelation 21 and 22 is the ultimate climax of what one sees already taking place in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11-22, the ultimate dwelling of God with his people consisting of both Jew and Gentile in a new creation, his people temple.

So, I've given simply two examples of what is easy to do. This isn't easy in every text and I don't want to say every text has a direct relationship to the story but still as one studies the biblical text one must be alert to the theological themes that emerge from the text and one must be alert to how it might fit with the overarching theological story as part of the canon and coherent, canonical community that has come down to us in the

form of the Old and New Testament.

Those of you that are accessing this on the website will note on professor Hildebrandt's website I have also put together a series of lectures on "The Storyline of the Bible." That is meant to unpack and unfold in even more detail this overarching narrative story that emerges from the Old and New Testament canon. So, one might go to that for more detail. There are also a number of very helpful books on biblical theology or Old and New Testament theology or particularly the unified story of the entire Bible. One very brief text that I find helpful is a book by T. Desmond Alexander called *From the Garden to the New Jerusalem* and it does some similar things and traces themes from Genesis all the way to Revelation 21 and 22.

Application and Hermeneutics

What I want to do now is to move and discuss issues related to application or as some scholars call it "contextualization." In my opinion the process of interpretation is incomplete for Christians until they respond in obedience in a way called forth by the scriptural text itself. That is until the Old and New Testament texts are contextualized to our own day and situation enabling Christians to respond in obedience as God calls forth in his revelation. Until that takes place, the process of interpretation remains incomplete. Again this stems from the fact that we confess that the Bible is nothing less than the very word of God and that God expects his people to conform to it and obey it and be transformed by his words. So this application or contextualizing God's word for our modern day context and situation is simply an implication of the Scripture and also is an implication of the theology of Scripture for itself.

It's important to understand that application is not just an add-on at the end of the interpretive process. It's not just something to be tacked on at the end so that you do your interpretation and try to understand the text and when you're done the last thing you do is tack on an application to show how it is relevant at the end of the interpretative process. I would argue that the application or what some would call "contextualization" is already taking place at the very beginning of the interpretive process as we are trying to understand it for our own culture.

Even though we are trying to understand it in its original historical context we are still reading it as the Scripture as God's word to his people. So we are already thinking of asking how we understand this in our own culture, in our own location. So the very goal is application that is conforming our lives to Scripture and being transformed by reading it. So we ask, how does the word of God continue to speak to God's people today? The challenge is that we recognize on the one hand the ongoing reference of God's word to his people because it is God's word we recognize the ongoing relevance of Scripture while at the same time we recognize that Scripture was communicated in a very historical and cultural context. So we have to then ask how do take a text that which was produced in a specific historical and cultural context and how do we bridge the gap to continue to hear it between then and God's people today who find themselves in a very different historical and cultural context.

New Testament Demonstrates the Application of the Old Testament

One of the biblical justifications for application is found in the text of the New Testament itself. A text that we consider for inspiration but simply suggests that the Bible calls for its own ongoing relevance an application to the lives of God's people and we can point to a number of other texts. Perhaps one of the more significant ones is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God breathed" that is the clearest text that refers to inspiration, but usually we stop there and we talk about the character Scripture as inspired and what that means but Paul's attention is to articulate in the rest of verse 16 and 17 "all scripture is God breathed and is useful for instruction in rebuking and correcting and training in righteousness so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for good works." The corollary of inspiration is the transformation of God's people and the corollary of inspiration is equipping God's people for every good work. So, in my opinion, the processes of interpretation is incomplete until not only until we are able to articulate clear areas of application but until we actually do it and until we actually allow Scripture to transform our lives. Until that happens, the process of interpretation has not yet run its course.

In my opinion also, I find application to be one of the more difficult aspects of

interpretation to do well. I frequently have students ask me about how did you keep up your Greek and Hebrew and how did you apply X to Jesus or even what is the most difficult aspect of preparing sermons? I usually tell them is exegesis or interpretation I have found to be the easiest part (and I don't mean that it was easy and I don't mean there weren't difficult texts that I had to wrestle with and were very very hard) but out of all the things that I would do in interpretation and sermon preparation I over and over again found that making good application is the most difficult aspect of interpretation.

But it's important to recognize that first of all interpretation or contextualizing Scripture for modern day readers and listeners it's important to recognize that it is first of all it must be based on sound interpretation of the biblical text in its original historical context as the author most likely intended it and as the readers most likely would have understood it. Interestingly, one model of this is actually reflected in a commentary series, one commentary series in particular which has generally successful results, the NIV Application Commentary series produced by Zondervan. It's intentional about applying a specific methodology to providing application of the biblical text that is rooted in understanding the text in its original historical context.

Errors to Avoid in Applying the Text

But as with many of the approaches that we've talked about the first thing I want to do is discuss briefly some of the errors to avoid in drawing the application and some of these are rather obvious almost silly, others are sometimes more important. The first mistake, or the first error I think to avoid in drawing application is the neglect of the overall context that is the failure to place a New or Old Testament document in its literary and historical context. Often one of the dangers of misapplying biblical text or one of the reasons for misapplying biblical text is often a failure to recognize the literary or historical context of a biblical passage. I think too, one of the curses in my opinion are the verse and chapter divisions, especially verse divisions in the Bible. Again before I finish that an aside is verse division and the chapter divisions at least to me in my understanding the primary value is that everyone can find the same place in the text. Can you imagine speaking to a group of a hundred people, trying to get them to find the same

place somewhere in the middle of Genesis without chapter and verse divisions? So chapter and verse divisions are very important in helping us locate the right spot and helping us to find the right place that we want. Otherwise chapter and verse divisions would be a curse because one of the offshoots of them is the danger of treating verses in an isolated fashion. To treat verses as self-contained units as promises of God whose people or something like that or a verse or even a paragraph is treated as some self-contained unit in isolation from context at which it occurs historically or literarily.

Philippians 4:13 and Haggai 1 Examples

We've already given one example of how ignoring and neglecting context can lead us astray and one of the more popular example is the Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." If I take that verse in isolation one of the ways I might apply it is as we've said before when we discuss literary context in relation to this verse, one of the ways I might apply it is that Christ helps me to do an impossible job that seems impossible to me. God will enable me to do it, or God will enable me to persist and persevere through a difficult marriage, or God will allow me to tolerate a difficult relative, or God will allow me to pass an exam that seems impossible for me to pass. This maybe often used as an excuse for not studying. But the point is this verse is taken as a principle that gets applied to any situation that seems overwhelming and too difficult for me to accomplish then I'm reminded of the Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." However as we've already seen, the difficult thing with that is, when one looks back at the broader context the verses right before it, verses 11 and 12, Paul is clearly talking about his ability to live in any circumstance that is whether he has abundance or whether he is in dire need. No matter what the circumstance Paul is able to remain content, he's able to respond appropriately and be content whether he has money or whether he doesn't, whether he has abundance or whether he is in poverty. He is able to be content in any situation, and the secret is; he can do everything through Christ, that is, he can live in any situation contently because Christ enables him to do so. So by understanding the broader context this makes a difference in the way that a text is applied.

To give a really silly example I always think of this one for some reason, this is just a silly example of a misapplied text, but I use it because this was serious, someone made a serious life decision based on reading this text. When I was in college in Denver Colorado, I heard a pastor speak one time who had just moved to Denver to become a pastor of a church that I was attending. I preached in his ministry and I don't want to say that he was there on false pretenses or that God did not want him there or anything else, I don't want to call that into question, but I do want to raise a question of how he got there. On the first Sunday he was there he read an interesting text from the book of Haggai, in the Old Testament chapter 1. And as he was basically giving some background as to how God had brought him out to Colorado to preach at this church he started at verse 3, Haggai chapter 1, "Then the Lord came through the prophet Haggai, is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains in ruin" and the pastor proceeded to say as he read that verse he looked around noticed that he was sitting in a room with paneling on it. I think he was living in the state of Alabama in the United States at that time, but he was living in his home in Alabama and he was living in a house that had paneling on the walls. He kept reading and he got to verse 8, "Go up into the mountains." He took that as a call to go to Colorado. So, he looked and the Colorado state was full of mountains, the Rocky Mountain State Park and now he found in Haggai a call for him to go to Colorado. Now again, I don't want to question his move to pastor this church in Colorado, back then years ago, and I don't want to suggest that God could not have led him there. But again the difficulty is that when you read Haggai chapter 1 its whole historical literary context is that God's people, this emphasis to look around and they're living in paneled houses, the whole point is that while their houses were suitable for living, the house of God the temple was in shambles. And so the call to go to the mountains in chapter 1 verse 8 is not a call to move, it clearly says to "go to the mountain to cut down timber so they can come back and build the house of God." So this is not a call for someone to leave your paneled house and go into the mountains to live, but it's a call for God's people to sit up and take notice, that while they live in comfortable surroundings, the house of God in shambles and it's a call to rebuild God's house, God's

temple and to give it priority in their lives.

So for any application to be valid must fit within its historical and its cultural and literary context. Any application must be consistent with how the passage functions within its context.

Psalm 127:3-5 Example

Another example that I was made aware of in a textbook by Craig Blomberg on biblical interpretation was a text that I've frequently heard read, for example at weddings or something like that. Psalm 127 3-5 is a reference to apparently building, having family or sons to having many sons and the virtue of having several sons as a heritage from the Lord. So verses 3-5, "sons are a heritage from the Lord; children are a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court." Now often this verse is used as a justification for having large families, even a command to do so, especially the reference to "having a full quiver." But the key is historically the last lines "they will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemy's at the gate." The significance is that the gate is a place where apparently one would do warfare or one would gather to decide legal cases. So perhaps in a day and age where mortality rates were much differently and perhaps higher today, having a large family would ensure safety against enemies and also ensure safety in legal situations. So this is not a call for everyone today to have a large family, and somehow it is disobedient to not have a large family. Instead, it needs to be understood inside its larger historical context. Notice the reference primarily to sons in this context; they would have been the ones that contended in the gate, not daughters. So this is more of a call for a large family to ensure safety against enemies, or a representation in legal affairs, not a command for everyone to have, especially today, to have large families. So simply make sure you're your application is consistent with the broader historical literary contexts.

Failure to Recognize Salvation Historical Connections

Another error or mistake interpretation is a failure to recognize the salvation historical or redemptive historical structure of the Old Testament, and New Testament.

That is we've already seen in our discussion theology that the Old Testament stands in relation to the New Testament as one of promise and fulfillment. So some texts find their fulfillment in the person of Christ in a way that shows that they've played a temporary role in the Old Testament. So we have to ask, how ultimately do we, when it comes to applying texts in the Old Testament, find there fulfillment ultimately in Jesus Christ?

For some texts such as food laws or sacrificial laws, we find that they are no longer applicable in the way that they stand in the Old Testament, but that they are only applied as they are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ in light of the new revelation that comes through Jesus Christ. So simply to look at the new food laws in the Old Testament that forbid eating certain types of food and to simply apply them straight across the board, as if we should also avoid those types of food ignores the salvation historical structure of the Old and the New Testament.

Neglecting Literary Genres

A third failure or error in application I think is to neglect the different literary genres that one does not apply for example narrative in the same way one would apply epistolary literature. Understanding the entire story and understanding the wider and broader literary context and how the story works, is essential to application. We saw that in relationship to Exodus 18, the story of Moses being told by his father-in-law Jethro not to try to do too much, but to delegate some of the cases. Moses is functioning as the judge of Israel but Jethro tells Moses you can't handle all these. You handle the more important ones and delegate the smaller ones to other individuals. If all I did was read Exodus 18 I might be tempted to apply that in terms of delegating responsibility and how to run a business, and those may indeed be valid, I don't know. But when you put Exodus 18 in its broader context we said it's a story of how Moses is portrayed as a weak human being in response to a question: is the Lord really with us or not? The Lord must be with Moses or the Lord must be with Israel because Moses is just a weak human being. Moses can't do it, it must be God who is doing all these things, it must be God who is with his people. So Exodus 18 is more a reminder of the fact that God often showcases our weaknesses in order to make clear it is his power at work within us. So application needs to take into

consideration the different literary genres and how that might make a difference in the way we read it.

Insufficient Analogies

A final one is insufficient analogies. That is the danger of trying to apply a text in a way where the analogy between the present situation and application is not entirely applicable to the original situation. That is, for example, to apply a text that refers to national Israel, to a nation such as the United States of America, is again to miss the fact that especially, this also takes into consideration the principle of the failure to recognize the historical redemptive structure of the Old and New Testament.

For example, as I have often heard done, take a promise made to Israel that God would bless them if they do that and to apply that straight across the board, for example if any nation, say the United States of America, in order for God to continue to bless them as his people or as a nation that they must do this and this. This misses the fact that God no longer shows preference to any one nation. God no longer relates to his people nationally, but now relates to them solely through the person of Jesus Christ. God's people are now transnational and transcultural.

Another example is to take a text in the New Testament that refers to the institution of slavery, the relationship between a master and his slave and to apply them straight across the board and compare that to the relationship to an employer and employee. Not that there are not some ways to apply that and that there might not be some application but to simply be unaware of the differences is to rely on an insufficient analogy between our modern day employee employer relationship and our society and the ancient master-slave relationship.

So, what should we do? This is something we should have attempted to do from the beginning, we do not simply tack on application to the very end of the interpretive process. Instead, one possible suggestion is that we, and a very common method of application is to extract and abstract a principle from the biblical text and then ask how that principle applies to the modern day situation and the modern day reader. This is very similar to the three aspects of translation where you have a source language, that is, the

ancient language and understanding it in its original historical context followed by a message, that is trying to uncover the main message of the text and then communicating it in a receptor language in a way that will be understood by those who are reading the text in a receptor language, especially through the process known as a dynamic equivalent translation.

