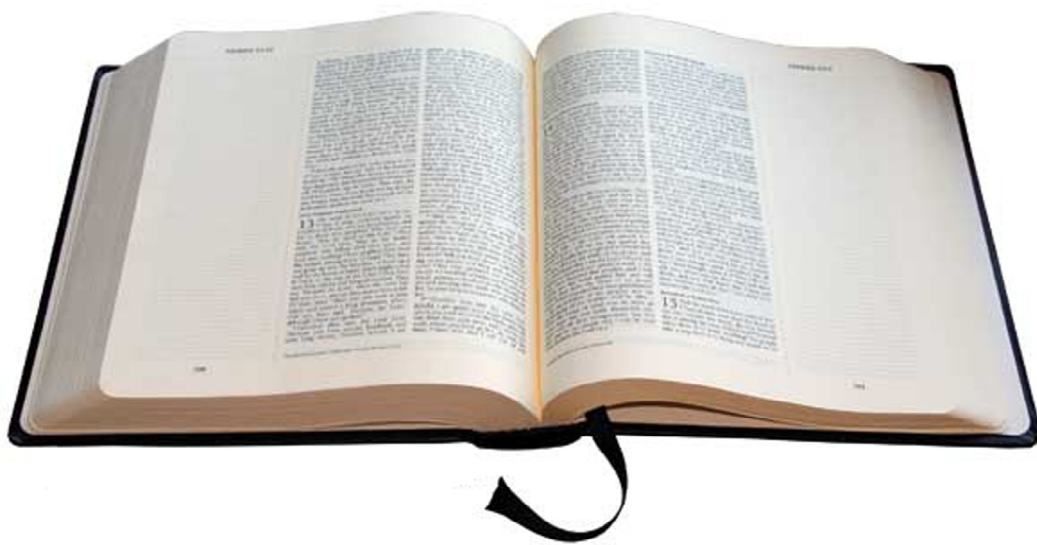


Equipping God's people to delight in His glory and declare that glory to the nations.

STUDYING SCRIPTURE: Hermeneutics for the Church

FOUNDATIONS

Year 1 | Fall 2



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Approach to Course Instruction

Over Arching Question

In this course we are seeking to ask the question, “How are we to study the Scriptures?” In grappling with this question, we will focus on the development of a theological and hermeneutical framework that will aid in interpreting the Bible.

Nature of Instruction

The material in this course is designed with a knowledge of and submission to, first and foremost the Scriptures, and secondly, the audience. While FOUNDATIONS is not a seminary classroom, studying Scripture requires much devotion and development on the part of the faithful exegete.

Studying Scripture: Hermeneutics for the Church is an overview of the essential elements and foundational beliefs that are involved in the interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God. “Hermeneutics” is the art or science of interpretation. In our case, we will be engaging in “Biblical Hermeneutics.” Unpacking this concept will involve not only studying the Bible itself, but also investigating the way in which that study is carried out. Further, the primary goal of the course will be to develop sound principles of interpretation that have an eye toward the theological purpose of Scripture and the edification of the local church. Our hope is that by engaging in this hermeneutical task, you will deepen your capacity to pursue biblical wisdom through “rightly handling the word of truth.”



1 | A Theology of the Scriptures

Theology (thinking about God) and hermeneutics (studying the Scriptures) are essentially linked. In other words, what we believe affects how we read the Scriptures and what we read from the Scriptures informs what we believe. For evangelicals (in particular, Baptists) there are some basic beliefs that drive us to have a keen interest in the truths of the Bible.

In the FOUNDATIONS curriculum, learners begin with a study of the gospel of God. The saving work of God makes possible the reconciliation between God and humans. This reconciliation is the work of the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The reconciliation requires the revelation of God including His holiness/justice and mercy/grace. The revelation of God's character and purposes of judgment, yet deliverance is the content of the gospel. The gospel (described in its fullness) serves as a central theme or summary of Scripture. The Scriptures tell the story of good news of the gospel in both the Old and New Testaments and are the objective revelation of God Himself.

Starting Points

This theological overview of the nature of the Scriptures draws us to the five starting points for studying the Scriptures. Five starting points that serve as a framework for interpreting the Scriptures are a commitment to the inspiration, revelation, authority, sufficiency and clarity of the biblical text.

1 | *Inspiration*

The biblical text is an inspired text. An affirmation of inspiration leads to further commitments regarding Scripture's truthfulness, theological purpose and appropriate use (corporate or personal). Inspiration of the canonical text also points to the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in interpretation. Since the Word of God is inspired by the Spirit of God, the Word and Spirit are inseparable in biblical interpretation. The Holy Spirit is a required aid for interpretation.

Selected Biblical texts that affirm inspiration of the Bible:

- ▶ **2 Timothy 3:16-17** | All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- ▶ **2 Peter 1:20-21** | But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 | *Revelation*

The Scripture is the only definitive source for special revelation of God's character and purpose. While God has demonstrated Himself through His creative work and His providential guidance of history (general revelation), these events are only revelatory in a specific sense as



they are interpreted through the texts of Scripture. Therefore, to access the revelation of God, a full range of hermeneutical tools must be used to garner the precious revelation of God in Christ found in the biblical text.

Selected Biblical texts that affirm revelation in the Bible:

- **Hebrews 1:1-2** | God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
- **Luke 24:25-27** | And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.
- **Luke 24:44-47** | Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
- **John 5:39-6:1** | “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. 41 “I do not receive glory from men; 42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. 43 “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? 45 “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46 “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47 “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

3 | *Authority*

Due to the Scripture’s inspired and revelatory status, it holds the final authority for both doctrine and practice. As a corporate body, the local church is to conform all things to the authority of the Word of God. Personally, each believer should endeavor to make the Scripture’s wisdom the prime force for thinking (meditation and “worldview”) and actions (life decisions and habits).

Selected Biblical texts that affirm authority of the Bible:

- **Deuteronomy 31:24-26** | It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,



25 that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26 “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.

- **Deuteronomy 32:45-47** | When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them, “Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. 47 “For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”
- **Matthew 5:17-19** | “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- **2 Peter 3:1-2** | This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.

4 | *Sufficiency*

Due to their status as inspired revelation, the Scriptures are sufficient for use in evangelistic expression, doctrinal development, wise counsel and promoting Christian piety.

Selected Biblical texts that affirm sufficiency of the Bible:

- **Luke 16:29-31 29** | “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”
- **Acts 17:2-3** | And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.”

5 | *Clarity*

The clarity of Scripture means that it has the ability to communicate meaning in the areas related to the authorial intent. In other words, the inspired revelation of the biblical text will require interpretation, but it can achieve the Spirit’s purpose of revealing God. Essential doctrines for the church and Christian practices are delineated with enough clarity to



arrive at valid interpretations of biblical texts.

Selected Biblical texts that affirm clarity of the Bible:

- **Nehemiah 8:8** | They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.
- **Acts 17:10-11** | The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

The five starting points mentioned above should inform our approach to interpreting the Bible. This approach should give clear attention to the canonical and compositional features of the biblical text to arrive at a rich, theological interpretation. The theological produce of the interpretative study utilizing this canonical and compositional hermeneutic will then be the raw material for our doctrinal teachings and personal piety.

The next sessions of the *Studying Scripture* course will explore different features of the biblical text that reflect the theology of the Bible presented in this introductory lesson. These sessions will focus primarily on features of the biblical texts that aid in their interpretation.

by Jason Lee and Ched Spellman

Next Lesson: Four Choices, pt. 1



2 | Four Choices, pt. 1

Starting with these five commitments (inspiration, revelation, authority, sufficiency and clarity) on the nature of the biblical text creates four other hermeneutical choices. The four choices are: text or event, canonical or critical, confession or descriptive and diachronic or synchronic. In the following two lessons, they are outlined with some rationale for the preferred option in each choice.

Text or Event

Text

The “text” option locates revelation in the text itself and focuses interpretation on the words and features of the text as a text. A text-oriented approach makes exegesis and the theological reflection on scripture essential to unlocking revelation.

Taking this approach does not mean that the interpreter doubts the historicity of the biblical events. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the way the biblical authors have truthfully portrayed and interpreted those events.