So in analogy to that we often find a three-fold process of application that looks like this: number one is to uncover the meaning of the text in its original historical context by studying the text in its original context. One might ask questions about the author's original meaning. What most likely did the author intend? Through a careful study of the literary historical context in light of the meaning of the words and the grammar, and the literary genre is, what is the meaning of that text? How is it applied to first century readers? Then the second step is: what is the underlying cross cultural principle? What is the underlying meaning that transcends the specific original historical situation? What is the timeless principle or what are the timeless principles that arise from this text? And then third, corresponding to the receptor language in the process of translation is: what are or what isn't appropriate or what are appropriate applications of this principle, or these principles for the modern day context and situation?

Again, in many ways that resembles the process of, especially association with dynamic equivalent translations of moving from the source language to the message and then communicating that message transferring it into a receptor language that will be understood by the majority of readers for whom it is intended.

1 Corinthians 8-9 Example

An example of how that might work could be found in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9, one could study 1 Corinthians 8 and 9 in its original context this is the section of Corinthians where Paul calls on the Christians in Corinth to be willing to not eat meat that had been offered to idols. Most of the times if you would have eaten meat in first century Corinth someone invites you over to eat or you decide to buy meat in the market place if you have the money to do so it would usually be that meat at some point had been offered to an idol. It was now being sold in the market place or now you go over to

someone's house to eat a meal and they are serving meat that had probably been offered earlier that day to an idol. Some of the Christians felt that it was okay to do that, and that idols are nothing and this is simply meat and I'm not participating in any idol worship in eating this I'm just enjoying some steak or whatever it is. Some Corinthians thought that it was okay to eat meat offered to idols while others felt that their consciences would not allow them to do that. They felt that it was wrong. Paul addresses those in Corinth who thought it was okay saying they should be willing to give up that right so not to cause another Christian to stumble, and what he means by that is not offending or making them feel bad but actually causing them to participate in that activity in a way that violates their conscience.

The principle then that emerges out of this text or could emerge out of this text is that Paul calls upon Christians then to be willing to give up their rights. The principle of this text would be to be willing to give up your rights for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So it is not to hinder the face of Christ or another Christian's faith in Jesus Christ by causing them to participate in an activity that they know is wrong.

The application is without giving specifics in application then would be to ask what specific ways in our own day and age and in our own church context might we be in danger of ignoring this or of violating this. Probably it won't be with eating meat, most of us do not live in societies, some of us might, but most of us live in societies where you go to the supermarket to buy meat that wasn't offered to an idol. So this form of application will probably change, instead we will probably ask for more appropriate modern day analogies when it comes to this text.

So that threefold message is a very common one often known as principalizing, that is through study of the text in its original context by identifying the meaning or principle that transcends the context that may now be placed in or applied in a new context. A principle or principles, most will not want to suggest that there's just one. While there's a lot of value in that approach, at the same time it's important to recognize that it not be treated as a mechanical approach that a simple three step method is like a recipe that if you just apply the correct methods that the application just emerges

naturally. For example, in my opinion much creativity and careful thinking must take place in order to arrive at valid applications.

Valid Application

But in addition to that I think perhaps to take that threefold approach in addition one must also recognize the more dialogical application or the more interactive nature of application. As I said at the very start of the application process one is thinking in terms of not only the meaning of this text in its original context but usually if you think about it, when you approach a biblical text one is interested ultimately in asking how does this text apply to the modern reader. Some have proposed that application is more interactive, that is, at the very start of the process one begins to study the biblical text in its context, but also one is alert to possible analogies and applications and the possible relevance of that text to people today. I think two other factors, any application of the biblical text whether I'm extracting principle that I will apply in subsequent situations, any application of the text must conform to at least two factors, that is, that the principle must be guided by the broader context of the book itself, that is there must be coherence in what is going on in the text with a broader contexts. Second, any principle and its application must be consistent with the intention of that text, with the purpose of that text. What's the text trying to do?

For example, we saw this with when we talked about legal literature and the genre of law. One of the laws that one finds in the Old Testament commands the farmers not to harvest their fields out to the edge but to leave some of the crops standing. One might ask is a valid application that this is only for farmers and that they should not harvest all their crops or it's consistent with its intention with the broader context that the intention of this law is the way the poor would be cared for in the midst. So that according to the intention of that command or that law I ask how can that principle or that intention of caring for the poor in that law, how can that be applied in my situation, again looking for analogies that are consistent with that law. So those two factors, the principle that we derive must be consistent and guided by the broader context and also be consistent with and guided by the text.

So what might the process of application look like, first of all again as an interpreter I enter the world of the text, I try to make sense of the text and understand it through applying the methods of interpretation that we've discussed by trying to understand the text in light of its broader historical context, in light of its literary context, in light of its genre, in light of its theological context. I try to understand the text and enter the world of text and understand it in its own terms. As I do so and I understand the text I begin to see possible connections between the ancient worlds of the text and my own world. I begin to see possible overlap between the biblical world and my own world. But I continue to study the text and I continue to weigh these possible correspondences in terms of whether they conform to the broader context of the biblical text. Do they conform to the intention ad purpose to that text? In essence in allowing the questions and insights that I gain from the text to be challenged by the biblical text itself, I'm allowing perspectives on the text to be shaped by a study of the text itself. So I continue to study the biblical text in its world, I seek to hear the message of the text. Finally, I then test any proposed application against whether it fits the context and whether it fits the purpose or intention of the text. So that is a little bit more of an interactive approach then just following a rigid three step study the text in its original context, extract the principle and then look for methods of application. But then taking that method and looking at it more as an interaction with the text or again I try to enter the world of the text and start to recognize and explore possible correspondences but continually test those by looking at the text and test correspondences and applications by the broader context and the intention and purpose of the text.

Obedience Response is Crucial

There is a final step that's often missed in application and that is the reader must respond by obeying it. It's not enough to uncover or to come up with applications of the text until one actually responds by obeying it and allowing the text to transform one's life. The process of interpretation has not yet been completed until it evokes a response in the reader that is consistent with the response that is called for by the text itself. A couple of additional features to mention when it comes to application is first of all I'm convinced

that interpretation of the biblical text must ultimately be done in the service of the church of Jesus Christ. The ultimate context of our scholarship and interpretation is not the college or seminary and it's not our learned Bible societies, although those can supply important checks on the work that we do. Ultimately our interpretation has to be shown to be relevant to the church of Jesus Christ. Scripture is meant to shape the community of the church to which I belong. So application more than just asking what in my own life needs correcting, it also asks how I live out Scripture in the context of the church, the people of God. So ultimately interpretation and application must take place within the context of the church and must be of service to God's people, the church of Jesus Christ.

The second relation to this when we do that we discover that God's community of believers is transcultural and spans the globe and is far broader then the limited historical cultural context in which I find myself. So that I must also listen to the voice of others who have interpreted and read the text and applied it to themselves, in order to help me see new ways of seeing things, or to help correct where I may have misunderstood or misapplied the biblical text. I find more and more since all my teaching has been in a North American context, the United States of America, that often it's my foreign students who have helped me see blind spots in my own interpretations and applications of biblical texts. They help me realize that I interpret the text from a North American western middle-class white perspective, not that that is a negative or will necessarily cloud the text. Sometimes I find that those who come from a situation of poverty or oppression are in a position to better understand and apply the biblical text because I think they come from a situation that's more in line with the original historical and cultural context that the biblical text is addressing. Therefore, they may be in a position to help me understand the text better, because they come from a situation closer and more analogous to that of the biblical text.

For example, I used to read the book of Revelation and its visions of suffering oppression and persecution, either not sure how to apply it, often I thought that this is something that really doesn't apply to me but maybe someday later it will apply. I often applied it to the rather menial and occasional minor ridicules and inconveniences that I

suffered. But from listening to those of my foreign students who have come from cultures where suffering and death for the sake of the Gospel or some were suffering oppression and death are a reality, especially at the hands of foreign oppressors, I began to read the book of Revelation in a new light. I read it not as a reference to my own occasional menial, trivial inconveniences but instead I began to read it from the perspective of others, that is, I begin to ask how might I be guilty of contributing to the suffering and oppressing of others. How can I alleviate the pain, suffering and the injustice that others are experiencing.

So I think it's important again number one as we think about application to do our application and interpretation within the context of the church, to understand how the biblical text is relevant to the church of Jesus Christ. Second is recognizing the church of Jesus Christ is transcultural, as Revelation says the church consists of "people from every tribe and language and tongue and nation," I need to interpret in light of my brothers and sisters and other cultures and countries, and how they are reading the biblical text as well. Indeed to listen because they might help me see through my own blind spots in interpretation and application.

So application then should not be seen as an add-on or something tacked on to the end of the interpretive process. It's the very goal of the interpretive process. In some respects it starts at the very beginning of the interpretive process where I enter the world of the biblical text, I try to understand it in light of what the author was intending. But I start to consider possible areas of relevance to my own day. I try to uncover principles that may be able transcend the original historical situation and apply to my own situation. As I do so I must test whether it fits with the original historical, cultural and literary context, whether it's consistent with the text and also whether it is consistent with the intention and purpose of the original text.

But all in all one must do this, one must apply the biblical text because the process of reading and interpreting the text is incomplete, is short circuited and stopped short unless one, not just explores areas of application, but unless one actually submits to the biblical text and allows it to transform us. Unless we respond to it in obedience in a way

that is called forth by Scripture itself, we have not yet completed the process of interpretation.

What I want to do in the next session is kind of draw everything together and be able to perhaps put this together in a framework. In other words, what might an interpretive approach look like especially from an evangelical perspective? How might we integrate the methodologies and criticisms that we've talked about? What might an interpretive approach look like? And then we'll also end by applying that approach, showing how it works in a couple of biblical texts.

Transcribed by Taylor McSherry
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 28

Synthesis of General Observations and Methodology

Synthesis and Summary

What I want to do now is attempt to bring everything together that we've talked about in all the previous sessions. We've discussed hermeneutics and biblical interpretation; looking at hermeneutics as a sort of asking or raising the question: how it is we understand or know something? What do we do when we interpret a text? What do we do when we try to understand a text, in our case, a text from the Old or New Testaments? What are the various theories that explain what we do when we read and interpret something and try to understand something?

Then we saw interpretation more broadly as the application of principles and methods, to the biblical texts in order to understand it and make sense of them. Number one, we have looked at various theories of interpretation and hermeneutical theories, beginning all the way back with the biblical text but also moving through – historically, logically – through author-centered approaches to interpretation, text-centered approaches that focus on the text as the primary locus of meaning and the primary object of interpretation, then reader-centered approaches that locate meaning in the reader and the reader's ability to make sense of the text, and finally more postmodern approaches and even deconstructive approaches that despair of any meaning at all in the text. But we've also looked at various interpretive methods, ranging from historical approaches, and form, source and redaction criticism and looking at traditional approaches of grammar and context and lexical analysis, the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, theological analysis of the biblical text, and asking how those affect the way we read the text and how they can be implemented into an effective hermeneutical practice or interpretive practice, in understanding the biblical text.

In one sense what we're doing with the different hermeneutical theories and interpretive approaches is simply recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of the text

that as we're probing the text from different dimensions, as we'll see in just a moment, we try to integrate all these things into a coherent interpretive approach. The various methods are necessary because they allow us to probe the various dimensions of the biblical text, realizing that as God's word, the text comes down to us in its historical and cultural rootedness. It's also a literary composition that requires that we use various techniques to understand it. It comes to us in a specific language, and also, as God's word. It has a theological dimension. So the various interpretive approaches that we have been discussing are necessary because they help us to probe or come to grips with the different dimensions of the biblical text.

So, having discussed all these various methods and approaches, what I want to do is try to integrate these various approaches, methods, insights and interpretive theories into an evangelical approach to interpreting Scripture, that is, an approach that takes seriously the Bible as God's word for his people. It seeks to take seriously the Bible as both the words of God but also the words of human authors as well. It'll have two parts. Number one: we will look at how some of the different theories, especially the historical and more author-centered approaches than we'll examine more text-centered approaches, and then also even more reader-centered and postmodern, even deconstructive, those post-structuralist approaches and how those might all be integrated into an evangelical approach to interpreting Scripture. It will be one that takes seriously the Bible as God's word, while at the same time recognizing its historical rootedness as the words of human beings and human authors.

But then there will be a second session asking the question: what might an interpretive methodology look like? What would an approach that gathers up some of these various methods we've been discussing, describing, and illustrating, what might an interpretive approach look like? What would an interpretive method look like?

General Observations on Methodology

How do we integrate these various approaches and interpretive theories into an evangelical approach to interpreting the Bible? First of all, I'll make simply seven or eight observations or comments that are an attempt to reflect the various theories and

approaches that we've looked at.

Author's Intention

First of all, since the Bible is the word of God; since as Christians we confess that the Bible is inspired Scripture, it's nothing less than the word of God to his people. Because of that, there must be some meaning that I can get at. There must be another in the text; there must be something outside of myself; a meaning outside of myself; that I can get at to some extent and that I can understand. As I read the Bible, the Bible clearly intends to indicate that God has communicated to his people in a way that he expects his people to not only understand that revelation but also to obey it and put it into practice. If the Bible is something that God expects his people to put into practice and conform their lives to, then there must be some meaning in the text that I can get at, so that complete relativism, that denies any kind of stable meaning misses it. However difficult it may be to get out of that meaning, however provisional or however much we realize that we cannot achieve it perfectly or exhaustively; there must be some kind of meaning that I can get at substantially and to some degree. So it seems that complete relativism is inconsistent with the Bible as the word of God.

Therefore, the author's intention is still a valid goal; again, however imperfectly it may be arrived at, however much we cannot achieve absolute certainty regarding the author's intent, however elusive it might appear to be at times. At the same times it appears that it still is a worthy goal and a necessary goal – that we pursue the author's, at least probable, intention. That is, our interpretation of the text must be justified in light of what the author could have intended and what the author probably intended. Again, although we cannot perhaps uncover it perfectly or exhaustively, we can substantially and adequately. This does not mean that we uncover the author's thought process or the author's mind, especially when we're dealing with authors that are no longer around to consult. We've already looked at the problematic nature sometimes of consulting authors that are still living. But nevertheless, the author's intention appears to be a worthy goal. Not uncovering the author's mind but uncovering the author's probable intention and

likely intention based on the text that we have. It is the author's intention as revealed in the text.