Affirming the text of Scripture as the locus of revelation allows other textual concepts to apply. One of these concepts involves the process of communication. As a text, the Bible has an author who intends to communicate some information to his reader. In writing his text, the author has anticipated the reader’s questions and responses. Part of the role of the reader, then, is to pay attention to these features of the text.

A text has numerous possibilities for clues to meaning (eg. repetition, structure, and genre). Consequently, the tools needed to unlock this textual meaning should take into account its character as a text.

Event

The “event” option locates revelation in the events recorded in Scripture and focuses interpretation on better understanding those events that have taken place. The object of study is the event itself.

Evangelicals who take this approach oftentimes locate revelation in “salvation history.” If this is the case, then a necessary feature of Scripture must be its accurate/truthful presentation of those saving events. If revelation is event-based, then the usefulness of a given passage or narrative is found in its proximity to the event or how clearly it describes the details of the event.

One appealing feature of this approach is its connection to the apologetic task of demonstrating the historical reality of the biblical events. However, this historical emphasis tends to deemphasize textual clues for meaning and, one could say, causes the “eclipse” of the biblical narrative.

Because the biblical writers have undertaken to interpret the events recorded in Scripture for us, our task as interpreters should focus on understanding their words and their point of view. The tools best suited for this task are ones that highlight textual features (literary techniques; point of view; genre selection; editorial commentary) rather than historical features (archeological findings; historical background not



mentioned in the text; social and cultural studies).

The following section is excerpted from John Sailhamer's *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*:¹

A text-oriented approach has these consequences:

1. The words of Scripture and the meaning of the biblical author are the first and primary goal.
2. Though there was inevitably revelation of some sort in God's actions in history, our only access to divine revelation now is through the interpretation of the inspired writers in the text of Scripture.
3. There is an important distinction between the text of Scripture and the prehistory of that text. It is the written text as we have it in its final form that is inspired and useful for instruction. It is the message of this text that is the locus of revelation. Whatever prehistory we may be able to reconstruct for the text, it is not a source of revelation or inspired instruction.
4. There is also an important distinction between the text of Scripture and its socio-religious context. The text means what the author intends it to mean. It means, in fact, what it says. The text may have played a specific role within the needs and events of its own day, but that role is not to be taken as the inspired meaning of the text. The socio-religious role of the Scriptures may be of historical or sociological interest, but it is not a part of the inspired meaning of the text.
5. There is an important distinction between the text and the truths of reason and personal experience. The meaning of the text is what the text says (author's intent). This textual meaning should not be mixed or confused with what we may know from science or personal experience. This does not mean that the two sources of truth, revelation and reason, necessarily stand in opposition to each other. It only means that the two approaches should be allowed to operate on their own, within their own fields of knowledge. When rightly understood on their own terms, the two approaches can then be compared and, we believe, found to be compatible.
6. There is an important distinction between the text and the subsequent interpretations of the text. Every text of Scripture has its own history of interpretation. The meaning of the text remains that of the original author and not the interpretation of later generations. This is true even when the later interpretation happens to be within the Bible itself, that is, "inter-biblical." A text-oriented approach rejects the various attempts to impose later interpretation onto the original author's meaning.

Next lesson: Four Choices, pt. 2



¹John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, pp.84-85. Sailhamer lists seven consequences.

3 | Four Choices, pt. 2

This session continues to investigate the four hermeneutical choices that result from our commitment concerning the nature of the biblical text (inspiration, revelation, authority, sufficiency and clarity). The first hermeneutical choice, text or event, comprises session two.

Canonical or Critical

Canonical

The canonical option focuses on the Scriptures “as we have them now” (final form of the canon) as the proper object of study.

A canonical approach receives the text at face value and utilizes tools that assume the legitimacy of the whole. The canonical approach encouraged here also affirms inspiration at the level of the final form of the canon. So, it recognizes the compositional process which produces a canon, but focuses on the results of the process rather than the process itself.

In the formation of the canon, the biblical authors and editors assemble and arrange the various documents in a way that demonstrates coherence and not necessarily uniformity in the text as a whole. The interpreter will then attempt to discern meaning from the whole canonical context as well as the individual parts. The canonical context serves as a framework for the smaller units (books, chapters, selected passages).

The final canonical form shows the effect of the canonical process and this canonical shaping should figure into the interpretative process. Textual features such as introductions, conclusions and superscripts are typical places to find the influence of canonical shaping.

Critical

The “critical” option utilizes various sources of information in order to reconstruct earlier or original sources of the Scriptures and focuses interpretation on this critically reconstructed text.

A critical approach focuses on the pre-canonical history of the text. Some of the tools used in the critical approach include literary criticism, source criticism and form criticism. These tools attempt to discern the building units of a text along with possible theological or socio-religious influences. These influences are often studied in the context of hypothetical sources that lie behind the construction of a text.

In a critical approach, various aspects of the text are isolated and interpreted individually. The canonical approach notes that there were possible sources, but that these varying elements have been pulled together in the text and given a meaning by the biblical writers. The shape of this final form should be the focus of our interpretive work.

Confessional or Descriptive

Confessional

In a confessional approach, there is an authoritative meaning which extends to contemporary readers.



To read the Bible as under authority (confessional) versus in authority (descriptive) is the main difference in these approaches. This approach is labeled confessional because the nature of Scripture as divine revelation requires a special hermeneutic (*hermeneutica sacra*). Perhaps the main point of this sacred hermeneutic is that since the biblical text is inspired by the Holy Spirit, true interpreters must be believers and led by the Holy Spirit. Due to inspiration, the Scriptures have the qualities of inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. However, due to the inadequacies of the interpreter (including sinfulness), the Spirit's illumination is required for proper interpretation.

Descriptive

In a descriptive approach, the meaning of the text is primarily for or about the original audience. The question of the interpreter often focuses first on "what the text meant" and then secondarily on "what the text means." The interpreter may suggest a considerable distinction between the two.

The confessional approach follows from the conviction that the Bible is inspired, and therefore authoritative. This approach does justice to the nature and content of the Bible as God's Word to his people.

Diachronic or Synchronic

Diachronic

A diachronic presentation structures the biblical material around the structure of the material itself (or by some scholars, on chronology).

A diachronic presentation orders the material in a way that shows process or progress of thought. A diachronic organization can be temporal, logical-thematic, or textual-canonical. A temporal presentation focuses on the time periods in which it occurs as a process for grouping its theology. A logical-thematic presentation could have timing elements to it, but primarily deals with the progression of ideas or themes. Using the logical progression idea, the schema could also be textual-canonical with subsequent texts in the canonical ordering building on the ideas of the preceding texts. This progression does not require or even imply a chronology of composition. It simply observes that the canonical order of reading (Old Testament before New Testament and Law before Prophets, etc.) establishes a logical priority of the preceding texts.

Synchronic

A synchronic presentation structures the biblical material around different themes or topics. A common synchronic approach would be to organize biblical material under headings such as God, humanity and salvation.

Though both types of presentation may be utilized in various situations, the (textual-canonical) diachronic approach perhaps best accounts for the fact that the biblical material has already been ordered and structured by its various authors.



4 | The Biblical Covenants, pt. 1

Biblical Covenantalism: The “Big Picture” of Scripture

Noticeably the first three sessions have focused on some fundamental concepts to keep in mind when studying the Scriptures (theology of Scripture, the four choices). These concepts may seem overly theoretical until they are fleshed out in one’s own study. The purpose of working through these ideas in detail is so that you will be able to recognize the various factors that affect your reading and interpretation of the Bible.

Another helpful concept in interpreting the Scriptures is to have a “big picture” in mind when reading. The overarching narrative of the Bible tells a consistent and coherent story of God’s purposes in the world and among his people.

This “big picture” (or interpretative framework) can be supplied either by the formulations of Christians of the past (confessionalism or tradition), by systematic theologians (doctrine or dogma) or by the Biblical text itself (canonical or biblical theology).

Examples:

- *Tradition supplies the framework:* Using the Nicene Creed or Apostles’ Creed or Augustine’s thought as a framework would be to let those writings establish the possibility of what the Bible is all about.
- *Dogma/Doctrine supplies the framework:* Using covenant theology (covenant of works/covenant of grace) or dispensationalism (history broken up into various “dispensations”) as a framework would be to read the Scriptures using the categories of those systems.
- *Biblical Canon supplies the framework:* Using the biblical covenants that are found in the biblical text as a framework would be to read the Scriptures in light of themselves (outlined below).

The Six Major Covenants in the Biblical Texts

We believe that the most helpful way of arriving at a “big picture,” or overarching story of Scripture, is to follow the guidance of Scripture itself. As we read Scripture, we find that the text itself provides a hermeneutical framework from which we can arrive at a faithful, coherent reading of its message. The biblical text presents six major covenants which unite its narrative. These covenants are the: Adamic, Noahitic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenant.

1. The Covenant with Adam | Adamic Covenant | Gen 1-2; esp. 1:26-31, 2:15-17

Though there is no covenant language in these passages, when compared textually with Gen 8-9 (Noahitic Covenant), it is clear that these passages are covenantal. In Gen 1-2 there is a relationship with God that takes a form which later is described as covenant. By nature of creation, Adam and Eve are in a covenant relationship with God. The covenant *stipulation* is to not eat of the tree of knowledge, and “to worship



and obey” God (Gen 2:15). The covenant *blessings* include, “Be fruitful and multiply”, dominion over creation, peaceful relationship with God and trusting God to determine what is “good”.

The covenant is broken when Adam and Eve’s lack of trust cause them to eat of the tree that will give them their own “knowledge of good and not good” (Gen 2:17). In the midst of the curses that result from the Fall, a redeemer is promised who will be a descendent (seed) of Eve and will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15).

2. *The Covenant with Noah | Noahitic Covenant* | Gen 6-9; esp. 8:20-9:17

Humans spiraled downward in evil inclinations so much so, that the Bible says that “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). However, Noah found favor in God’s eyes because of his faith and obedience and He delivered Noah from the flood of destruction and judgment on all the world. After his deliverance from the flood, Noah offers a pleasing (faith-filled) sacrifice to the LORD. Further, God offers a covenant with the blessings: “Be fruitful and multiply”, dominion over creation, and peace in the relationship with God (The name ‘Noah’ indicates peace).

The blessings of the Noahitic Covenant seem to be a reversal of the curse of the fall (that God will no longer curse the ground, and Noah can now be fruitful). This covenant made with all humans demonstrates that God will withhold his righteous judgment on human sin in order that humans might have the opportunity to worship Him.

Note also the presence of sin (drunkenness) and curses following the scene of covenant renewal (Gen 9:20-29). Even after the LORD displays His spectacular judgment on the world for sin and His gracious deliverance of Noah because of his faithfulness, sin was not eradicated and men’s hearts turned from the LORD.

3. *The Covenant with Abraham | Abrahamic Covenant* Gen 12-17; esp. 12:1-3

Abraham (then Abram) receives the covenant with the LORD by faith (15:6). The covenant *blessings* include: a great land, a great people, and a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2-3; 22:15-18). The promise will be fulfilled in Abraham’s descendant (“seed” 12:7). Through this promise, the children of Abraham who have the faith of, or just like, their father will become God’s chosen people. The faith of Abraham’s descendants will allow them to participate in being God’s chosen people.

The faith of Abraham is a central part of this covenant. Though it has an unconditional aspect to it, there is a conditional aspect that has to do with enjoying the blessings. The blessings of the Abrahamic covenant come to those living by faith. This covenant is the background (context) for God’s gracious dealings with Israel and for His blessings to be extended to the nations.

4. *The Covenant with Moses | Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant* | Exod 19-20, Deut 4:1-8; esp. Exod 19:19

The Mosaic Covenant provides a potential fulfillment of the



Abrahamic Covenant. If Israel fulfills the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, then it receives the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant (i.e., the land, being the people of God: a kingdom of priests). This connection with the Abrahamic Covenant alludes to the requirement of faith for fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant. Here, God presented Moses with the offer for covenant with Israel. The covenant *blessings* include being God's chosen people, being God's representatives among humans and being reserved for God's purposes. The key *stipulation* to the covenant was faith-filled obedience to God's word. Before Israel left Sinai (Exod 32) they had already disobeyed the primary command of the covenant (exclusive worship of the LORD), and therefore broke the covenant. The LORD revealed Himself as gracious and renewed the covenant (Exod 34) albeit with added stipulations (commands/laws).

The failure of the Mosaic covenant becomes evident through the history of Old Testament Israel. The primary cause of the failure of this covenant is the "heart-problem" of the people. Their hearts are corrupt (they are scoundrels!).

5. *The Covenant with David | Davidic Covenant* | 2 Sam 7; esp. 7:8-17; 1 Chron 17

The Davidic Covenant comes in correlation to the previous two (Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Covenant). It is important to see the correspondence between these two covenants and the Davidic Covenant. There is the overarching promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, then there is the immediate presentation of the Mosaic Covenant, which allows for an immediate enjoyment of the Abrahamic Covenant dependent on the people's obedience.

Because there is constant disobedience, there must be a new measure of hope given through another means. This new measure of hope is the Davidic Covenant. In spite of the failure of the Mosaic Covenant (due to the heart of the people), the Davidic Covenant is the means by which the Abrahamic Covenant can be fulfilled. David's faith provides the context for the Lord to offer a plan for fulfilling His promise to Abraham.

The son of David would come and bring the covenant blessings of rest in the land, worship of the Lord (cf. the house of the Lord), an eternal kingdom, eternal dwelling in Jerusalem and the son of David being God's Son. One of the promises is that this coming son of David will be God's son. The seed of Abraham that is coming that will provide this great nation is demonstrated to be the son of David. The great nation is formed because of the coming King's great kingdom (i.e., the son of David). When he reigns, he establishes the blessings that are promised in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Old Testament prophecy looks fervently for this coming Son of David. The New Testament gospel writers attempt to demonstrate Jesus as this coming Son of David. It is no wonder, then, that in the genealogy of Matthew 1, Jesus is described as the Son of Abraham, and the Son of David. Matthew is pointing out that Jesus is the fulfillment (coming seed) of both the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant. Biblical Covenantalism (the biblical covenants), then, becomes a significant part of interpreting the book of Matthew (Jesus as the son of Abraham, the



son of David).

6. *The New Covenant* | Deut 30:6-10; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek36:22-32; Heb 8-10

Though the phrase “New Covenant” is used only in Jeremiah 31, the same stipulations and covenant situation are present in the other passages. In this New Covenant, there are significant developments that happen. The New Covenant is promised even in Moses’ last words that there will be a circumcision of the heart. The failure of the Mosaic Covenant was because of the inability of the people to obey due to their corrupt hearts. Deuteronomy 30 holds out hope for the people because the people will be able to obey because their hearts will be circumcised. This inward transformation is pictured in Jeremiah 31 as a new heart, and in Ezekiel 36 as a new Spirit. The New Covenant will address even the heart.

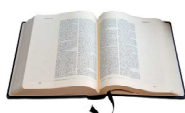
Hebrews 8-10 speaks about the mediator of this New Covenant. The New Covenant is not a renewed version of the Mosaic Covenant. The covenant blessings include an internal law (much like Abraham who kept the law through faith though the Sinai laws had not yet been given), being God’s people, God’s glory being known universally, forgiveness and a rebuilt promise land. The Old Covenant (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant and not the OT) is rendered obsolete by this New Covenant. The one who made redemption is now the mediator of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is the means of bringing the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant into actuality.

A Look Ahead

In the next session we will briefly review the covenants and answer the question, “How do the biblical covenants help with the reading of Scripture?”

We will also see how the four choices we have made in session two and three relate to this development of the biblical covenants.

Next Lesson: The Biblical Covenants, pt. 2



5 | The Biblical Covenants, pt. 2

Biblical Covenantalism: The “Big Picture” of Scripture

As we covered in session four, there are six major covenants in the biblical text:

1. The Covenant with Adam (The Adamic Covenant)
2. The Covenant with Noah (The Noahtic Covenant)
3. The Covenant with Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant)
4. The Covenant with Moses (The Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant)
5. The Covenant with David (The Davidic Covenant)
6. The New Covenant

How do the biblical covenants help with the reading of Scripture?