So, it seems that the corollary of understanding the Bible as God's word is that there must be some meaning that God intended to communicate to his people that he expects them to observe and obey; and that at some level we can get at, however imperfectly or exhaustively. It is a worthy goal to pursue the meaning of the text and the meaning that the author intended to some degree.

Focus on the Text Itself

Second, in relationship to understanding the Bible as inspired, going back to one of our earlier sessions, we saw that when we confess that the Bible is inspired we're primarily focusing on the text itself – the finished product – as nothing less than the very word of God. Whatever human processes that authors went through to write scripture, the end product was nothing less than what God wanted to communicate to his readers. It could be to some extent identified as the first…in some way identified as the very word of God. Since the Bible is the word of God in the written text, the final product is nothing less than the word of God, those methods that focus on the text are valid and to some degree necessary.

That is, methods that focus on, for example, the grammatical dimension of the text (we talked about the grammatical analysis), lexical analysis that deals with the wording of the text, and the lexical inventory, the vocabulary of the text and what that means. Other approaches such as redaction criticism, asks how the author has brought the different forms and sources together and put them together into a coherent whole. Contextual analysis, and literary approaches again, look at the details of the text and the workings of the text. Genre criticism asks: what kind of text is this? What is the literary form of this text? Those methods that put one in contact with the text; those approaches that deals with the text in itself as it stands, and deal with the details of the text are both valid and necessary. Structuralism fits with the text-centered approaches.

They all put us in context in contact with the biblical text itself. The Bible as a text, which we claim is the word of God, is therefore consistent with approaches that deal

with the text itself and look at the details of the text, as opposed to approaches that merely look at the origins of the text and the different sources and the history that produced it. Approaches that deal with the text itself and put us in contact with the text as it stands seem to me to be both valid, necessary and consistent with the Bible as the word of God. The text of the Old and New Testament itself is the word of God to his people.

Importance of Historical Approaches

A third implication of what we discussed, and a third principle in integrating these various approaches into an evangelical approach to Scripture that takes seriously the Bible as God's word is: since the Bible claims to be a record of God's acts in history, historical approaches are both valid and necessary. That is, approaches that are ahistorical, some literary approaches that are not interested in or even reject the history behind the text, or the historical world outside of the text that the text might refer to, such ahistorical approaches are only interested especially when we looked at a lot of literary approaches that are either not interested or sometimes even reject the historic– especially some approaches that might treat the Bible as purely fictional literature or something like that – they are to be rejected, since the Bible itself claims to be a record or God's revelatory acts in history, or God's redemptive acts in history on behalf of his people.

Because of that, historical approaches are both indeed necessary and valid. So, approaches related to historical criticism – that reconstruct the historical background and circumstances (the historical/cultural background) asking questions of the historicity of the text, doing things like harmonizing the gospels, asking about the validity and the nature of the historical events that are referred to in the biblical text – are necessary because the Bible claims to be a record of God acting in history for and on behalf of his people.

However, we've also seen historical approaches need to be tempered by an approach that allows for and is open to divine intervention in history. It must therefore allow for such things as resurrections, and miracles, and God becoming incarnate as a human being, and God's divine intervention into history. Historical-critical approaches that operate with a cause-and-effect assumption, that do not allow divine intervention and

simply see valid historicity as that which is analogous to my modern-day situation; those approaches that simply rule out a supernatural divine intervention are to be rejected and are inconsistent with the biblical text, which again claims to be witness to and record of God's revelation of himself in history.

So, historical criticism must be tempered by an approach that allows for the supernatural, but on the other hand, as I've already said, historical approaches also remind us, then, that any hermeneutical and interpretive approaches that are entirely ahistorical, that is, they deny any historical referentuality referring to a world outside of the text, or approaches that are not interested in the historical dimension of a text, or whether certain individuals actually existed or certain events took place are to be rejected as well. So certain literary-critical, certain narrative approaches would fall under this category. So, as a text that claims to record God acting in history it requires, demands and validates historical approaches to the biblical text.

Use of Various Critical Methods

Fourth, since the Bible is a human document as well, the various criticisms and some of the other approaches are also valuable and necessary. Those approaches that focus on the human author, and the process of composition. So, many of the criticisms, such as form criticism, even source and redaction criticism, again, historical approaches that try to reconstruct the historical background of the text, the different critical methodologies, when stripped of their destructive and negative assumptions, are valuable tools in that once again they put us in touch with the historical author; with the author of the biblical text. So again, for example, a genre criticism, which focuses on common literary types that the author would have used, we've already said redaction criticism explores the way the author takes up sources and forms and edits and arranges them to communicate his theological intention. Those approaches that focus on the author as the one who puts the text together seems likewise therefore to be valid because the Bible claims to be a human document. Again, when stripped of their destructive tendencies or presuppositions, these approaches can be helpful in helping us to deal with the human author and the activity of the author producing the text. So we don't need to fear critical

approaches to the biblical text; again, they seem to be justified because the biblical text is the words of God but also the words of human beings, and so various critical approaches are valid and necessary, when removed from and divorced from the destructive and negative assumptions that sometimes accompany their usage.

Importance of the Theological Dimension

Fifth, also because God's people claim the Bible is the word of God because it is the Scriptures of the Church, we must also explore the theological dimensions of the text. Likewise we need to be cautious of approaches that ignore the theological dimensions of the text. Purely logical approaches or purely literary approaches that do not take into consideration the theological nature of the biblical text are to be avoided.

Instead, we must ask what the text says theologically. We also, as we have seen, must take the Old and New Testament text and place it within the broader overarching story of the Bible, of God's redemptive activity in behalf of his people and in behalf of all of creation. So the Old and the New Testament have a theological dimension as the Scripture of the church, as the word of God to his people, that should be explored, and so a theological analysis must be part of the interpretive enterprise.

Reader Response to Humility and Listening to Others

Six, even more radical reader response approaches, where meaning is, in a sense, solely in the eyes of the reader, and even more postmodern and deconstructive approaches to the biblical text might still have something to say to Christian interpreters in that they function to chasten the pride and arrogance of the interpreter. Primarily, they can function to foster humility, to recognize that no one arrives at an interpretation that has a pure, perfect and pristine connection with the meaning in the text. It functions to remind us that no one comes to the text void of presuppositions and any theological understandings. No one comes to the text with a blank slate just waiting to be written on. We all come from our own perspectives, and these different – the reader-centered approaches and even deconstructive approaches – can function to remind us that we all come to the text with our predispositions that affect the way we read it. We all see the text through a certain perspective.

Now, I would argue that that does not mean therefore that we are doomed to failure; that we're simply doomed to find in the text what we bring to it. Instead, using some of the other approaches that were allowed, or that perspective can be challenged and changed. That text can be transformed; we can discover a meaning outside of ourselves, something that is other. But at the same time, these types of approaches serve to remind us that, interpretation is sometimes a messy process. The "author's intention" or the meaning of the text at times can elude us, and reminds us for the need for humility in interpreting the word of God. There's no place for arrogance and pride. Also, reminding us of the need to be aware of using interpretations in oppressive ways.

But instead, we come to the text with our own perspectives, but hopefully we allow the text to transform and challenge these perspectives in the interpretive process. So, even more reader-centered and even more deconstructive approaches can function in a helpful way, in reminding us of the provisional nature of our interpretations at times, reminding us of the need for humility, reminding us of the fact that we approach the text with different assumptions and predispositions. I think that the person who comes to the text aware of that is probably in a much better position to interpret the text and not to allow those perspectives to override the text than someone who simply says "I simply come to the text in an objective way without any presuppositions or biases." That person is probably in more danger of allowing those to affect and influence the way he or she reads the text.

Eclectic Approach

Seventh is: probably the best approach is an eclectic one, that is, all these different methods, even the way I've described them, we can see sometimes certain approaches have value (for example, historical/critical approaches have value), but there are also inherent weaknesses if they are applied exclusively to the text, ignoring other interpretive methodologies and other dimensions of the text. So an eclectic approach allows us, as I've said, to probe the different dimensions of the text. All these different approaches allow us to get at different facets of the texts. So an eclectic approach allows the different methods to balance each other out. For example, literary approaches are

extremely valuable in that they deal with the text as it stands, they deal with the structure of the text, and how the text is put together, the inner workings of the text; but literary approaches at the same time can have inherent weaknesses when they are applied exclusively and exclusive of historical and theological approaches to the text as well. What we're calling for, in a text, is an approach that is eclectic, in that it allows the different interpretive methods to balance each other out and hopefully come up with the most plausible and the fullest interaction with the text possible.

This might also be the place to say as well that in an approach that is eclectic as possible, it's important to also listen to the interpretations of others, and listen to what others have said about the text, especially those who come to the text from a very different perspective than us. This is particularly true of those who are marginalized or come from a certain situations that in fact may indeed be closer to the situation that the biblical text itself is addressing. Sometimes by listening to others, who have interpreted the text from a very different perspective, sometimes that can function to help us see blind spots in our own interpretation. It can help to challenge us.

Back up to number six, with more reader/response and deconstructive approaches sometimes it's listening to interpretations of others that can help challenge our own, where we might be – our interpretations might be colored by our own perspective. Again, there's actually, an offshoot now of more liberation approaches, liberation theology and liberation exegesis. One of the offshoots of that – we didn't spend a lot of time talking about it – is what is called cultural interpretation, that again interprets the text and reads it from various cultures and situations. Again, that could often be valuable in at least exposing, our own narrow-sidedness and how our own perspectives might influence the way we read the text. Again, with the goal being not simply to value plurality for the sake of having as many interpretations as possible, but to have perspectives that might be closer to the actual perspective of the biblical text, that helps us to get closer to what the author was actually intending.

So all that again is just to say: be aware of and listen to how others have read the biblical text, and how that might, perhaps, be more in line with the intention of the text

itself in its original historical context.

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

Then finally, the eighth observation to make regarding all these methods is since the Bible is the word of God and since as God's people we confess it is the word of God, it must ultimately function to transform us. That is, we must respond in obedience. We must respond to it in the very way called for by Scripture as God's word. As sometimes it is put, it's not enough to understand the Bible, but we must also stand under the Bible.

So it's not enough to simply conform to orthodoxy, but it's important to advocate orthopraxy. In other words, to me it seems to be inconsistent for someone to claim that the Bible is the inspired word of God, yet they actually betray their disbelief in that when they fail to do what it says. So application is the ultimate goal of interpretation.

So, these eight principles I think, seem to me to be some of the broader more general insights derived from looking at all of these previous methodologies and theories (hermeneutical theories) relating to how we approach the biblical text, and I simply try to integrate them into what I see as an evangelical approach to interpreting scripture, that takes seriously the word of God as God's very revelation, but at the same time the words of human beings and God's revelation in all of its historical and cultural rootedness.

Process Description: Hermeneutical Spiral

Now, what might the process of interpretation look like? Again, my purpose is not to establish a detailed methodology, but to simply, again, try to put this information together in a format that might be useful for actually approaching a biblical text. But two things I want to say:

Number one is – kind of two sides of the same coin – number one is we should avoid looking at this as simply a checklist of things to do, or even a series of steps, as if one can move through them mechanically like one does a recipe, and the end result, then, is the meaning of the text as the author intended it. Or to see it as a series of stages that you do one stage and then you're done, and you move onto the next stage, and then you're finished, and then you move on to the next stage, and then you're finished with that, and you just work through all the steps and your final product is your interpretation

of the text. So I want to avoid, on the one hand, a mechanical approach that would simply see this as a series of steps, as in a recipe that is mechanically performed so that you arrive at the end with the end product.

Instead, on the other hand, what I want to say is: On the other hand, the interpretive process is probably best envisioned as many interpreters and discussions of hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics, have seemed to have gravitated towards, and that is to understand the interpretive process more using the metaphor of a spiral. That is, the interpretive process can be seen more as an interaction with the text, kind of a back and forth. We come to the text, we enter its world, we try to make sense of it, but we do so with our assumptions and our presuppositions and our baggage and our theological background. We try to make sense of the text, we allow the text – as we continue to explore it in its original context – to challenge those assumptions and to transform those perspectives and bring them in line with the text, and so it's kind of an interaction back and forth that allows us to get closer and closer to the biblical text, and to the meaning of the text as most likely intended by the author in its historical context. Also that means, too, that these different interpretive methods, or stages in the interpretive process, are not ones that we complete and then we're done with them but they continue to interact with each other and they continue to affect how we do the others. They continually impinge upon the interpretive process.

So again, I think a spiral might be one of the better metaphors we can come up with that would describe the interpretive process of this back and forth continuing to probe the text and allow it to speak and challenge our assumptions with the hopes that we get closer and closer to a plausible reading of the biblical text that conforms to what the author most likely intended and his readers would have understood in the historical context. Those that advocate such a method are clear that this is not a vicious circle, by using the metaphor of a spiral, the spiral gets tighter and tighter as it gets closer to the meaning of the text itself.

So, having said that, what might an interpretive approach look like? Well, first of all what I want to do is discuss again eight and one could develop these in more detail,

some might arrange this a little bit differently – I simply try to follow what I find to be sort of a standard, almost logical, way of putting these different approaches together. So one might arrange these slightly differently, but what I want to do is simply spell out what I think reflects common interpretive methodology but seems to be a fairly logical approach as well to applying these methods to the biblical text.