The biblical covenants (Biblical Covenantalism) can provide a theological framework that affects and enhances your reading of Scripture. When you read a given passage of Scripture, you can ask, “What biblical covenant is in the foreground of this text?” Additionally, you can ask, “Is there a biblical covenant in the background that provides the context?” Asking these questions will help you to understand where the passage you are reading or studying fits in the larger storyline of God’s redemptive purposes.

There are at least four features of the biblical covenants that aid the reader in the interpretive process.

The Covenants are Embedded

A primary feature of the biblical covenants is that they are embedded in the text of Scripture. This framework rises up out of the canonical texts themselves. You could say that this covenantal framework is a canonical framework. Though the other options (mentioned above--tradition and dogma) can find biblical support for their structure, using the covenants presented in the text emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture to provide both the content and the structure of our theological understanding of the Bible.

The Covenants are Interconnected

All six of the covenants are interconnected and exist in a relationship that needs to be recognized. This whole scheme (Biblical Covenantalism) is important because every text of Scripture could be seen as bearing on these covenants. Together, they cast a light on the whole of the Scriptures; on all parts of the canon. This is one way that helps connect and give coherence (not necessarily conformity) to the biblical canon.

The Covenants are Directive

The covenants are signposts that direct readers through the texts of the canon. For example, in the prophetic literature, the prophets use elements of the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New



Covenant to convey their message.

The prophets set up the idea of the need for complete obedience to the Lord. To drive home their point of the need for repentance and obedience the prophets keep the Mosaic Covenant and its stipulations in the foreground. However, the fact of the matter is that the people do not obey and they will not obey! Consequently, the prophets appeal to the hope of the Davidic Covenant in the background. As the situation worsens through the sustained lack of repentance and obedience, the prophets use the failure of the Mosaic Covenant (due to the people's lack of faith) to point to the need for the New Covenant, the measure of hope.

When reading the minor prophets, you must have this scheme in mind. When reading the Old Testament, you must have this scheme in mind. When reading the New Testament (Jesus: 'this is the blood of the New Covenant), you must have this scheme in mind in order to understand the text. Jesus has something like this scheme in mind when He speaks of the blood of the New Covenant and Himself as the mediator of this New Covenant. He gets it from the Scripture that He says He came to fulfill.

The Covenants are Comprehensive

The eschatological vision of the Scripture can be seen and interpreted by means of this scheme. The biblical covenants function as an interpretive grid for seeing how God is at work in His cosmic plan and His eternal purposes. It is no wonder, then, that we can say that the promises of God are "yes" in Christ. The promises of God that are being held out are the benefits of the covenants (Abrahamic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, New Covenant). The Christological focus of the Scriptures relate to these covenants.

The biblical covenants develop a way of understanding how the Scriptures tell their story. In this scheme, a mention of David in the Psalms is easily connected to the Davidic Covenant, because what is in mind in Scripture is revealed in these covenants. The examples of forgiveness in the canon are easily connected to the New Covenant. When during the first Lord's Supper, Jesus says "this is the blood of the New Covenant," it is no wonder that a word about the forgiveness of sins follows, because one of the promises of the New Covenant is the forgiveness of sins.

This interpretive framework is helpful in understanding the Scriptures. It does bear weight in interpreting the canonical texts. It can function as a helpful and reliable guide for reading the Old and New Testaments.

How do the Four Choices relate to the biblical covenants?

The way we have described and developed the covenants here relates to the four choices we discussed in sessions two and three. Each of these choices will not necessarily be readily observable or present in every passage. Rather, they undergird the entire interpretive process and oftentimes affect the type of results produced.

Text

As we develop the content and structure of the covenants, we strive



to observe and notice textual features of the narratives. The connections between passages oftentimes relate to the way the author portrays and structures the covenant narratives in addition to the actual covenant situation itself. For example, in the Adamic Covenant narratives, we notice strong covenantal ties with the Noahic Covenant narratives. These connections are textual ones.

Canon

Our understanding of a “covenant” is drawn from the various depictions of covenant relationships found in the biblical texts themselves, rather than from the surrounding cultures and nations that were around during the time of Israel. The canon sets the limits for the range of interpretive possibilities. The canon also provides the fullest context in which the covenants are interpreted. An attempt has been made to read each of the covenant narratives in light of the others.

Diachronic

Further, the way the covenants build upon one another implies an important sense of progression and narrative development as the reader makes his way through the canon. This is a diachronic way of understanding the covenants. Rather than beginning with an overarching conception of covenant that was illustrated by the various instances of that concept, we attempt to let each instance of covenant stand on its own and build on the previous instance.

Confessional

The “confessional” choice relates to the underlying disposition of the interpreter that we have encouraged along the way. An interpreter chooses the confessional option as he or she prayerfully considers the meaning and message of the biblical text and its significance for today. Regarding Biblical Covenantalism, readers that choose the confessional approach would seek to submit themselves to the worldview and picture of reality that the covenants portray.

Next Lesson: Textual Strategies and Devices in the Old Testament



6 | Textual Strategies and Devices in the Old Testament

In sessions one through three, we discussed basic commitments that we make about the Bible, and also four important choices that we make in the interpretive task. In sessions four and five, we developed a “big picture” of the Scriptures drawn from the major biblical covenants.

Working within the framework of these ideas, in the next two sessions we will study various textual strategies and devices in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Narrative and Poetry in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament there are two basic categories for the types of literature (literary types) that are used by the authors: *narrative* and *poetry*.

Narrative

The majority of Old Testament texts can be classified as narrative texts. While other material such as legal material or poetic sayings may appear in these texts, they are set in the context of the narrative. In other words, they have a narrative framework (Gen 35:9-12; Ezek 21:9-10). The narratives of the Old Testament do more than recount history. They provide insight into the character and purposes of God. The narratives often provide this revelation by a combination of narration and discourse.

1) *Narration*

“To narrate” means to give an account or to tell a story. The main feature of narrative texts is the narration given by the biblical author, which provides details of specific events and insightful commentary by the author. The author’s commentary may be *implicit*, as he includes or omits various details and as he tells the story in a certain way. His commentary may also be *explicit*, by actually breaking into the narrative and giving the reader an editorial comment (e.g., Gen 2:24-25).

2) *Discourse*

A secondary feature of narrative texts is discourse (speech or conversation) between the characters. This discourse can be human to human (Adam to Eve, Moses to Israelites), or divine to human (the Lord to Adam). Within the narrative, characters often speak from a limited viewpoint and can be corrected, nuanced or contextualized by other aspects of the narrative. For instance, Solomon speaks of himself in Messianic terms in 2 Chronicles 6, but we learn from the rest of the book that he is clearly not the fulfillment of the promise to David (cf. 1 Kings 10-11).

Poetry

The second basic literary type in the Old Testament is poetry. Poetry has many features, two of which are *imagery* and *parallelism*.



Imagery

One of the most common traits of poetic literature (in the Bible and elsewhere) is the use of imagery. In Old Testament poetry, abstract themes (evil, death, joy, etc.) are represented in poetic, concrete images (darkness, sleep, laughter, etc.). Poetic imagery may be expressed through a variety of figures of speech. For example, metaphors and similes both make comparisons between two phenomena. Personification, where an inanimate object is given humanlike qualities is also a typical feature of poetic images (e.g., “the sea is raging”).

Parallelism

Structurally, poetic texts often contain parallelism. Parallelism is a type of sentence structure and so provides a common form in which biblical authors express their poetic images. Parallelism occurs when two lines form a complete unit of thought and have symmetry between them. The relationship between the two lines varies. They can express either:

‣ Similar ideas;

My son, keep your father’s commandment,
and forsake not your mother’s teaching (Prov 6:20).

‣ Opposite ideas;

One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor,
but the way of the wicked leads them astray (Prov 12:26).

‣ And, build on each other;

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy (Exod 15:6).

Discerning the relationship between the lines of a given poetic text can provide insight into an author’s meaning.

Types of poetry

1) Poems

Not surprisingly, significant amounts of poetic material in the Old Testament are simply poems. The poems may contain alliteration² and/or rhyme. The words of a poem are metric, which means they are arranged in regularly measured, patterned, or rhythmic lines or verses (in Hebrew). Consequentially, poems contain condensed language in comparison to narrative texts. The book of Psalms contains many examples of poems, though poems occur in most biblical books.

2) Proverbs

The literary form of proverb is a frequent occurrence in the Hebrew Bible. These short, pithy statements relay various aspects of wisdom. Positively, wisdom is portrayed as having the beneficial qualities of virtue, truth, social contribution and life. Negatively, folly is presented in images of infidelity, deception, social injustice and death. The biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are filled with proverbs.



²The occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.

3) Prophetic Oracles

A prophetic oracle is a divine communication or revelation. Often when a biblical author records an oracle from the Lord, the words are in poetic form. Prophetic texts share many features with other poetic texts. The use of metaphor (or simile) and personification are standard devices for the prophetic texts. In the Prophets, the books are composed of prophetic oracles set within a narrative framework (e.g., Jer 1-3). Prophetic material (oracles) not only occurs in the suspected texts such as Isaiah or the Book of Twelve, but also in books such as Numbers and Proverbs (Num 23-24; Prov 30).

4) Apocalyptic Visions

A few Old Testament books contain apocalyptic material. This material has much in common with prophetic material. However, apocalyptic material contains even more symbolism and its highly symbolic texts often portray God's plans as having cataclysmic/disastrous effects on the visible scene. For example, prophetic material may use imagery of an unproductive vineyard in need of replacement, where apocalyptic material may describe four dreadful and terrifying beasts who attempt to unleash complete and utter destruction on all of mankind (i.e., Dan 7). The books of Ezekiel and Daniel contain a significant amount of apocalyptic material within a narrative framework.

The Textual Strategy of Narrative-Poetry-Epilogue

In addition to investigating literary types, a reader can discern an author's purpose by paying attention to the textual strategies that he uses in writing a text. Oftentimes distinct patterns will emerge that can help the reader interpret the meaning of a verse, a passage, or a book.

The writer of the Pentateuch (Moses) utilizes several literary techniques as he develops the narratives from Genesis to Deuteronomy. One important strategy that he uses involves the textual pattern of "Narrative-Poetry-Epilogue." In the Pentateuch, a clear pattern develops where a block of narrative is presented, which is followed by a section of poetry, which is then followed by a brief epilogue. In this scheme, the poetic section contains important information about the preceding narrative, and the epilogue serves many times as a summary statement or an editorial comment by the author.

The poetic material serves as a "seam" which ties the narratives in the Pentateuch together, and also provides commentary on them. The poetic seam serves as an "interpretive lens" through which the reader is to view the preceding narrative. This is one way that the author emphasizes the main point or "moral of the story." This textual pattern is important in discerning the author's theological intent in the Pentateuch.

This pattern occurs on a small scale throughout the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 2; Gen 3; Gen 4), and also on a large scale in the Pentateuch as a whole (Gen 49; Exod 15; Num 23-24; Deut 32-33).

On the small scale, this pattern helps interpret the meaning of several smaller narrative sections. On a large scale, this pattern aids the reader in understanding the main message of the Pentateuch.

In the large scale "poetic seams," often we find out what will happen in



“the end of days” (Gen 49:1; Numb 24:14; Deut 31:29). The Pentateuch looks forward to a coming king (“the one to whom it belongs” (Gen 49:10) who will rule God’s people. This coming one (seed/descendent) will lead God’s people in power, crush the heads of God’s enemies, and bring a blessing to Israel and to the nations. In this sense, the Pentateuch is a future-looking, Messianic book.

By using this pattern, the author guides the reader through his text and points out the significance of the narratives. Noting this pattern will help us read the Pentateuch and better understand its message.

The Textual Strategy of the Old Testament’s Use of the Old Testament

An important strategy at work in the Prophets and in the Writings involves the Old Testament’s use of the Old Testament. Here we are investigating the way that OT authors utilize previous texts in the canon.

As discussed above, the biblical reader should notice the arrangement of different literary types to discern the biblical author’s meaning. However, it is not just the literary structure that accentuates meaning, but also the type of material used. When texts from other portions of the Bible are quoted or are referenced less directly, the author is using a technique known as “inter-textuality” or perhaps “inner-textuality.”

- *Inter-textuality* is when biblical authors draw on other biblical books to help make their point.
- *Inner-textuality* is when an author uses texts within the same work (or book).

The Importance of the Pentateuch

A typical occurrence in the Old Testament is for successive biblical authors to draw frequently on the Pentateuch (Law or Torah). These successive authors follow this practice because of the authoritative nature of the Pentateuch for them and as a means of demonstrating the continuance of God’s purposes as described in the Pentateuch.

The first five books of the Bible are the foundation of the rest of the Scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy form one book, called the Pentateuch (i.e. five books). The Pentateuch was meant to be read as a whole, with each of its parts interpreting and building upon each other. There is so much allusion, quotation and inter-textual reference to the Pentateuch throughout the rest of the Bible that a close reading and continual study of the Pentateuch is essential in understanding the rest of written revelation. You cannot understand the NT without the OT, and you cannot understand the OT without the Pentateuch.

When the Old Testament speaks of the Law of Moses, it is speaking of the Pentateuch. Though often neglected by today’s Christians, the OT and NT writers assumed that their readers were intimately familiar with the contents of this “book.”



Inter-textuality in the Law, Prophets, and Writings

There are several ways that authors draw upon biblical texts. Sometimes an author will reference an important word or an important figure. Sometimes an author will quote a sentence or phrase from a previous text. And sometimes an author will simply allude to a theme or the broad outlines of a previous narrative.

This technique occurs in the Law, Prophets, and Writings of the Old Testament.

In the Law (Pentateuch)

A significant instance of the strategy occurs in the poetic seams of the Pentateuch. One of the ways that the author conveys his message about the coming one in these seams is by alluding to previous significant texts.

A clear example of this occurs in Numbers 24:3-9. In the surrounding context, Balak (King of Moab) sends for Balaam so that he will curse the nation of Israel. However, when Balaam opens his mouth to curse, he can only speak the word the Lord gives him which is a blessing on Israel. In Balaam's discourse, previous texts in the Pentateuch are utilized to speak of the coming one.

24:8 "God brings him out of Egypt" (Exodus narrative, cf. 23:22)

24:8 "He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, And shatter them with his arrows." (Gen 3:15)

24:9 "He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him?" (Gen 49:8-12)

24:9 "Blessed is everyone who blesses you, And cursed is everyone who curses you." (Gen 12:2-3)

By alluding to previous texts in the Pentateuch, this passage develops the theme of the coming one and also adds to that picture. This passage connects the promise of a Redeemer who will crush the head of God's enemies (Gen 3:15) with the coming King from Judah who will reign over God's people (Gen 49:8-12), and also with the descendent (seed) who will bring blessing to Israel and to the nations (Gen 12). Further, this description of the coming one is developed in the context of what will happen in "the days to come" (Num 24:14, 17).

In the Prophets

This technique also occurs in the prophets. The former prophets (sometimes called the historical books) begin with an emphasis on the Pentateuch. Joshua's first order of business after the death of Moses is to command the people to "be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you." He urges, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (Josh 1:6-8).

Not surprisingly then, the rest of the prophets are obedient to this command as they meditate and reflect upon the themes and promises of the Pentateuch.



In this reflection, the prophets might allude to the Lord as Creator of the heavens and the earth (Jer 10:11-13//Gen 1:1), or the promise of blessing of the land and the covenant at Sinai (Jer 3:15-18//Gen 12; Ex 19). A major theme that the prophets draw upon is the Exodus. The Exodus is seen as a metaphor of the Lord's deliverance of His people. The prophets constantly allude to texts which describe God's deliverance of His people "out of Egypt" (Micah 6:4-5; Hos 11:1; cf. Neh 9:5-21).