Process: 1. Being Aware of Our Own Presuppositions

Number one is – and hopefully you'll be able to identify these and draw connections back to the different methods and approaches that we've studied. Number one is one needs to, first of all, when one comes to a biblical text, identify and be aware of your presuppositions and your beliefs that might influence the way you read the text. So ask yourself: what theological commitments do you bring to the understanding of the text? What specific background, or what specific cultural background do you bring to understanding the text? What understanding of this text do you have already that you bring to it? What prior understanding of this text might you have that could influence the way you read it? What in the text is unfamiliar to you? Is there anything else that might influence the way that you read this text?

So this is simply being aware of our own assumptions, our own background, our own beliefs, and laying that out on the table, because this will help us to understand the text, but at the same time we need to be aware that these do influence the way we read it. We need to be open to allowing the text to challenge those, and be aware of how those might be influencing the way we read the text.

Before we look at the next one, as an aside (this could be another step) but more of an assumption of the rest of these approaches or these methods, is that the assumption is that you will consult several good English translations throughout the interpretive process, throughout the entire process. I'm assuming no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. If one knows Greek and Hebrew, one will obviously want to work with those texts, but for those that don't, mainly this interpretive method is primarily geared to those who have no knowledge of Hebrew.

2. Historical and Social Background of the Text

So the second step in the interpretive process is to study the social and historical world of the text, that is, one wants to enter the world of the text and try to understand historically, socially, religiously, politically, the context that produced or lies behind the biblical text. There are two things that I think make up part of this interpretive process: number one, you need to study the history behind the text, that is, studying things like the author – everything you could know about the author, everything you could know about the readers, what you could know about things like dates, when that's important; the apparent purpose of the book, and the problems that are being addressed. Some of this information could be found in the text itself. By reading the biblical text, the Old in New Testament text, one can sometimes infer the situation or find specific references to the author or reader or the purpose of writing. One must also consider any other extra-biblical resources that will help you put together a plausible reconstruction of the history behind the text: what were the historical/cultural factors that the text appears to be addressing? What is the broader historical/cultural context of the biblical text?

And then second, we'll return to this one, but be aware of the history in the text, that is, specific references to historical or cultural or socio-religious issues or references in the text itself. Beginning to be alert as to how that might make a difference in the way you read the text is significant.

3. Literary Genre

The third stage of the interpretive process is to identify the literary genre, or the form of the text you're dealing with. What type of literature is it? We talked about various types in the Old Testament, is this narrative? Is this poetry? Is this wisdom literature? Is this prophetic? Is it law and legal literature? Is it epistolary? Is it apocalyptic? Being able to identify the literary genre or the form of the text you're studying, and then second, be able to identify what interpretive principles grow out of that literary form? As we've seen, every literary form demands that you treat it differently, so that you need to ask what methods particularly will be necessary based on this literary form. What questions, what unique questions should be asked? What

principles need to be applied given the literary form?

4. Literary Context

Fourth, is then to study the broader literary context of your passage. We spent some time talking about and giving examples of asking the question: "How does your passage fit within the overall structure and argument of the book?" At this point some people find it helpful to outline the book. I'm all for outlines as long as they are interpretive and as long as they help reveal the structure of the text and what's going on. So it's important to understand where your text fits within the broader plan and structure of the book. How does it fit within the author's main argument in the book? As I've said before, this is where it is important to ignore chapter and verse divisions when you're dealing with a biblical text. As I've said numerous times, they're there simply to help us get to the same place, especially in longer books, but they are not necessarily indicative of divisions in the Bible itself. So you largely have to ignore chapter and verse divisions when it comes to understanding the structure, but attempt to understand how does your passage fit within the overall structure and plan of the book.

But second, how does it relate, more specifically, to what comes before it and what comes after it? How does your text grow out of the section that comes before it, how does it prepare and fit with what comes after it? What would be missing if your text was not there? How does it fit within the argument of the larger section in which it occurs? In my opinion, you are not prepared to go on to the other stages of exegesis until you can answer this question. Any meaning in the text must be coherent with – consistent with – the broader literary context of the work in which it appears.

5. Analysis

The next stage in interpretation, then, is to begin to analyze the details of the text in a sense that you can see logically that interpretation sort of begins broadly, providing the framework and understanding of the text and then narrows down to begin to examine the details of the text. As we're working through these stages, it's important to realize

that you don't just complete literary context and drop it and go on to the next stage, but that provides a framework for interpreting the details. Sometimes the details will cause you to go back and revise your understanding of the context and even historical context, that's part of this hermeneutical spiral of moving back and forth even between the details and the whole of the text that other interpreters have recognized. But with this fifth stage, now we begin to analyze the details of the text itself applying the appropriate methods for the literary genre.

So, for example, identify key terms, or key words for study. We talked about lexical analysis, and examining the vocabulary, the words of the text, and how that can make a difference in meaning, and some of the pitfalls to avoid. Identify key grammatical issues and their function. Here, unless you know Greek and Hebrew, you'll probably want to rely on a very literal, wooden translation; a formally equivalent translation, but also on commentaries and any other tool that helps expose you to the grammatical features of the text.

Analyzing important connectors: the "and's" and "but's" and "therefore's" and those things that function to show how different sentences or different paragraphs are connected to each other. Identify any other issues and interpretive problems in the text that you need to deal with. What problems or issues do you need to solve before you can arrive at an understanding of the text?

But, as we said, also, it's important to understand how the literary genre affects the way you examine the details. For example, if I'm dealing with narrative, I will focus more on the relationship of paragraphs, outside of speech and narratives, I probably won't be quite as concerned with the detailed logical flow and the tight argument from sentence to sentence or clause to clause; although that can be important. Instead I'll focus more on the paragraph level and on much larger units of text. Poetry, we said you'll focus more on things like parallelism and metaphorical speech; letters, you'll ask the question what was the occasion, for his vote the writing of the letter? Here you'll more carefully trace the argument from sentence to sentence and clause to clause. With apocalyptic literature you'll focus more on symbolism, the symbolism in the text and what the

symbolism meant, what it referred to. With gospels you'll utilize tools such as form and redaction criticism, and other tools of narrative analysis such as plot and characters, and those things that you would apply with literary and narrative type approaches. With the Old Testament, you will also ask questions of the use of the Old Testament in the New, whether that's by direct quotation, or more allusion, or more by way of echo, and ask what the Old Testament text, what the understanding of that text contributes and how the author has used it.

5. Analyzing Textual Details

And finally, within number five, within this stage of analyzing the details of the text, you will also want to consult any commentaries or other helps to help you identify any other details or any other issues in the text that you might have missed. By the way it's important when you're examining the details of the text, to always be asking the question, "What difference does this make in reading the text?" It's not enough to simply unearth the details so that they simply lie there flat on the page. As you're looking at the vocabulary and the grammar and the connectors and the different features of the genres in the text, and the – when you're asking the questions of the Old Testament use in the New, in every stage you must continually raise the question "What difference does this make in interpreting the text? What does this contribute to my understanding of the text?" It tells me nothing to just move through and label certain parts of the text or isolate words and their meanings you must continually strive to relate this to the meaning of the text itself – what does this contribute to my understanding of the text?

6. Theological Approach

Number six, then, is to analyze the theology of your text. What key themes, what key theological terms or themes are evident in the text? How are they developed in the text? How does your passage contribute to that theme and its understanding? But also ask, how does your text fit within the broader overarching theological story of the Bible? Recognize that the ultimate context for your text is the broader biblical theological canon, consisting of the Old and New Testament that now stand in an organic relationship to each other. So this stage of analyzing the theology of the text is simply to recognize the

ultimate final context being the theological broader canonical context of your passage. So, ultimately, you need to ask the question of how your text fits within that story. Where does it fit? How does it relate and contribute to that ongoing story? Reading the New Testament in light of the Old Testament, especially when there are clear allusions or quotations, but also reading the Old Testament ultimately in light of the New Testament, to see how it finally gets fulfilled in the climax of God's redemptive activity in the person of Jesus Christ.

7. Summarize the Main Idea

Seventh: the seventh stage, then, is to summarize the main idea, in one or two complete sentences. Be able to summarize, synthesizing everything you've done up until this point, based on the broader context, the historical background, examining the details of the text, the theological dimension of the text. Now, see if you can summarize your passage by stating the main thrust or the main idea of your text. What exactly is it saying? In one or two complete sentences – not abstract thoughts – but in one or two complete sentences, what do you perceive as the meaning of the text? These sentences should focus on the meaning and function of the text, not the content merely, but should reveal what the text means and how it functions. What is its purpose? It should also account for all the details. All the details in the text should be subsumed under and summarized under your main summary. It must be specific to the text and not just general. To come up like a general statement that we should obey Jesus or that God wants his people to obey him, that could fit virtually every text in Old and New Testament. So it needs to be specific to that text, as it's functioning in its context and is consistent with the purpose of that passage. And again, as I've said, it must be interpretive. It must focus on the meaning of the text, not merely just repeat and summarize the content. So, until you can do this, you have not yet sufficiently wrestled with the text itself until you can summarize meaning in one or two sentences.

8. Application

Then finally, number eight is you should then reflect on valid application. Maybe I should say you should reflect further on valid application, because number eight is not a

step to be tacked on the end, but is the very goal of interpretation. It is something that one is probably already drawing possible corollaries and correspondences between the world of the biblical text and our own world. But ultimately then one needs to, in light of one's understanding and interpretation of the text, you need to sit down and reflect on valid application. What analogies emerge between the ancient text and the world of the biblical text and our own modern-day world? What principles seem to emerge from the text that might be applied cross-culturally? Are these analogies, these principles or these applications, consistent with the broader context of the biblical text? Are they consistent with the purpose and intention of the text? And then to state specific application for the people of God today, not just individually what one should do, but how one lives out life within God's people, the church.

So, in concluding the discussion of these interpretive principles in this list, as I've said, it's important to realize that this is not simply a series of eight steps that one works through mechanically, that one simply performs each stage, and then leaves it aside and moves on to the next one, but instead it's more of a dynamic process. These stages should be distinct as one moves through them, but at the same time you recognize that at times the other stages affect the way you do one stage, and having performed one stage might require you to go back and review another one. So again, it's a constant interaction with the text, like a spiral as we attempt to come closer and closer to the meaning of the text, as most likely intended by the author in its original historical and literary context.

Creativity

At the same time, too, I think it's important to add that when we interpret the text, we do so in a way that demands creativity. Again, the other side of merely treating this as like doing a recipe, moving through the eight stages, is that interpretation requires to some extent the creativity of the interpreter. It depends on your ability and your creativity, not so much in creativity in coming up with wild or different meanings, but your ability to creatively and insightfully apply these methods to the biblical text.

So at the end of the day the goal then is to arrive at a plausible interpretation; one that is consistent with what the author most likely intended, and one that is consistent

with the historical/cultural context of the biblical text. One that is consistent with the literary context of the text, of the biblical text, one that reflects the theology of the text, and one that equips the church to live out its life in the world, one that equips the interpreter to live out his or her live in the world and in the church.

So I'm convinced an interpretive process such as the one just outlined at least provides us with a starting point of beginning methodology that will help us to engage the biblical text in a way that will help us to understand it in the way that God intended through his human authors to communicate his revelation to his people, whether it was in the first century, or earlier, or whether it was God's people today.

Transcribed by Joel Estes
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics. Lecture 29

Interpreting Romans 6

What I want to do in the last two sessions is to work through two New Testament texts to illustrate how the different methods can be applied to understanding the biblical text. I want you to follow along and attempt to identify, I'm not going to explicitly say, "Now I'm doing historical method, now I'm doing lexical method or word analysis or word study or now I'm looking at grammar." I want you to be able to identify what method is being applied, so I'm not going to explicitly indicate what I'm doing, but as I work through the texts, applying the different methods, I want you to be able to identify and be aware of what I am doing.

The Text of Romans 6:1-11

The first text that I want to look at comes from one of Paul's letters in the book of Romans--Romans chapter six, one through eleven. We've already talked about it in relationship to a couple of things related to the literary context, but I want to look at it more detail. As a text I think it is illustrative of the way interpretive approaches can be applied. So, let's read Romans chapter six, one through eleven, since it's short it'll only take a minute, but I'd like to read it to familiarize you with the content and what's going on. "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also

live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God." Verse eleven, "In this same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Historical Setting

Well, first of all, it's important to ask, "Why was Romans written?" What are the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of the book of Romans? How does that help us to understand the book and the text? First of all, when you look at the text of Romans itself, it seems to contain rather clear hints by way of references to certain geographical locations as to why Paul wrote it, and the circumstances that surrounded his writing it. For example, in chapter fifteen and verse twenty-five, and actually that reading twenty-three and a few of these verses, "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make contributions for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles had shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."

So Paul clearly indicates a number of things in these references in chapter fifteen, these geographical references. In one other section of the latter chapters of Romans it seems to be clear that Paul is probably writing from the city of Corinth. But in the sections we've read, we can construct a scenario. Number one, Paul clearly is on his way to Jerusalem. Paul is in en route to Jerusalem with an offering he has gathered from the churches of Achaia, that he has gathered and now he is taking it to Jerusalem.

But also, these texts clearly indicate Paul's intention to eventually make his way back west to visit Rome and even beyond that, to continue on to Spain. So Paul clearly indicates that the Roman church is an important one and that he wants to visit, although

apparently he hasn't yet, but that now he's taking up an offering after his ministry in the region of Achaia. Now he is going back to Jerusalem with an offering, but with the intention that he will make his way back through Rome, and that even beyond that to go further west, beyond Rome go even further west into Spain.

Another important feature of that comes from extra-biblical information is that in A.D. 49, the emperor Claudius, the Roman emperor during this time, in A.D. 49, expelled the Jews from the city of Rome. There's mention of that in one in particular historical writing that refers to the emperor Claudius expelling all the Jews from Rome, and it was not until a few years later, A.D. 54, when Claudius died that the Jews were permitted to return. It wasn't long after that, in about 55 to 57 A.D., that the book of Romans was written.