In the Writings

Like the Prophets, the Writings also reflect and draw upon the themes and promises of texts from the Pentateuch. The first book in the Writings is the Book of Psalms, which begins by demonstrating that the wise man delights "in the law of the Lord" and "meditates on it day and night" (Ps 1:2//Josh 1:8).

Many of the Psalms allude to the same themes and texts that the Prophets use, including the story of the Exodus. For instance, in Ps 68, the psalmist describes the narrative of God's provision for the Israelites through the wilderness wanderings and through his presence at Sinai and in the tabernacle. By using this imagery, the psalmist demonstrates God's faithfulness to His people. The psalmist also uses this imagery to connect God's presence in the tabernacle with God's presence in the temple. In this way, the psalmist shows that the promises of the Pentateuch continue through the ages.

Many of the other authors in the Writings use the texts of the Pentateuch in a similar manner.

Next Lesson: Textual Strategies and Devices in the New Testament



7 | Textual Strategies and Devices in the New Testament

In session six, we discussed textual strategies and devices in the Old Testament. In this session, we will discuss similar themes in the New Testament. Though oftentimes the Old and New Testaments are strongly contrasted, there is considerable overlap in the textual strategies and devices used by the biblical authors. Many of the techniques used in the Old Testament are picked up and utilized by New Testament authors. Discerning this overt similarity is one way we can affirm the literary unity of the entire Bible.

The literary unity of the Bible complements well the theological unity of the Bible. In fact, one way that the New Testament authors demonstrate their theological agreement with the Old Testament texts is by following them in themes and style. From Genesis to Revelation, the inspired biblical writers employ textual strategies that aid careful readers in understanding the meaning of God's Word to his people.

As a reminder, we are still working within the framework that we established in the first five sessions. These ideas include the theology of the Scriptures and the four interpretive choices, along with the "Big Picture" of the Bible provided by the biblical covenants.

The Framework of the New Testament Canon

One preliminary concept that is important to keep in mind is the canonical context of the New Testament. The prevailing context for the New Testament authors is the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, the books of the Old Testament are divided into three parts: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. In this structure, the Pentateuch is the foundation for the other two parts.

The New Testament is structured in a similar way. Very early in the formation of the New Testament, the various writings from the apostles began to be circulated in groups. As this process took place, those circulating these documents were concerned about the preservation of the content of these writings as well as the order in which they were arranged. One of the effects of this canonical process is that the writings of the apostles began to be seen in light of each other. For example, the Gospel of Mark was to be read alongside of the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Another example is that the Pauline letters (Epistles) and the General Epistles were to be read in light of the historical framework provided by the book of Acts. On a broad scale, the Gospels start with a focus on "the beginning," while the Book of Revelation concludes the New Testament canon with a concern for what will take place at "the end."

The major sections in the New Testament are:

- 1) The Gospels
- 2) The Pauline Epistles
- 3) Acts and The General Epistles
- 4) The Revelation



In summary, the combined Old and New Testament Canon is the church's guide for reading the biblical material. As we read the Old and New Testament, taking note of this canonical framework is helpful.

Narrative and Poetry in the New Testament

The New Testament employs the same basic types of literature (literary types) as the Old Testament: narrative and poetry.

Narrative

Following the pattern of the Old Testament, the narrative texts of the New Testament can be categorized into two basic components. *Narration* occurs when the author/narrator depicts the actions of the characters. *Discourse* occurs as those characters address each other (or by implication a broader audience).

1) *Narration*

Narration features heavily in the gospels and in Acts. These books develop the larger narrative in which the writings and events of the rest of the New Testament are found. The narration often provides the background or setting for the discourse which carries the central meaning of the text. For instance, John sets up the necessary background information required for a reader to understand the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4:1-45. This technique occurs repeatedly throughout the narrative portions of the New Testament.

2) *Discourse*

Discourse occurs throughout the New Testament narratives. In the gospels and Acts, discourse may come as characters in a narrative address each other or God. An important aspect of discourse to notice is that the author has selected which parts of the speech to include and also how those parts are presented. For example, Mark uses a portion of Jesus' preaching in order to provide a summation of his primary message:

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14).

Alternatively, discourse features can occur as a main character (or author) addresses an unknown or implied audience. In the epistles, the author addresses his exhortations to the readers (whether they are implicit or explicit). Sometimes the New Testament authors use Old Testament texts as the voices that are allowed to "speak" the central truth. The book of Hebrews is a prominent example of this technique, as the Old Testament text is repeatedly the content of what someone "says" (e.g., Heb 1:5-13, 2:6-8, 3:7-11).

Poetry

In comparison to the Old Testament, there are relatively few poetic texts in the New Testament literature. Poems or proverbs are sometimes sampled or used as a simple illustration of the author's point. Some of the



“hymns” or “confessions” mentioned have poetic qualities. For instance, Paul writes to Timothy,

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory (1 Tim 3:16).

Also, many of the Old Testament allusions and references to the prophetic literature are in poetic form. Perhaps the main poetic texts of the New Testament are the apocalyptic texts of Revelation.

▷ Apocalyptic

The book of Revelation has a vast amount of apocalyptic (poetic) material. However, like Old Testament examples (Ezekiel, Daniel), there is a narrative framework for the apocalyptic material. John is told in his vision to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things” (Rev 1:19). This word implies an overarching coherence of the book and confirms the importance of a narrative structure.

The imagery of apocalyptic material must be read in light of the surrounding narratives (for instance, the introduction and conclusion of the book) and also narratives at a textual distance (like the Old Testament texts of Gen 1-2 or Dan 7). Narrative texts in other biblical books often provide the key to unlocking the imagery of apocalyptic texts.

The Textual Strategy of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament

In the last session (session six), we discussed the important textual strategy of the Old Testament’s use of the Old Testament. There we investigated the way that Old Testament authors utilize previous texts in the canon. We also discussed the concept of inter-textuality, where biblical authors draw on other biblical books to help make their point.

The same strategy occurs in the New Testament. The New Testament authors have continued the practice of using previous texts in the canon to tell their stories and give meaning to their writings. Sometimes it is said that the New Testament writers are doing something “brand new” in their use of Old Testament texts. However, as we saw last week, they are actually adopting a pattern that they have seen developed and employed in the Old Testament text. The continuance of this pattern is another way we can affirm the unity of the entire Bible. The New Testament authors follow the Old Testament authors in their use of other biblical texts and in applying the intended meaning of those preceding texts to their purpose in writing.

Some main reasons that New Testament authors used Old Testament texts include the authority recognized in those texts and the common theological themes. The primary reason for the New Testament authors’



use of the Old Testament is the common Christological (or Messianic) purpose. In the gospels, two texts establish a clear connection between the Old Testament texts and the New Testament presentation of Christ.

First, in John 5:39-47, Jesus states that the Old Testament (“the Scriptures”) as a whole “testify” about Him. He also specifically mentions the Christological theme of the Pentateuch (the Law of Moses), when He says that Moses “wrote about Me.” Furthermore, Jesus connects the message of the Testaments by saying that if His audience did not accept the scriptural (Old Testament) testimony, then they would not accept His preaching (later enscripturated in the New Testament).

Second, in Luke 24:13-27; 44-48, Jesus again connects both His mission and message with the texts of the Old Testament. After the two disciples (on the way to Emmaus), shared the details of the recent crucifixion and reports of the resurrection (relayed with some skepticism), Jesus exhorts them to believe what the prophets had spoken. He taught “with Moses and with all the prophets” the “things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (i.e. written, Old Testament canonical texts). Again, the biblical narrative moves from the general to the specific in the narrative scene as Jesus indicates that all the things “which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” This overt connection between the texts of the Old Testament canon, i.e. the Law, Prophets and Writings, and the message of Christ (vv. 45-48) becomes a central tenet of the New Testament authors’ purposes. This Christological theme and the authoritative place of Old Testament texts in the New Testament canon cannot be overemphasized when it comes to trying to understand the New Testament texts.

Though the New Testament is replete with usages of Old Testament texts, let us examine just a few to sample how these texts are used. Following Christ’s example, let’s use texts from the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms.