So based on all of this evidence, is it possible then to suggest why Paul might have written this letter? Actually, most interpreters think that the book of Romans has more than one purpose, and at least the following three purposes seem to emerge from the text and what we know about the historical background. Number one, is Paul seems to be paving his way to visit Rome, and ultimately to go further west to visit Spain. That is, he appears to want to secure Rome as a basis and as support for his further missionary activity. So he writes to secure Rome as a base for what he wants to do in the future; his ongoing missionary activity of preaching the gospel. Second, because of this, perhaps Paul seems then to attempt to explain in some detail the gospel that he is going to preach. Perhaps he needs to explain it because of some misunderstanding that has taken place and some of the opposition from his opponents, especially Jews, and now Paul in securing Rome as a base, now explains in some detail the gospel that he preaches. So we find in Romans one of the clearest and most detailed expositions of Paul's teaching. And then third is Paul writes to unite Jew and Gentile, perhaps related to this expulsion of Jews under Claudius and now they return and find the church is predominantly Gentile. The struggle that might have ensued in integrating them back in might have caused a breech in the relationship between Jew and Gentile, and so Paul writes also to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians. So, at least those three purposes seem to lie behind the book of

Romans.

Contextual Analysis

But let's look at chapter six as part of our argument, this is a detailed explanation of Paul's gospel. In Romans chapter six, this first thing we want to do is put it within its context. Romans chapter six, obviously, follows from chapter five. What is significant about that is chapter five verses one through eleven in particular, begin a section where Paul begins to examine the results of justification that he has argued for in the first four chapters. In the first four chapters he's argued for justification solely by faith, that is now available to Jews and Gentiles, now they can both be justified and declared God's people. They are declared righteous based on faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the Law, but now the results of that justification by faith are seen particularly in chapters five through eight. That is the hope that they now have through justification by faith means that first of all, this hope is based on and this justification results in freedom from God's wrath, chapter five verses one through eleven. It also means freedom from the power of sin in chapter six, it means freedom from the law in chapter seven. Ultimately, their hope means freedom from death, and their justification results in freedom from death. So these chapters demonstrate that the hope that comes from justification is based in the freedom that God's people have from God's wrath, from judgment, from sin, from the power of sin reigning over them from death and the law as well.

But six, one through eleven, more specifically seems to flow naturally from chapter five, the second half of chapter five and verses twelve through twenty-one, in two ways. Number one, we've already seen that in chapter six, one through eleven, the text we just read a moment ago, is a response to a possible objection from something that was said in chapter five in verse twenty where Paul said, "the law was added so that trespasses might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more." And so, chapter six verse one begins with a question, "if grace abounds where sin increases, should we go on sinning more, so that grace can increase all the more?" The more I sin, the more grace is going to increase and abound. So, on the one hand, Paul is responding to a possible objection based on something he said back in chapter five, by raising a

question.

Diatribe Form of Argument

Now this is what is known as, this occurs in the form of what is known as a diatribe that is by introducing an imaginary opponent Paul enters into kind of a dialogue with this imaginary opponent who raises questions and possible objections.

There's been a lot of interesting study as to what is entailed in this. Many have traced this back to a typical Greco-Roman technique of teaching in the classroom, so it was just a way of instruction, it was just a way of the teacher raising possible objections to his argument to further his argument and his teaching. It may not necessarily represent what anyone has actually said it may be the author's, just the author's own way rhetorically of advancing his argument in his teaching. So Paul seems to be relying on a fairly common form that scholars have identified as a diatribe, that may have had its roots in philosophical schools and teaching. So clearly Paul is anticipating in diatribal fashion, possible objections and responding to them as a way of advancing his argument. It's difficult to tell, though, whether these objections, these questions he raises are Paul's own way of simply advancing his argument and anticipating possible objections, or whether these questions raise real objections that his opponents or Judiazers, for example, themselves have raised. That's a possibility. But what I want to simply focus on is how his question functions to move Paul's argument forward and relate chapter six to chapter five.

So the first way that chapter six relates to chapter five is this question-answer format, the question raises a hypothetical or possible objection to something Paul has just said. The second way that this relates is, I think in chapter six, and we'll see this in just a moment, the Adam-Christ contrast which we found in chapter five still continues into chapter six, that is, in chapter five we find this contrast between Adam and what he did and accomplished in plunging humanity into sin and death, and now, also into chapter six what Jesus Christ does through his death on the cross, through his act of obedience. In contrast to Adam's act of disobedience to sin, now in his act of obedience, Christ now brings righteousness in life. So Adam and Christ are portrayed as two heads of humanity;

Adam of the old humanity, dominated and ruled by sin and death, and now Jesus Christ forming and establishing the new humanity characterized and ruled by life and righteousness. So there are two humanities, two spheres with their respective heads, Adam and Jesus Christ. This will continue to influence what we find in Romans chapter six.

Another way of connecting the two is, chapter six might also function to demonstrate that in contrast to what could be possibly induced from five-twenty, where sin increases, grace increases all the more, should we continue to sin? Is now Paul says, no, justification, rather than freeing one to do what one wants, justification has inescapable moral consequences. Chapter six is a clear reminder that no one can go on sinning, where sin increases, grace increases all the more is not a justification for continuing to sin. So chapter six will show that justification and the hope of God's people in chapter five has moral consequences.

Detailed Analysis

So, to look more closely at chapter six one though eleven itself, we've already seen that it develops according to a question-answer format. Chapter six verse one raises a question that we saw is based on a potential understanding of chapter five verse twenty as a possible objection to Paul's argument, followed by the answer to that question. So the whole texts operates by this question-answer format, the question in verse one, and then two through eleven constitutes the answer to that question. Again the question being, "therefore, should we go on sinning so that grace might increase?" Actually, the question is in two forms. "What shall we say then?" is the first question. Then more specifically, the question is: "should we go on sinning so that grace might increase?" That's the rest of the text of Romans six, one through eleven, specifically two through eleven is a response to that question.

Now, the response itself is in at least two parts. Number one is the initial answer to that question in verse two, is that well known, "by no means." It's interesting to explore a number of translations to see how they handle this. "By no means" or "May it never be" or the old King James Version I think said "God-forbid." This is, the first response in

simply kind of an all out, just interjection; "By no means," no way! This should never happen; God-forbid that this would be the case. That is where grace increases, should we sin more so that grace can increase? God-forbid that that would ever be the case; that can never happen. This is kind of the initial outburst to the question, "By no means." But Paul goes on, the second part of the response to the question is, Paul goes on in more detail to describe why is this absurd and why should this not be the case. And I think the key is, the main part of the response is found in the second half of verse two, "We have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" That is the second part of the question, again the first is the outburst, "God-forbid," and now to give it more content, the reason that God forbid is that we've died to sin, so how can we live in it any longer? There's something inconsistent about God's people who have died to sin living in sin. There is a contradiction there, an inconsistency.

But to further look at six, one through eleven, this part of the response, "we've died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" that now will get further explained and unpacked in the rest of verses three through eleven. In other words, what does it mean that we have died to sin? How have we died to sin in a way that makes it absurd that we would continue to live in it? So the rest of this, starting with verse three, Paul is going to explain how is it we've died to sin. Obviously, he's addressing his readers that are still alive. Why would he write this letter to people that are actually dead? So now he's going to explain in what way have the readers died to sin that makes it so absurd and contradictory that they would continue to live in it.

And then verse eleven will give the summary exhortation that refutes the objection in verse one. "Should we then continue to live in sin so that grace might increase?" Verse eleven overturns that in a summary command: "No, instead consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God."

As we said, that fact that we have died to sin in verse two, then calls for further explanation in the rest of the text. But I want to start by examining what does Paul mean by saying we've died? Should we understand this in perhaps lighter terms, as far as it simply means we don't respond to sin, or that sin has no affect on us, or something like

that. I think Paul uses death in the strongest sense of the term, and I think he uses it in the sense of physical death. That is, as we saw in chapter five verses twelve through twenty-one as this contrast between Adam and Christ that I said still continues to influence this section of chapter six, one through eleven. In five, twelve through twenty-one we saw that Paul operates with two ages or two eras or two humanities that have their respective heads. The old age, the old era, the old humanity with Adam as head, dominated by sin and death, and then a new age, a new era, a new humanity that has been created and inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. I think Paul's operating with the understanding, the only way to be released from or to transition from the old era to the new era is through death. The only way to escape the power and influence of the old era and old age under Adam, is to physically die. So, one must die to be released from the power and authority of the old age under Adam.

The other thing to notice here is how Paul uses the word sin. He uses the word sin as a singular, notice he does not say, "You have died to your sins," but he says, "You've died to sin," singular. That is because I think Paul conceives of sin as a power which rules over us and controls us as part of that old era and old age under Adam. So the only way that I can be released from, or escape the power of the present evil age, the present era, or under Adam, dominated by sin, the only way I can escape the control and domination and rule of sin is to physically die.

But that still raises the question, "In what way can we say we've physically died?" In what way can we say we've experienced the death that has ended the reign and rule of the present age under Adam and the rule and domination of sin over us. Verses three and four explain that: "We have in fact died," that is, we have in fact experienced that death that releases us from the power of the present age. We have in fact actually died and experienced that physical death, that era-ending death by being joined to someone who has in fact actually died and that is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's death has brought to an end the old era. And by virtue of being joined to Jesus Christ we also share in that death that brings to an end the old era and brings to an end the rule and reign of death and releases us from that power.

But you'll notice that for Paul, he moves beyond only discussing Jesus' death, which brings to an end the old era, but he discusses the fact that Jesus' resurrection, is necessary in inaugurate a new era. So, we've also, according to Paul, we've also then been joined to Christ, not just in his death, to his death, but we've also been joined to his resurrection. We've been united to Christ in his death so that we've been released from the power of sin and the old era under the headship of Adam, but through being joined to Christ's resurrection, we also now participate in a new era, the new age that Christ has inaugurated that's characterized by life and righteousness, as we saw in five, twelve through twenty-one.

The further link in this is to ask, "How is it that we have been joined to Christ?" Paul links that with baptism. He says it is through baptism. Baptism is the means that joins us to Christ, that links us to Christ in his death, burial, and his resurrection. Therefore, it's important to understand what Paul means by baptism here. Many have interpreted this to mean spiritual baptism, that is Paul is referring to being baptized or immersed in the Holy Spirit, such as one finds in a text like 1 Corinthians 12. And especially, many students of the New Testament have been attracted to this explanation of baptism here in Romans 6. In order to avoid contradicting what Paul has said elsewhere, justified solely by faith, and not by works of the law, he's argued for that in chapters one through four. So now it would not be inconsistent for Paul to usher in another work, baptism, as the means by which we are saved and united to Christ. So, some have therefore concluded that this must refer to spiritual baptism. However, I think there's still much to be said for identifying this and physical water baptism, as an early rite of the early church, that in a sense initiated them into the church and into the people of God. For example, usually when baptism is used metaphorically, it often has a qualifier such as a baptism in the spirit, or something like that. So that probably baptism here is utilized in its physical sense as water baptism, as again the rite of the early church. But why does Paul emphasize baptism? Probably, the way to understand this is, Paul would have conceived of the salvation experience and process as consisting of a number of elements that all are bundled up together. That is faith, and conversion, and the gift of

and receiving of the Holy Spirit, and water baptism would have been seen as a unified experience. So that therefore, baptism would function as a way, as something that stands for an entire conversion experience, using a kind of a figure of speech or a use of language called metonymy, where a part stands for the whole. So Paul could refer to the baptism experience, the physical rite of baptism as standing for the entire process of conversion. It stands for the process, the entire process of faith, and conversion, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Water baptism then would be simply the means of referring to that entire experience. So Paul can say, through water baptism, assuming faith and conversion, et cetera, through water baptism then one is joined to Christ, his death and his resurrection. So, by doing that then, by being joined to Jesus' death and resurrection, we then are released from the old age, the old era, and the reign and domination of sin and death under Adam by being joined to his resurrection then, we also are inaugurated or we also participate in the new era of salvation that Christ inaugurates through his resurrection, characterized by life.

Therefore, for Paul, his point so far is that it's inconsistent for Christians then to continue to live in sin, this very question, "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" is absurd by virtue of the fact that we have died to sin through being joined to Christ through baptism, being joined to Christ's death and resurrection. We've died to sin because we have experienced the death that brings to an end the reign of the old era in sin, by virtue of being joined to someone who has actually died, the person of Jesus Christ. But more than that, not only have we been released from the age and the domination of sin under Adam, but now through being joined to Christ's resurrection, we also participate in the new era, the new age, and have the hope of participating ultimately in the end in Christ's resurrection.

Verses five through ten, then, go on to explain in more detail and unpack this even further. What does it mean to be united to Jesus in his death and resurrection? Verses five through ten explain this further. And here, notice that Paul uses, first of all, he uses slavery language in verse six, part of dying to sin and being released from this present age is we're no longer slaves to sin. We're no longer under it's rule, again Paul conceives

of sin as not just individual acts of sin, although that's part of it, but that is merely a result of sin being a power and a master that controls and dominates us. A part of dying to sin, by virtue of being joined to Christ in verse six, is now we are free, we are no longer slaves to sin. We are free from its tyranny; that seems to be Paul's main point, that by being joined to Christ in his death, we have died to sin, therefore freeing us from the reign and the tyranny of sin over our lives.

But notice the two other ways he describes sin's domination over us. Number one, he uses the language of old self. In verse six he says, "For we know that our old self has been crucified." Again, we should probably understand this language in light of chapter five, twelve through twenty-one. The old self is not some ontological part of me, my being, or some separate part of me, or some impulse that resides in some specific place in my body, but probably the old self refers to my entire being, my entirety of myself, physically and spiritually as under the influence of Adam. As part of the old era under Adam that is under which we are controlled and dominated and ruled by sin. That old self, who I was in Adam, my entire self, ruled by sin, under the old era has now been crucified and put to death. I think Paul's language of crucified in intentional, again because the way that that has been crucified is that we have been joined to Jesus' own crucifixion, his own death and crucifixion is in some way ours as well. By virtue of being joined to Christ, we participate in that so he can say "my old self," not some separate part of me that gets obliterated, but who I am under the old era, under Adam, dominated and controlled by sin has now been crucified by virtue of us being joined to Christ and sharing in his death.