New Testament use of the Law

Abraham is a central figure in the Pentateuch. He exemplifies faith in the Lord and in His promises. Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham “believed in the Lord and He reckoned (or credited) it to him as righteousness.” This text is central to Paul’s argument in both Romans 4 and Galatians 3 for the necessity of faith for righteousness. In fact, Paul repeats a portion of the verse three times in Romans 4 alone. After the third use, Paul explains, “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:23-24).

New Testament use of the Prophets

The texts of Isaiah prove to be fertile soil for the New Testament authors as they mine texts to present the story of Christ. In Matthew 13, Jesus relays a parable about a sower who “went out to sow” and the produce that came later. In between the parable and its explanation later in the chapter, Matthew provides an extended quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10. In the Isaiah text, those in Israel who are hearing the message of the Lord



will not “understand” or “perceive” because their “heart” has become dull to the Lord. Matthew’s use of this Old Testament text at this critical point of his book demonstrates that the same thing is happening in response to Jesus’ teaching.

New Testament use of the Psalms (first in the Writings)

The writer of Hebrews draws heavily on the Psalms to communicate his Christological message. In Hebrews 1 alone, at least seven psalms are referenced with some being used multiple times. Psalm 2:7 is used to establish Jesus Christ as the begotten Son of God. The chapter concludes with a reference to Psalm 110 in order to point out Jesus’ supremacy over humanity and the other heavenly beings (angels). Psalm 110 is used nearly two dozen times in the New Testament with at least five occurrences in the book of Hebrews.

These examples provide a snapshot of the way New Testament authors use Old Testament texts. The main point here is that the worldview of the New Testament writers was submersed in the textual world of the Old Testament. When a New Testament writer wants to make a theological point, illustrate an argument, or utilize a metaphor, they most often draw on the images and narratives developed in the Old Testament.

Next Session: The Interpretive Task



8 | The Interpretative Task

In this final session, the principles of the previous sessions will be utilized to develop some probing questions that will be helpful for discerning the meaning of a specific biblical text. The questions are not exhaustive, but provide a framework for considering the different qualities of a biblical text. The questions are not meant to serve as a mechanical process (or method) that you “run” a text through in order to “produce” meaning. Hence, the questions do not have to remain in a rigid order, though the sequence presented here recognizes the interconnectedness of the questions with a common sense order of grappling with the questions.

Finally, since studying the Bible is not just an exercise in gaining personal knowledge, this framework of twelve questions anticipates that the interpreter will share the fruits of the study in different contexts (with family members, in a small group setting, in a sermon or in a gospel conversation).

The questions are grouped broadly within the categories of context, focus text, content and assimilation. After each question, we will discuss “what’s at stake” in answering the question. Also, we will use Matthew 4:1-11 as an extended case study throughout. This case study is not meant to be exhaustive (there is more that could be said in each case), but will provide a glimpse of what answering these types of questions might look like.

The Interpretative Task³

Context: These questions are aimed at investigating the larger context of the passage that is the focus of study.

Q1 | What is the overall purpose of the book?

‣ What’s at stake?

The concern of this question is to grapple with the idea of an author’s intention (authorial intent). A specific text should be interpreted in relation to the overall purpose of the book. Grasping a book’s main point or primary message will help in understanding what an author is doing in an individual passage or section. Obviously, as more individual texts from the same book are interpreted, the reader’s awareness of authorial intent becomes better informed.

‣ What would this look like? (We will use Matthew 4:1-11 as a case study.)

One aspect of the overall purpose of Matthew is to establish the identity (nature and purpose) of Jesus Christ. The reader can see

³This interpretative task assumes the prior choices of text over event, canonical over critical and confessional over descriptive. So, an inspired and authoritative canonical text is the scope of the interpretative task. Noting the achievements of canon criticism, the interpretative task also assumes the value of certain textual critical work, text linguistics, along with composition and redaction criticism. Wording for some of the questions comes from David Alan Black’s *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry*, pp.66-67.



this idea in recurring questions or references about “whose Son is He?” (selected examples: 1:1, 1:25, 2:15, 3:17, 8:29, 9:27, 12:8, 13:55, 14:33, 16:16, 17:5, 18:11, 21:9, 22:42, 27:54)

Q2 | How is the book used in the canon and in conjunction with surrounding books?

▸ What’s at stake?

This question tries to recognize the book’s placement in the biblical canon (canonical analysis) and its effect on reading. The order in which the biblical books appear in the canon affects how they are read. What precedes and what follows a book will oftentimes affect how a reader relates the content of that particular book to the rest of the biblical material. “Contextuality” is the term that indicates this effect that the canonical order has on the reading of individual books. Attention to this question will help the interpreter to remember the canonical context.

▸ What would this look like?

Matthew begins the canonical collection of the Gospels and the NT as a whole. As such, Matthew serves the important purpose of establishing the identity of Christ for the rest of the NT and of connecting the NT picture of Christ with its OT foundation (a point seen in Matthew’s frequent use of OT texts).

Q3 | How do the focus text and its connection with surrounding texts contribute to the book’s overall purpose?

▸ What’s at stake?

This question queries the compositional strategy of a book and the part that the focus text plays in the text’s strategy. This literary analysis notes textual features of the focus text and asks how they relate to the book’s structure and literary types. This question clearly builds on the foundation laid by the first two questions. Once a reader understands the purpose of the book, then he/she can begin to see how a particular passage relates and contributes to that overall message. Every focus text will not explicitly develop a main theme, but will always have some connection to the author’s overall strategy in the whole book.

▸ What would this look like?

Matthew 4:1-11 speaks clearly to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. In verses 3 and 6, the devil questions whether Jesus is the Son of God. The devil moves his attack to “what type of Son would Jesus be” in his third temptation found in verses 8-9. This focus text connects well to the end of chapter 3, which declares Jesus as the Son of God through the heavenly voice.

Focus Text: These questions are aimed at investigating the various elements of the focus text itself.

Q4 | What are the compositional features of the focus text?



‣ What's at stake?

Give special attention to any compositional seams in the focus text. Remember, the point is not to isolate or strip away portions of the texts, but to ask what the form of the text that has been presented does in the way of adding authorial or editorial comments, transitioning to the successive texts or connecting with the broader themes of scripture.

‣ What would this look like?

In 4:1, the use of the term “then” (*tote*) is a means of connecting the narrative of 4:1-11 with that of chapter 3 in chronology and in theme. (Notice Luke 4:1 to see how Luke does not attempt the same connection.) Thematically, the dismissal of Satan in verses 10-11 is important because he will not appear again (textually) until Matthew 16:23, where Jesus rebukes Peter's suggestion of a different identity and purpose for the Christ, much as Satan does here.

Q(s)5 | How did the author use form and genre (literary type) to communicate meaning in his book? Which form or genre is used in the focus text?

‣ What's at stake?

This question reminds the interpreter that the author has chosen a style or genre to communicate as well as content. In addition to choosing “what to say,” he has also chosen “how to say it.” This rhetorical analysis notes that the author's choice of style of presentation is an important part of his communicative effort. This choice is made at the book level and also on a smaller scale within the text. Once an author chooses a genre in which to write a work, he also decides which forms or literary types will make up the individual sections of the larger work. Oftentimes an author will vary his choice of form or literary type in order to make a certain point, or to produce a certain rhetorical effect (e.g., a poetic doxology at the end of an extended argument, like Rom 11:33-36 at the end of Rom 9-11).

Could Matthew have chosen to use an epistle to communicate his ideas about Jesus' nature and teaching? Yes, but he used a narrative type of literature known as a gospel. That choice was intentional and has implications for how his text is read and received. Though Matthew chose not to write an epistle, within his gospel, he includes two extended discourse sections (the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse). These sections have a certain effect when placed within a narrative. Again, that choice is intentional.

‣ What would this look like?

The overall genre type for Matthew is narrative. In 4:1-11, the narrative features a pointed discourse between the devil and the Christ (Jesus). The questions of Jesus' identity and His purpose come to life in Satan's temptations and are answered in Jesus' emphatic replies.



Q6 | How did the author arrange the textual components of the focus text?

‣ What's at stake?