But furthermore, notice also he uses the language of the body of sin, so that the body of sin might be destroyed or done away with. Again I think the body of sin is not referring just therefore to my physical body, that there's something sinful about the physical body that Paul finds repulsive as opposed to the spiritual part of me. But again, instead, body of sin probably is to be understood in a similar way. To my old self, that is my entire self as under the rulership and tyranny of sin, under Adam as part of the old era that has now been destroyed and done away with, again by being joined to the death of

Jesus Christ. So strong is our connection with Jesus Christ's death that Paul can use this language of who I was in Adam under the old era, ruled by sin, has been crucified, has been destroyed, it's been completely done away with.

So verse seven seems to articulate the primary principle that lies behind this, when Paul says anyone who has died has been freed from sin, that's Paul's whole argument. It requires a death, the only way to be freed from the tyranny of sin and the old age is to die. And again, that's exactly what Paul is convinced has happened to Christians by virtue of being joined through baptism as kind of the part that stands for the whole conversion experience. Through baptism, we've been joined to Jesus' death, which brings to an end the rule of sin and the old age in the life of God's people.

So then, verses nine and ten simply go on, and notice how in nine and ten, Christ's death is described in a way that picks up some of the language of verse two. Back in verse two when Paul says "if we have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" And in verses nine and ten, Paul wants to make sure that's the very experience Christ participated in, or that's the very way to understand Christ's death. So in verses nine and ten he says, "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he could not die again. Death no longer has mastery over him." It no longer rules over him, in the same way that verse six, sin no longer and death no longer rule over us. "The death he died, he died to sin once for all," which reflects verse two, "we have died to sin, but the life he lives he lives to God."

So the way Christ's death to sin is described in verses nine to ten is a reflection of the way our death to sin, is described back in verse two. So Paul wants to make clear that again, there's an inconsistency about God's people continuing in sin, because in fact, they've died to sin, that is, they have died to the tyranny and the power of sin, sin no longer rules over them because they have died, releasing them from the era, the present era and age under Adam and the rule and tyranny of sin. But the way that they have died, the death they have experienced is by being united to someone else's death, that is the death of Jesus Christ that brings to an end the old era. Paul is clear that more than just being united to Jesus' death, we have also been united to Jesus' resurrection, and so

therefore we have been raised to live a new life. So it's not just being released from the power of sin, but it is participating in a new life by virtue of being joined to Christ's resurrection.

Notice some of this language, though, for example in verse nine, "For we know that since he was raised from the dead, he can not die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." But to back up verse eight he says, "Now if we died with Christ we believe that we will also live with him." Notice the future tense grammatically, "We will live with him." Interpreters debate, should we take that as a strict future, that is, as a reference to the second coming, we will live with him in the future in the second coming, or is this more logical? If this is true, then this will also be true as well, so that the sharing in Christ's resurrection could be present as well.

No matter which way one takes it, both are clear in the context, it's clear that we already participate in Christ's resurrection through baptism, even though the ultimate experience of that resurrection, and the ultimate release from the tyranny of sin does not come until the future, the new creation, or the second coming of Christ. In this case, we still await ultimately the second coming of Christ, although again, even then, Paul has already emphasized our ability to walk or live in new life back in verse four of Romans chapter six.

So all of this is meant to argue to this point that the perspective articulated in the question in verse one is absurd. There is a contradiction and inconsistency about Christians or about the perspective of Christians sinning so that grace may increase. God's people have died to sin by virtue of being united to Christ though baptism in his death, God's people have died to sin so that there's an inconsistency of claiming to be united with Christ, yet to go on sinning. Paul says that's an absurdity because we've already experienced that death that breaks the power of sin in the old era that releases us from that and we've also been raised to participate in a new era and a new life by virtue of being joined to Jesus' death, burial and his resurrection. So death is necessary to bring to an end our existence in the old era. The only way to break the power of death or sin

over us is to die. And Paul is convinced that that has indeed taken place by virtue of being joined, although he doesn't explain exactly how we have been joined to Jesus Christ, he still is in fact convinced that Jesus' historical death in some way has become ours by being united with Christ. We participate in that so that his death is the death we experience that brings to an end the old era and its domination over us. But in the same way, we've also been united with his resurrection that ushers us into new life, causing us to participate in the new era of life, but more than that it gives us hope for future resurrection and ultimately overcoming the power of sin.

But the text then ends in verse eleven, in undoing this hypothetical objection in the form of this absurd question in six, one. Paul now ends by overturning that with an ethical exhortation in the form of a command. Notice that it begins with "In this way," that is based on what the author has just said in verses nine and ten, that is, in the same way, in what way? According to verse ten, "In the same way that Christ died a death to sin, so that sin no longer has mastery over him, in the same way, now he lives life to God," Paul says, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, in the same way that Christ is dead to sin, in the same way count yourselves dead to sin," but "in the same way," in verse ten, "that God lives, that Jesus lives, and the life he lives he lives to God, In the same way, consider yourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus." Again, it's through being united to Christ in his death and resurrection that Paul can say that this is all true. Interestingly that word "consider" is a term that suggests to, not only to consider, but to judge, to consider it the case. This is not simply a fiction, it's not the idea of consider something to be such, even though it really isn't, or think of it this way, even though it may not be the case. But instead, this is a judgment or consideration that is not a fiction, but it is a reality, it is to consider something true and valid because Paul said, indeed, it is a reality, we can consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, not as a fiction but as a reality because, in fact, we have indeed been joined to the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So this considering or judging in verse eleven is to be seen in light of the reality of Christ's own death and resurrection that now becomes ours by virtue of being united to Christ and participating in some way in his death and

resurrection.

Already but not Yet Tension

What I want you to note is it's intriguing that Paul ends this way with a command, because this seems rather, in some sense, to create a tension in the text, because note how Paul has used rather strong, unqualified language up until this point. Starting in verse two he says, "We have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?" He uses terms, such as in verse six, "We know that our old self was crucified," again using a language that refers to Christ's crucifixion, and then he says, "So that the body of sin might be done away with," the language was probably even stronger than that, "might be destroyed." And then, verse seven, "Anyone who has died has been freed from sin." So you have this strong, unqualified language. We've died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, the old self has been crucified, because of death we've been freed from sin. Sin is a power that exercised tyranny over people. Now Paul uses rather strong language, we have died, we have been crucified, the body of sin has been destroyed. We have been freed from sin.

So how is it that Paul ends this section with a command or and imperative? This seems to create a tension in the text. If we've really died to sin, if the body of sin has been destroyed, if the old self has been crucified, if through death we've been freed from sin, why does Paul have to now tell us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God? Why is it that we need to be told that and commanded that if that is in fact a reality? What I think we find here in the text is part of the tension we find throughout the New Testament between what is already true by virtue of being joined to Christ, but what is not yet complete or unconsummated because the end has not yet come in what Christian theologians identify as the second coming of Christ. Because the ultimate end time resurrection and new creation have not yet taken place. It's only been inaugurated in initial or partial form. It's already present, but has not yet arrived in its fullness and perfection. It's because of that tension, the tension between what is already true, what has already been begun and inaugurated, and what has not yet been complete and consummated. Christians live in the tension between those two. It's that tension that is reflected in Paul's language. So the already is, because we've already been joined to

Christ, the already means Paul can use absolute language. Yes, we've already died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, the old self has been crucified. We've already died to sin and so we've been freed from it. That is true already because we've been united to Christ. But because of the not yet, because of perfection, the final resurrection and the new creation have not yet arrived, we still then need the imperative, we need to consider that true and continue to live in between that tension, between what is already true, but what has not yet been completed and perfected.

In between that time, what is required of God's people is a process of considering and reckoning that we've died to sin, by virtue of being joined to Christ and we now live to God. Other terminology that New Testament students often use is the tension between the indicative and the imperative. The indicative are statements of what is already true by virtue of being joined to Christ, so the indicative is you've died to sin, why live in it any longer? The indicative is, the old self has been crucified, again using very strong language. The indicative is the body of sin has been destroyed. In verse seven, the further indicative, again anyone who has died to sin, anyone who has died has been freed from sin. So, verses two through ten are basically in the indicative, simply statements that are true by virtue of being joined to Christ.

The imperative then, comes in verse eleven, that balances the already with what is not yet the case. Also, the indicative grounds or makes possible the imperative. It's impossible to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God if that in fact is not true. The imperative has no teeth, it lacks force if it is not grounded in the indicative, that is the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is the reality we have been joined with.

So the indicative is why Paul can make these rather strong statements. You've died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, and the old self has been crucified. But this tension between what is already and what is still to be realized creates the need for the imperative. So Paul can end in verse eleven, "Therefore, you need to consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God." A command to live out life in this tension between the already and not yet, but an imperative, a command that is valid and not

necessary and is doable because it's grounded in the reality of Jesus' own death and resurrection that we have been joined to.

Following Context

Notice how chapter six one through eleven relates to what comes after it. Verse twelve is where English translations are interesting, you'll notice that a number of English translations break the verses up a little bit differently in six, one through eleven. The NIV text that I'm looking at, the original NIV begins a new paragraph at verse eleven. It sort of separates verse eleven off from verses one through ten. Probably because, again, verse eleven is imperative, it is a command for the readers to appropriate what is true in their own lives based on the reality of verses one through ten. But notice, verse eleven begins with a "therefore", which often is a strong way of linking something back to what has previously been said, and often is used to introduce a new thought, that probably verse eleven should go with one through ten and is the conclusion to one through ten. But then, verses twelve to the end of chapter six, seem to work out in more detail and spell out in more detail the command of verse eleven. So eleven is sort of an imperative, "consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God." But what does that look like, what does that entail? Chapter six, verses twelve and following to the end of the chapter spell out in more detail what that involves. So verse twelve begins, "therefore," that is based on verses one through ten, or one through eleven, especially verse eleven, "Therefore, because you have died with Christ, been united with Christ and died to sin through Christ, and been raised by identification with Christ to live a new life, therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey it's evil desires." So now, again, based on the indicative, of verses one through ten, here's the imperative. "Do not let sin reign in your moral bodies." Verse thirteen, "Do not offer parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life. And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are no longer under law, but under grace." So the rest of this chapter continues to unpack and spell out in more detail what is involved in the concluding command of one through eleven.

So what I've tried to do in looking at this text is apply the different methods, passage in terms of the vocabulary and meaning, looking at the, making a few grammatical comments, looking at its theological content and the theological themes, relating it to it's broader context, and the ultimate context of Romans one through six, but also how it grows out of what comes before it and how it merges into and prepares for what comes after it. So hopefully, as we worked through the text, you were able to identify the different methods that work; historical criticism, context work study, grammatical analysis, theological analysis, et cetera, to see how that works.

One of the things we didn't talk about explicitly was the Old Testament in the New. Obviously, that lies under the surface, based on the comparison between Christ and Adam from chapter five. Now that runs over into and continues to inform chapter six, one through eleven. But I'll stop there with the text, again hopefully you get a clearer idea of how the different methods can be implemented in understanding this text.

What I want to do in the next session, then, is look at another text, a very different text, with different literary features, different needs and raising different questions, and that is a passage from the book of Revelation, and we'll look at that in terms of the different methodologies and how that might affect the way we interpret that text.

Transcribed by Marin Butterworth
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt

Hermeneutics, Lecture 30

Interpreting Revelation 12 and 13

What I want to do in the last session is look at another New Testament text as an example of how to utilize and interpret using different methods that we've talked about in this course. Once again I won't necessarily explicitly refer to the method and say, "now I'm doing this" but hopefully you will be able to identify what method is used and how I utilize it as I work through a text. The text I want to focus on is Revelation chapter 12 and 13 and I want to begin by reading just chapter 12. A text like Revelation is very important to read and it begins by issuing a blessing to those who read and hear. So Revelation was first meant to be heard, so there is something about listening to the drama that goes on. I will only read chapter 12 and then just summarize chapter 13. So Revelation chapter 12:

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven

say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

And so then there is verse 1: "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea." And then what happens in chapter 13 is you find what Satan finds on the shore of the sea is that he summons two helpers, which we find in chapter 13 in the form of two other beasts: A beast that comes out of the sea and a beast that comes out of the earth. These two beasts are called upon by Satan to help him in pursuing the woman's offspring which she bore with them in an attempt to destroy them. Now before we understand this text it's important for us to place it in its historical context and particularly the historical context of the book of Revelation. Revelation is clearly addressed to seven churches that are located in the ancient area of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey.

All of those churches are ensconced upon the Greco-Roman empire that was under Roman rule. One of the features of the seven cities is that all of them have empirical temples that is they were erected in honor or they had temples that were devoted to pagan gods. It was expected that citizens who found themselves in the confines of the empire would engage in worship or activities of the god or for the emperor. Rome was viewed in

a positive light. Rome was responsible for giving peace to all of those who were in the empire or its borders. Everyone owed the empire because of the peace and prosperity, economically that people enjoyed. All of that was the result of Roman rule and the emperor. We have already seen the patron-client dynamic. The patron-client relationship primarily functioned under the Roman emperor. The emperor was seen as responsible for the well-being of the people, in terms of peace and well-being. Everyone had to express their gratitude. We have also seen that the political and economic life of Rome would have been intertwined with the religious life of Rome. All of these cities would have had temples constructed for the emperor, a sign really of an imperial cult, showing one's gratitude and allegiance to the emperor but also other Roman gods. In fact, most businesses including whether it was a textile business or commercial, or trade, would have been wrapped up with occasions of worshipping the emperor or pagan gods. So one can begin to see in the face of all these opportunities to participate in pagan worship or of the worship for Christians the questions arises, "to what extent can I participate in the culture of Rome?" which would include participating in its religious practices. To what extent can one do that and still keep their allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ.