This question is a follow-up to the previous one. First, we looked at the author's use of various devices in the book as a whole in comparison to the focus text (Q5). The next step is to notice the way in which the author has arranged the various textual components of the focus text. In this arrangement, the author may include a few different literary types or devices in the text (e.g., poetic material, a saying, discourse, legal material).

Additionally, the way the author orders the material could be a tool to emphasize meaning. The sequence of the different elements in a text can shed light on what an author wants to highlight or emphasize. Questions we might ask involve why an author has put a particular element where he has. For instance, if the author makes use of an Old Testament quotation or hymn-like poem, does he make his point and then close with the quotation or hymn as illustration? Or, does he put the quotation or hymn in the middle of his idea allowing the quotation or hymn to serve as the heart of his argument. In narrative texts, this structural analysis will ask if the author is arranging the material by strict chronology or through some other means (like a theological theme). The main point here is that the ordering of an author's textual components is no accident. There is a reason why some things come first and some come last, or why some things are omitted and some are repeated.

‣ What would this look like?

The narrative is structured around the three temptations presented by the devil in the discourse. Perhaps Matthew is making a point of emphasis by moving from the two questions of identity to the last question of purpose. Luke arranges the material differently, transposing the second and the third question to meet his purposes.

Q7 | What are the significant words in the text? (Primarily in the original languages; secondarily in translation)

‣ What's at stake?

This question deals with a lexical analysis (a focus on words themselves and vocabulary). The meaning of the words in a text is an important key to the text's interpretation. Certain key words may have special importance and merit close study. Key words could be words that are repeated throughout the focus text or those words which connect with the main themes of the book (e.g., "Kingdom of God" or "righteousness"). They can also be terms that have significance because of their use in the OT (e.g., "Law" or "tabernacle"). Another indication of key words would be word plays such as the use of synonyms or the repetition of terms from the same family of words (semantic domain). To illustrate the use of key words, it would be hard to miss that the key word in 1 Cor 13 is "love." Paul also strategically uses the word for



“tongues” in 13:1, an important key word from 1 Cor 12, 14.

▶ What would this look like?

The names/titles “devil”, “tempter”, “Satan” and “Son of God” seem to be significant terms in the narrative.

Q8 | How do the words relate to one another?

▶ What’s at stake?

Words in a text are put together to make up phrases and clauses. Words can easily be misinterpreted if studied in isolation. They must be interpreted in conjunction with one another, as they have been used by the author. This grammatical or syntactical analysis is best done in the original languages, but even in translation can provide some helpful insights. Identifying the subject, the main verb, the direct object and other sentence elements is often immensely helpful in understanding the meaning of a sentence.

▶ What would this look like?

One grammatical point could be that the action verbs used in connection with the devil (came, took, showed, left) present him as the aggressor. Jesus instead “was led” and simply says or answers throughout the narrative. (In the Greek text, the frequent use of the present tense over the aorist tense perhaps heightens the vividness of the encounter.)

Q9 | How does the author use other biblical texts to provide meaning to the text?

▶ What’s at stake?

This question recognizes the possibilities of inter-textual (or even inner-textual) analysis. Before the analysis can proceed, the inter-textual allusion or quotation has to be recognized. It has been established previously how the Pentateuch (Law) is used frequently in the successive books of the Bible and how the Old Testament is drawn on by New Testament authors (See sessions six and seven of this study). This question asks how those preceding texts are being used: as illustration, as authoritative testimony, as implicit or explicit commentary, or as part of the development of an argument.

▶ What would this look like?

In Matthew 4:4-10, the use of OT quotations is a central feature of this text. Jesus’ use of Deuteronomy and the devil’s quotation of Psalm 91 are keys to interpreting this text. Is Jesus drawing on the imagery of Israel’s temptations (testing) in the wilderness in His citation of the Deuteronomy text? Is He the faithful Son in the moment of testing when Israel was not? Or, is it that He has meditated on the Scriptures (in keeping with Deut 6) and so He demonstrates the power and wisdom of the Word of God against the devil’s schemes? Does the devil cite Psalm 91 because he wants to avoid the trampling on the serpent mentioned there (Ps 91:13)?



Content: This question is aimed at investigating the theological content of the focus text.

Q10 | How does this text speak of Christ as the revelation of God?

▸ What's at stake?

As noted in previous sessions, the Christological fervor of Scripture must not be overlooked in the interpretation of specific texts. One way to protect from an overly "man-centered" (anthropocentric) or otherwise misguided interpretation is to ask how a specific text speaks of God's revelation of Himself in Christ, a chief aim of the Scriptures. This Christological analysis should not be strained to the point that Christological ideas not related to the text are read *into* a text.

A text can point to the need for Christ or provide a framework for understanding Christ's work without resorting to an allegorical or even typological reading of the text. Moreover, though some interpreters read Christ into the text in artificial ways, other interpreters are too reserved in noticing messianic or Christological themes or images. This latter group may relegate Christological interpretation to a few overt references in the Old Testament or may miss the Christological background of New Testament ethical teaching. How a text speaks of Christ as the revelation of God should be a prevailing concern for any interpreter.

▸ What would this look like?

In this text, Jesus is presented as the Son of God. His identity as the Son of God is marked by His reliance "on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (v. 4). His purpose as an obedient Son is shown in His willingness to serve the will of the Father (v. 10).

Assimilation: These questions are aimed at investigating how the meaning of the text can be assimilated into the teaching and life of the interpreter.

Q11 | What aspect of biblical theology is taught in the text?

▸ What's at stake?

This penultimate question recognizes that the Christological theme is not the only aspect of biblical theology that features significantly in any given passage. This theological analysis grapples with other elements of biblical theology that are communicated by biblical texts (e.g., the Trinity, theology of the Scriptures, doctrine of sin, etc). Like the previous question, this question draws on the findings of the preceding questions to explore the variety ways that biblical authors communicate their theological concepts. These other themes should be understood in light of the overarching Christological theme.

▸ What would this look like?

In addition to the Christological theme, the biblical theological themes of spiritual warfare, facing temptation, wisdom of the Scriptures, exclusive worship of the Lord and the role of angels all



garner some attention in this narrative.

Q12 | *How can this truth best be proclaimed?*

‣ What's at stake?

This homiletical analysis notes that the interpreter's task is not done after discovering the biblical theological content of a focus text. As the interpreter shifts from the role of disciple to that of disciple-maker, the need is for a way to communicate the biblical theological message that is in keeping with the structure, content and purpose of the biblical text. Recognizing that the method of delivery can affect a hearer's perception of the meaning, the interpreter-turned-teacher presents the biblical theological findings in a way that encourages the hearer to become a faithful student of the Word as well.

‣ What would this look like?

Reflecting the structure of the narrative, the three temptations could provide the main structure of the sermon or Bible study. The use of the OT texts should figure prominently in the study matching their centrality in the text.

Using the Interpretive Task in Your Own Study

The "interpretive task" that we've outlined here may seem daunting at first. However, these are simply the types of questions we are encouraging you to ask when reading and studying the Scriptures. Depending on the text you are working with, each of these questions will have different levels of emphasis.

One way to begin using these questions is to start small. Pick one or two questions to think through and begin using when you read your Bible daily. Once you feel comfortable asking and answering that question, move on to another. The goal of the "interpretive task" as we have laid it out here is to make these types of textual questions common in your study of the Scripture.

A Closing Word About the Course

The primary goal of the course has been to develop sound principles of interpretation that have an eye toward the theological purpose of Scripture and the edification of the local church. Our hope is that by continuing to engage in this hermeneutical task, you will deepen your capacity to pursue biblical wisdom through "rightly handling the word of truth."

It is our hope that by thinking through a theology of the Scriptures (session 1), important hermeneutical choices (session 2-3), the big picture of the biblical covenants (session 4-5), textual strategies in the OT and NT (session 6-7), and a few questions to ask in the interpretive task (session 8), your understanding and love of the Scriptures will increase (Psalm 1:1-3).



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*Though we gladly recommend these resources to you for further study, we do not necessarily endorse every aspect of each author's discussion or argument. So, as should be your common practice, seek to read with discernment.



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