Some Christians refused to participate in the life of Rome especially in the imperial cult and opportunities to worship the emperor and other pagan gods and to do that because it excluded Jesus Christ. Therefore they would suffer the consequences, like the loss of job or persecution. One person has already died according to Revelation but it doesn't appear as if there is an empire-wide or officially sanctioned persecution yet. Most of the persecution that arose and resulted in death would have been at a more local level and more sporadic and it would have been local elites pressuring Christians to conform. After all they don't want to their city to appear rebellious against Rome because they didn't participate or show allegiance to the emperor or other pagan gods. So, most of the pressure to conform came at a local level. Most Christians didn't get a second thought to what they were doing and they were quite willing to participate in the economy and whilst doing so, they had to participate in the worship side. So this is the situation that John appears to be addressing, the reality of Christians at that time. Most

likely, Revelation, amongst many dates given, was probably written towards the end of the first century; the middle of the last decade of the first century, under the emperor named Domitian.

Genres of Revelation

The genre of Revelation, unlike John 6, consists of a unique blend of a threefold genre. It belongs to the genre of an apocalypse. That is a type of literature that records the vision of a seer, who sees the heavenly world and of the future and couches that vision in highly symbolic language. The purpose of this is to help the reader see the reality of their situation in a new light. So by writing in the form of an apocalypse, John is trying to get his readers to see their situation in a new light, to get them, especially those who are compromising, to wake up and see what is really at stake, and give them a heavenly or transcendent perspective, that has been revealed to John which he passed on in writing to his churches.

We see that this is also a prophecy in that it is primarily a proclamation, a message that addresses in terms of comfort but also exhortation, in that it warns God's people. It's also an epistle in that the author communicates a message that is relevant to his reader and therefore it is something that could have been understood. So when we read Revelation 12 and 13, any interpretation of its images or symbols or the text as a whole, that were not able to be picked up on by the readers and understood, is probably to be rejected.

Context

So in light of that background, let's look at chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation. Revelation 12 and 13 follows a section in chapter 11 that discusses witnesses, which the discussion of the two witnesses portrayed the role of the church in the context of the trumpet players in chapters 8 and 9, modeled after the exodus. After portraying these seven trumpeters, John addresses the question in chapter 11, of what is the role of the church in all of this? And he portrays it in terms of two witnesses that the church is to be a faithful witness even in the face of suffering, in the midst of opposition and suffering. Interestingly, in chapter 11, John describes a beast that comes out of the abyss and makes

war with these two witnesses and actually defeats them. So chapters 12 and 13, I think, go into even more detail than chapter 11, to ask the question, "What is the source, the true source, of the church's conflict?" It goes into more detail concerning these two witnesses, the church, and the beast. Now we are going to see in chapters 12-13 further more detail between the beast and God's people, the church.

As we look at chapters 12 and 13 then we also need to ask, "What is the meaning of some of the symbols?" What events might be referred to in chapters 12 and 13? When do they occur? Are they describing things in the first century or events that will happen at the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world? So we'll need to deal with those questions that I think are unique to Revelation as an apocalypse, and as a prophecy as well. Chapters 12 and 13 need to be treated together because they form a unit; based primarily around these three beasts and also the woman and her offspring. We find three beasts or dragons. We find a dragon playing the central role in chapter 12. But in chapter 13 two other beastly creatures that are described like a dragon. We already see that the dragon ends up standing on the sea shore as if he is looking to summon more help and he does so by calling two beasts that resemble him in chapter 12. So chapters 12 and 13 form a unit and again these three beastly creatures probably form what some have called an unholy trinity, that is in contrast to the rest of the references made in Revelation, such as God the Almighty one, Jesus Christ the lamb, then finally the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is described in several ways, such as "the seven spirits of God."

Now as a parody of that, we find an unholy trinity of that, that is the dragon; and this beast number one, that is often referred to as the Anti-Christ, that which is anti or contrary to the person of Christ. Then finally, beast number three, which would correspond to the Holy Spirit, perhaps. Whether there is a precise correspondence they might overlap, there does seem to be a parody between the three beastly characters here and the trinity of God, his son Jesus Christ and the Spirit, which is already referred to back in chapter 1.

Analysis

So, we will narrow it down and look at chapters 12 and 13 in more detail. Starting with 12, what we want to do is be alert to the symbols and what they could possibly mean and how they are referred to and also to how their character develops. Again, we said the genre of an apocalypse is a narrative of a visionary experience, an account that has a story and a narrative, and it's not enough just to isolate the symbols and what they mean but to be alert to the whole text and what it's doing. So the first interesting symbol we are introduced to in chapter 12 is this woman with twelve stars on her head and much of this comes from the Old Testament. Probably the woman here is symbolic of Old Testament Israel and we'll see though that in the rest of the chapter this reference to Israel as God's people will merge into Jesus's own followers, who are described right at the end of chapter 12. They are described as those who keep the testimony of Jesus which is clearly a reference to his church and Jesus' followers. So in a sense we're going to see the one people of God from the perspective of Israel but also the people of God through Jesus Christ that includes Gentiles, as well, his church. Although the author doesn't clearly indicate, one does merge into the other. He's mainly interested in portraying the God's people of Israel and the people of the church, as well.

But we are going to see that chapter 12 seems to follow a story beginning with this woman who probably represents God's people in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel. This woman is portrayed as about to give birth to a child. Before we look at the identity of that child, the author introduces another figure: this hideous dragon whose function in this text is to pursue the woman because she is pregnant with a child who is identified clearly to point an Old Testament allusion. This child is identified as a male child who rules all the nations with an iron scepter. This is a clear allusion back to Psalm 2:8, an Old Testament Psalm that is often seen as depicting a royal Psalm or a Messianic Psalm that is picked up in the Old Testament in reference to Jesus Christ. So the author, by alluding to the Old Testament makes it clear that this child is none other than Jesus Christ, the Messianic ruler, the Son of David, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter, as a fulfillment of Psalm chapter 2.

He pursues the woman in order to devour and destroy this child, but as the text

clearly indicates, the child is rescued from the teeth of this dragon and is raised up and sent to heaven, therefore, frustrating the dragon and depriving it of its prey. Now one interesting thing in this story, as told in this text, reflects another common story told in the Greco-Roman world. There a number of Greco-Roman myths that follow a similar story or narrative, which is that a goddess is about to give birth to a son and a dragon who is about to devour the son. Sometimes the woman gives birth to the son but other times the son is taken to an island and grows up and then comes back and slays the dragon that was pursuing the woman in the first place. Usually the son is a god, a Greco-Roman god. But John seems to take that story, not to buy into a common myth, but to follow that the story as historical reality. It's difficult to read Revelation 12 and not see at least in some form, in a very symbolic form, the birth of Christ. But notice it's compressed: no sooner is the child born than he is swept off and raised to heaven. So in this, in compressed form, we see reference to birth, resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven, thus irritating the dragon and we see the dragon's attempt to destroy and kill the son.

Old Testament in the New Testament

It is very interesting that the dragon later on is identified by linking the dragon to an Old Testament reference. He says, "the dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil that leads the whole world astray." That reference to the ancient serpent clearly identifies the dragon of Revelation 12 with the serpent that deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and identifies him as the devil or Satan, using terms we find elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to this primary antagonist of God and his purposes. We'll return to that in just a moment, that reference to Genesis.

There are a couple of other important references. Notice that this woman flees to the desert. Again we shouldn't ask questions about where this geographically takes place or what is going on. The desert is simply symbolic of preservation at this point. So by having this woman flee to the desert, the idea of this is now that God protects his people. Though the dragon pursues her, God keeps and protects her and cares for her. So the woman is not referring to an actual literal woman but is symbolic. We sometimes reflect on the Old Testament referring to God's people as a woman, a wife, as the bride of

Yahweh or something like that. So even in the Old Testament you often find a woman symbolizing the people of God, Israel. So by having this woman flee into the desert, I think, is a clear indicator of her preservation and safety, and God keeping her and caring for her even with the wrath of this dragon figure who is identified as Satan.

But a further reference is, following that you have this interesting story in verses 7-9 of Satan warring with angels and being defeated and cast out of heaven. The question is when does this take place? Where in the text does this take place? Most likely this is not chronologically happening after 1-6, saying that the dragon did this and then following that something else happened in history. Verses 7-12 are going back and explaining in more detail what happens in verses 1-6. And so you have this battle between Michael and his angels. Remember apocalyptic literature deals with transcendent and heavenly reality as a reflection of what is happening on earth. So now, in true apocalyptic fashion, John sees this vision of this war in heaven where Michael and his angels are fighting against this dragon that we have been introduced to in verses 1-6 and his minions or his angels as they fight and engage in battle and in verses 8 and 9. Satan is cast down and is defeated. And one wants to know when did this take place and what event is this referring to. I think the key is to read verses 10-12, and particularly verses 10 and 11: "then I heard a loud voice." Voices in Revelation often interpret events so you'll find certain persons, voices or heavenly hymns or angelic beings saying things. Often the speeches or voices in songs in Revelation interpret events that take place in Revelation. I think that verse 10 and 11 interpret this probably as Michael and his angels defeating the dragon and his "angels." Verse 11: I'll read it again: "then I heard a loud voice saying now have come the power and salvation and kingdom of God and the authority of his Christ for the accuser of our brothers who accused them for day and night has been hurled down." This is 7 through 9. They overcame them (these accusers) which I take it are God's people. They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony.

I think verses 7 through 9 is again a symbolic portrayal of the defeat of Satan and his angels at the defeat of Jesus Christ. The blood of the lamb, or the death of Jesus

Christ was the ultimate defeat of Satan and his angels. And as I said, 7 through 10 is interpreted as this voice in 10 thru 12 further describes what is going on in 1 through 6. The true source of Satan's death, then, is Jesus Christ on the cross. This further explains why he tries to devour the woman and as he tries to go over the woman and why she needs to be put in the desert to be rescued and secured is verse 12. The devil, the dragon, that has been cast down and is now filled with fury because he knows that his time is short.

So what we are going to read in the rest of 12 and 13 is a result of what happens in the first part of chapter 12. Satan has been defeated and cast down. He has been deprived of his ability to destroy the child. Now because he has been defeated, he has been cast out of heaven at the time of Jesus Christ, the blood of Christ, the death of Christ has spelled the defeat of the dragon. So now that his time is short he is going to release his wrath and fury on the woman and her offspring.

So that brings us to the rest of chapter 12. When the dragon saw he has been hurled down, now he goes after the woman, which we said symbolizes God's people. Now the woman is probably more than just the people of Israel and now includes, as chapter 12 ends, those who keep God's commands and the testimony of Jesus Christ, which would clearly be a reference to the new people of God, both Jew and Gentile, making up the church that belonged to Jesus Christ, and God's people by virtue of belonging to Christ.

Now there is an interesting contrast going on here. Again, if we try to make sense of it at a literal level, we'll result in doing one thing with it; but I think the best way of making sense of it is to read it symbolically. As the genre of Revelation asks us to read it, notice that there is a contrast between the woman and her offspring. If woman refers to the people of God, then who are the woman's offspring? Are they someone else? Is the woman Israel and her offspring are someone else, the church perhaps? Or Gentiles? How are we to understand the woman and her offspring? Are these two separate entities? If we read it literally that would seem to be the case but I think it is better to understand it in true apocalyptic fashion we need to read this symbolically. So the woman and her

offspring (which doesn't make sense at a literal level), however, at a symbolic level they probably both refer to the same thing. The woman and her offspring are probably both symbolic of the people of God. But they are probably symbolic of the people of God from two different perspectives. Notice as we have already said, the woman back in verse 6 flees to the desert, to a place already prepared by God, where she is taken care of for 1260 days. And then notice in verse 14: the dragon now goes off to the woman and says based on the fact that he was not able to destroy this child, Jesus Christ, who is to rule the nations with an iron scepter. Based on the fact it was through his death and resurrection that Satan has been destroyed, cast out of heaven and defeated. Now in his anger, he goes after this woman.

In verse 14, the woman was given two great wings like an eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert where she would be taken care for a time, times, and half a time out of the serpents reach. So in both of these images you have the woman going to a place where she is preserved and taken care of, out of the reach of Satan. Yet after that happens, starting in verse 17, after all the attempts to destroy this woman, even when he could seem to get to her, the earth opens up and devours Satan's attempt to destroy the woman. The woman is preserved; Satan can't get at her. So he gets angry in verse 17 and goes after the rest of her offspring who apparently he is able to get at.

So what are we to make of this? If the woman and the children get at the same thing, how can Satan get at the offspring but not the woman? I think this is John's way of showing that God's people, the church, are kept and preserved, and ultimately Satan cannot get at them and destroy them. Yet, that's the perspective of the woman, yet, from the perspective of her offspring God's people might suffer for persecutions, some of them even death, yet ultimately God's people, especially spiritually, cannot be harmed. Persecution cannot serve to destroy God's relationship of God's people to God himself. We will see ultimately, through new creation, that God will indeed vindicate his people so that ultimately, no matter how much Satan can cause problems for God's people physically through persecution, from the perspective of the offspring, even though he can

cause problems for the church physically and temporally, from the perspective of the woman, ultimately the church cannot be harmed or destroyed. They are still God's people and he will keep his promises to them. So the woman and her offspring probably referred to the same entity, yet it's looked at from two different perspectives. They're preserved spiritually yet they are still subject to persecution at the hands of this dragon.

The last two things I want to talk about is, we have already talked about that number of three and a half years in verse 14 or time, times, and half a time. I have already suggested that this language should not be taken literally to refer to a specific time in the past or in the future but the three and a half years is symbolic of the entire time of the church's persecution, starting in the first century. Again, John is trying to help the churches make sense of what it is they are experiencing under Roman rule, especially for Christians who are suffering but even for those who are not yet need to be aware of the need to stop compromising and embrace Jesus Christ no matter what the consequences. Now John is trying to help them understand the true nature of their conflict. I take it as the three and a half years is referring to the entire period of the church's existence, as it struggles with persecution that is primarily instigated by Satan. It is the whole entire period of the church's conflict with the world that John is now making clear as by no one but Satan himself.

One other thing to mention, to add to this story, is to go back to that reference to Satan in verse 9, where he is described as the serpent of old, making a clear inter-textual connection to Genesis chapter 3. I want to look at this text again, but first of all I want to read Genesis 3:15-16 and then with that text resonating in our ears go back to Revelation 12 and 13 and note possible correspondences. Now in Genesis 3, right after Satan tempts Adam and Eve to sin through deception. Notice it again in verse 9 of chapter 12 of Revelation, the dragon is called "the one who leads the whole world astray." Satan is displayed primarily as a deceiver and that's exactly how he gets Adam and Eve to sin, by deceiving them. But following that, God then begins to speak to the serpent and to the woman in verses 15 and 16. To the serpent he says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you

will strike his heel." And then verse 16, to the woman he says "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe, in painful labor you will give birth to children." Now keep all of those elements in mind and then go back and read Revelation chapter 12 and 13. Notice that it begins with a conflict between the woman and the dragon, a battle over her son. And even after the son is born the dragon goes after the woman. So that is the first person of the Genesis 3 verse 15. But then also note that the dragon ends up going not after the woman but after the woman's seed, notice that language of seed. But then one could ask, doesn't the dragon's seed go after the woman's seed? So this is where chapter 13 comes in of Revelation. These two beastly figures are the seed of the dragon. They are described just like him. He stands on the sea shore at the end of chapter 12 to summon them. So you have both of those elements: there is conflict between the dragon and the woman in chapter 12 and there is also conflict between the dragon seen in chapter 13 and the woman's seen in chapter 12 and 13.

Notice that Genesis account, though, in 3:15 the bruising the heel which simply may refer to Satan going after the son. So he's able to bruise his heel especially after the death of Jesus Christ. But then it says that "the woman's seed will crush his head," and the question is: where do we find the head of the dragon crushed? And in a way you could infer that the battle and defeat of Satan in Rev. 12:7-12 is the crushing of Satan's head, but if you jump over to one of the dragon's offspring, notice that beast number one, who is described just like the dragon, notice what is said about him. Verse 3 of chapter 13 describing this beast, it says "one of the heads of the beast seemed to have a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed."

Now there may be other things going on, but it appears to me, two in particular. Number one I think this is a parody of Jesus Christ. In other words, it's describing the beast in the same way that Jesus Christ was dead and is now alive like in Revelation. Now the beast appears to be able to mimic Christ, he's so powerful. But second, I think this is probably an allusion back to the Genesis account. This is the crushing blow to the head of dragon, through the crushing of the head of one of his followers, one of his offspring.

Also notice another interesting thing; at the beginning of chapter 12. Notice how the woman is described: she was pregnant and cried out in pain, as about to give birth. This probably reflects Genesis 3:16 and the promise that the woman would give birth through pain that she would give birth to children; that she would cry out in pain.

Now the question is: what is the significance of this? What might be the interpretive importance of this allusion to Genesis chapter 3:16? How does that make a difference in the meaning of the text? I think it might be this: we have already seen one of the things going on in chapters 12 and 13 where the author is trying to help his readers understand the true nature of their conflict, to go back to the era of Christians living in the Roman Empire, many of them facing hostility at the hands of Rome. This now is explaining the true nature of their conflict.

What John does is that he places their conflict in the first century in part of a larger story or narrative that goes all the way back to creation, as if John wants to tell his readers, what you are experiencing in Rome should not be a surprise; it's nothing less than the age old conflict that goes all the way back to creation. What you see going on is simply this ongoing conflict that goes all the way back to the beginning of creation. Now you see it emerging again in your story, although the linchpin is the death blow. Satan is already defeated and he knows his time is short. The Christians in Asia Minor in the first century, and we might indeed say any Christians that find themselves in similar situations, can take heart because number one they know this is nothing less than an age old story with conflict that goes all the way back to creation. Second, Christ has already defeated the death blow and the enemy, the primordial enemy, Satan, and therefore his time is short. Therefore they can respond appropriately and they can hang on and not become overwhelmed and discouraged because now they are able to see their situation from a new perspective and in a new light.

So these chapters portray them and portray the true nature of the church's struggle in the first century. Again empirically they look out and see the Roman Empire and the pressure to conform and all that the Roman Empire does, but John then in true apocalyptic fashion portrays a different perspective and says that the things aren't really

as they appear. But behind what you see in the world is this age long struggle and even a heavenly battle that determines what is going on in the present. It helps them put their conflict in the context of God's larger, bigger perspective for the world and his people.

In chapter 13, then, we are introduced to two of Satan's cohorts, as he stands on the sea and summons two other followers that emerge from both the earth and the sea. These two beasts probably have their background in both the Old Testament. Sometimes you find beastly figures or dragon like figures. We looked at Isaiah chapter 51 in verse 9, the Rahab, the serpent that is pierced through, the serpent of the sea. As you find this idea of beast associated with the sea in apocalyptic literature also in the Old Testament sometimes you find the notion of two beasts, often labeled the Behemoth and the Leviathan. John may have that text and other texts in mind but he's clearly drawing on other imagery taking beasts or dragon like figures and using them symbolically to refer to various persons and nations.

So when I read this text you need to first ask what is the meaning or connotation communicated by these beastly creatures and second, what might they do? So first of all, by using beastly serpentine dragon like figures, whether in the Old Testament or apocalyptic literature or even in Greco-Roman literature, a beast or a serpent like figure usually symbolizes features of evil and chaos, antagonism, destruction, everything opposed to life and order. So by portraying a beast, I think John wants to communicate those things, whatever he is referring to he wants to associate it to beastly figures of the past or these beastly figures in other literature, that is, those persons, or events, or nations associated with evil and chaos and which are inimical and demonic; that which is destructive.

The question is though, to what do the beasts in chapter 13 refer? Starting with the first one, I find it very difficult with the first one that a first century reader, and again, remember that Revelation is a letter, it's a prophecy, it's trying to communicate a message to the first readers to make sense of their situation. I find it difficult that a first century reader could identify this beast with anything or anyone other than first century Rome and perhaps the Roman emperor. So what the author is doing then is trying to get

the readers look out in their first century context and see this glorious, colossal Roman Empire and see the emperor on this throne and he's responsible for peace, blessings and prosperity and they are called upon to give him allegiance.

What is the effect of John's portraying of the Roman Empire or the emperor himself as a beastly figure? It's to get the readers to see that it's not as it appears. Actually, what lies behind the Roman Empire and the emperor is this beastly figure that is associated with nothing less than the dragon, this age old serpent that goes all the way back to the creation narrative. In fact, notice how this beast is described, it says "men worshipped the dragon" because he had given authority to the beast. So the dragon in chapter 12 gives his authority to the beast and so the beast is kind of now the representative of the dragon and the sole goal is to point the people towards the beast. So this to be involved in Roman society and Roman commerce and participate in opportunities to worship and show allegiance to the emperor is not as innocuous as it seems.

Now John says "behind it is nothing less than worshipping the dragon himself." But who is the second beast? In others words, beast number one is the empire, the emperor who demands worship, who rules over the entire earth in the form of the Roman Empire and perhaps the emperor. Who is beast number two? Most likely the second beast you'll notice as you read verses 11 through 18 in Revelation 13 that the second beast is described much like the beast number one and also the dragon. Notice verse eleven: "he had two horns like a lamb but he spoke like a dragon." So in a way, the beast number two is an offspring of the dragon and he represents the dragon. But it goes on and says "he exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf." So the main function of the second beast, the beast from the land, in verses 11 through 18, is to point to and draw attention to and get people to focus on beast number one: the Roman Empire and the emperor. Most likely, beast number two symbolized the local elites who fostered and even demanded that people participate in pagan worship or even emperor worship, as a form of participating in the local economy or the local temples that were built and existed in the seven cities to which Revelation is addressed. Most likely the second beast

represents the elite or at least anyone who promotes worshipping or enforces worshipping the Roman Empire and the Roman emperor, through occasions for emperor worship. It is the whole system and imperial cult, even pagan worship directing attention to Rome, the goddess Roma. Probably beast number two would represent anyone who was responsible for enforcing persons to participate in that.

Verse 14 is an interesting one and in verse 13 it says, "He, the second beast, performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of people. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast, who was wounded by the sword, yet lived. Again the setting up of the image as the beast, is it possible that it refers to different local shrines set up in honor of the emperor? But what I want you to notice is the connection between deceiving again and the description of the dragon back in verse 9: "he leads the whole world astray."

So at the heart of all that John is saying that as the people look out and see this colossal empire and all the benefits that it provides and all the glamour and glitter of the Roman Empire, what John wants to see is that this is part of the ploy, the deceptive ploy, that ultimately goes back to Satan himself, to deceive the readers into following the beast. They are attempting to deceive the readers into thinking that they can compromise their faith in Jesus Christ, their allegiance to Jesus Christ and God, by participating in the idolatrous system of the Roman Empire.

Now John, do you see what he is doing, is shedding a new light on what is going on in first century Rome. In fact, note that the second beast that is representing those who are in charge of promoting the first beast, the Roman Empire and emperor, they are able to even level economic sanctions in verse 16 and 17, for those who refuse to comply.

Comments on 666: Rev 13:18

Verse 18, I can hardly end without saying something about verse 18. This is the famous number 666 and there have been all sorts of wild things done with that. One instance I always like to tell is one time when I was living in Minnesota in the USA, I

went to a Christian music festival and we had to have wrist tags to get in and they all had a number and for almost everyone the first 6 numbers were identical, but the last three were the ones that changed, that was your identification to leave and get back into the events. I looked at mine and the last three numbers were 666 and some individuals may have made a big deal out of that and even refused to wear something like that, but I think of that in terms of what is going on in this text and try to relate that to what is going on in our modern day phenomena. Sometimes someone might have a phone number with 666 or you will see license plates with 666 and what do we make of those things in light of what is going on in Revelation?

First of all, the first obvious principle to apply when thinking about modern day applications of this text is once again to evoke the principle of what John would have intended and what would have most likely been something that his readers could have understood and this in my mind rules all kinds of modern day speculations regarding computer chips that are imbedded in someone or credit cards or the internet or identifying specific persons like Saddam Hussein. All of that is far beyond the horizons of the first century author reader.

Furthermore, notice that this is not accidental, this is not just the coincidental occurrence of the number 666, especially when it comes after the number 665 and before 667, but this is an intentional receiving of this mark by those who will indeed pay allegiance to and even worship the beast. So these are not the 666 in Revelation 13. It is not just a coincidental appearance of the number, it's an intentional act on the part of the reader who receives it and embraces it and participates in it whatever it is.

Let me say two things: number one, most likely this is to be seen symbolically as the counterpart of chapter 7, where the saints also receive a seal or a mark indicating their identification. The seal or the mark here, 666, is meant to indicate the true identification of the followers of the first beast, the Roman Empire or the emperor. But second, out of all the possibilities I think there are two that are compelling, is the number 666 probably corresponds to at least one spelling of the name of "Nero," one of the more well-known Caesars. Revelation appears to have been written well after Nero, so what John may be

doing is simply using Nero, who was known for his harsh treatment, his cruelty and his evilness, as a symbol or a model of what's going on in the reader's present day. 666 may be a way of them saying what's going on is similar to what went on with Nero. It is written in the same once again representing evil and chaos, evil in an attempt to destroy God's people now incarnated again with the Emperor and the situation that the readers face.

Second, it is also possible that 666 falls short of the perfect number 7, 666 corresponding to the evil trinity, the dragon, beast number one and beast number two that fall short of the perfect number of seven; perhaps falling short of the godly trinity of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Application

But in any case, again to put this case together, Revelation chapters 12 and 13 function in the book to explore and explain, at a deeper level, in more detail, the true nature of the conflict of the people of the first century, and I would argue, any age. The pure nature of the conflict is not merely a physical one, but behind it lies a spiritual battle, a spiritual conflict, the tempts of Satan and his ability to revitalize this ongoing battle, his ability to inspire human persons and institutions to set themselves up as God, arrogantly as God, and to oppose and even kill God's people. Chapter 12 and 13 then help us. They help God's people come to grips with the true nature of the struggle and to be able to respond to it appropriately, to be able to resist ungodly oppressive powers but be able persevere under pressure and even the ultimate price of martyrdom or death. In a sense the Revelation chapters 12 and 13 is a symbolic narrative of what Paul says in Ephesians 6 are "battles not in flesh and blood but against the powers and authorities and rulers of the heavenly realms." Revelation 12 and 13 reminds its readers that your true battle is not with flesh and blood, not that it's not a real battle, that is not what John or Paul is saying, but the battle is not one of flesh and blood, with just the rulers and authorities of the earthly realm, of the Emperor or the Roman Empire, but your true battle is a spiritual one with the rulers and leaders in the heavenly realm which in true apocalyptic fashion, lies behind the earthly battles that you face. So knowing the true nature of the battle for

the readers of the first century or any century, are better equipped to respond to any society or government or person that exalts themselves as God and to resist that but also to rise up and persevere and endure in the face of oppression and persecution

So, this is one more example of how applications of various interpretive methodologies can help us to understand the text and to come to grips of its meaning in light of its original, historical context but also to apply avenues for how we relate that text to ourselves as God's people who confess God's word as inspired Scripture and through which God continues to speak to his people today.

Transcribed by Alex Bostian
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt