

How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth

Preface to the Third Edition

Changes Made (from one edition to the next)

1. necessitated by updates in translations
2. explanations for revision to translations
3. waning influence of KJV
4. recommended commentaries changed
5. greater emphasis now on reading well vs. abuses to the text

Preface to the First Edition

1. types of hermeneutics books
 - list of rules/methods
 - hermeneutic primers (for “lay” person)
2. present emphasis - learn biblical genres
3. studying vs reading (information vs understanding)
4. emphasis on application (obeying), not just reading, studying
5. crucial issue - then & there vs here & now; meant vs means [cf. Thiselton - Between 2 Horizons]
6. Bible initially revealed in “concrete historical context” but with continuing relevance
7. exegesis - what text originally meant (HTSB #4) -
8. hermeneutics - how it applies today
 - classic usage of term combines both concepts - the text means today what it meant then
9. purpose of book: study of 10 literary genres
10. “Tolle Lege” - “Take up and read”

Chapter One - Introduction: The Need To Interpret

1. mistaken approach
 - no interpretation needed - just read it and do it
2. it is true that we need to practice what Bible teaches - which often does not need an interpretive “step” (Lk 10 - lawyer knew; Rev 1:3 - between reading/keeping is understanding)
3. aim of interpretation is not uniqueness, but to get to the “plain meaning of text”
4. to get to “plain meaning” we need to consider:
 - nature of the reader - as interpreter
 - nature of Scripture - as interpreted
5. every reader is an interpreter
6. danger: assuming our understanding =’s God’s
7. what we bring to the text can “color” the text
 - e.g. cross - **t** vs **T**; church - pews vs. people
8. flesh - body vs nature (beware of Calvinism)
9. “plain meaning” demands awareness of present circumstances and original context (e.g. role of women, speaking in tongues, et. al.)
10. “plain meaning” re baptism (immersion, adults vs infants, etc.)
11. cults (Bible+ ? authority) vs cults (Bible + ? interpretation); e.g. “health & wealth gospel”
12. erroneous ideas ≠ all interpretation is bad
13. erroneous ideas demand good interpretation

The Nature of Scripture

1. like Christ's - both human & divine elements
2. because it is divine it has continuing relevance
 - Word = divinely guided human words in history
 - each book an "historical particularity" ("conditioned by the language, time..." Rom 4:22ff)
3. tension of eternal relevance & historical particularity >'s need for interpretation
4. correct view of scripture demands we know:
 - not just human - to interpret like all literature
 - not just divine - containing only divinely revealed propositions/mandates
5. correct view of interpretation:
 - not just a literal vs figurative issue (not just either/or)
 - not just a "series of propositions and imperatives"
6. correct view demands we see propositions in historical context and circumstances
7. genres include:
 - narrative history • genealogies • chronicles • laws
 - poetry • proverbs • prophecy • riddles
 - drama • biography • parables • letters/epistles
 - sermons • apocalypses & multiple variations within each genre
8. this demands
 - knowledge of general rules
 - knowledge of genre specific rules (how does a Psalm addressed to God apply to us?)
9. God's word to us was initially his word to others, thus necessitating a means of connection
10. our test today demands both exegesis (then & there) and hermeneutics (here & now)

The First Task: Exegesis

1. "the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning"
 - basically an historical task involving language, milieu, etc.
2. difference between them & us is
3. exegetic problems:
 - sometimes too selective
 - inappropriate sources
4. exegesis - not just for "problem" passages, but for every passage (cf. 1 Th 5:22 - avoid people or error or both; eye of a needle; "miracle" to save rich)

Learning To Do Exegesis

1. exegesis requires knowledge of:
 - languages • culture/background • textual variations • primary sources & tools • your own abilities & the work of others
2. exegesis requires: learning to read (cf. Adler)
3. exegesis requires answers to questions of context & content

The Historical Context

1. time and culture of author & readers
 - geographical • topographical • political
2. occasion of writing • type of writing (letter, psalm, etc.)
3. personal background of author, reader, city, customs affects understanding/interpretation
4. recommended Bible background books & bibliographies
5. most important issue: occasion & purpose of book, usually found in text itself

The Literary Context

1. “first that words only have meaning in sentences, and second that biblical sentences for the most part only have clear meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences.”
2. most important contextual question - “what’s the point” (can we follow writer’s train of thought?)

The Questions of Content

1. meanings of words, grammatical relationships in sentences, choice of the original text re mss variants, etc.
2. it also includes historical context (denarius, etc.)
3. most important contextual question - “what’s the point” (can we follow writer’s train of thought?)

The Tools

1. a good translation (ch 2)
2. a good Bible dictionary
3. good commentaries

The Second Task: Hermeneutics

1. hermeneutics - inclusive of the entire task of interpretation, including exegesis, or
2. narrower sense of finding contemporary relevance of ancient texts - S/F use this sense
3. Note: 2nd ¶ - “Surely the same Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible can equally inspire one’s reading of it.” - “In short, you must also learn to study the Bible, which in turn must inform your devotional reading.” (tf - exegesis > hermeneutics)
4. you must start with the original intent, not here & now
5. original intent “is the objective point of control”
6. re false interpretations, etc. - “We cannot make it mean anything that please us and then give the Holy Spirit ‘credit’ for it. The Holy Spirit cannot be brought into the process to contradict himself, and the Spirit is the one who inspired the original intent.”
7. “A text cannot mean what it never meant.”

Chapter Two - The Basic Tool: A Good Translation

1. Basic facts: 66 bks; 3 languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek)
2. If you read in translation you are already involved in interpretation (i.e., the translators)
3. Using one translation commits you to all of the exegetical choices of that translation.
 - a. 1 Cor 7:36
 - b. 4 translations
 - c. variation in identity of the virgin: daughter, wife, fiancé, ?
 - d. they can’t all be right
4. It’s alright to use one main translation, but for study, be prepared to use multiple translations as a checks and balance system

The Science of Translation

1. Two choices made by translators
 - a. textual - the actual wording of the text
 - b. linguistic - theory of translation

2. The Question of Text

- a. which Hebrew/Greek text will be used

- b. no originals (autographs) exist
- c. 1000's of mss exist - and copies of those mss
- d. differences exist among them due to transmission issues - handwritten, not printed, photocopied, etc.
- e. problem - sifting through variants to determine "most likely" original text
- f. this is the domain of textual criticism - "the science that attempts to discover the original texts of ancient documents."
- g. two key issues:
 - i. Textual criticism is a science that works with careful controls
 - 1. external evidence - quality and age of mss re variants (OT - DSS, LXX, Masoretic, etc.; NT - Egypt, copying traditions, etc.)
 - 2. internal evidence - copyists, authors, habits of transcribers, cf. e.g's., 1 Sam 8:16, et. al.
 - ii. Though textual criticism is a science, it is not exact - it deals with too many human variables
 - 1. when mss evidence conflicts with best explanation of variant/error (?), committees can be divide, hence majority/minority opinions, margin notes, etc.
 - 2. cf. 1 Cor 13:3 re boast, flames, etc.; lesson/principle remains the same - sacrifice w/o love = 0
 - 3. correct text is a content issue

3. *The Questions of Language*

- a. original language - Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek
- b. receptor language - final product of translation, 1000's of possibilities (English, German, French, et. al.)
- c. historical distance - differences between original and receptor languages (number of words, idioms, grammar, culture, history)
- d. formal equivalence - keeping close to the form of original language as possible; in word, grammar, etc.; often referred to as a literal translation; keeps historical distance intact at all points
- e. functional (sometimes called dynamic) equivalence - keep the meaning of original language; put original idioms and words into "normal" words in receptor language; keeps historical distance intact on historical, factual matters, but updates re language, grammar, style, etc.
- f. free translation - translation of ideas from one language to another with less concern about using the exact words as original, sometimes called a paraphrase; eliminates historical distance - desires to be faithful to original
- g. theory of translation - which style (formal or functional/dynamic) is used
- h. issues re formal equivalence - can be stilted, ambiguous
- i. issues re free translations - translator updates original too much, almost becomes a commentary

4. *Some Problem Areas*

- a. weights, measures, money (see examples in text)
- b. euphemisms (see examples in text) - translate literally, formally, functional equivalent euphemism
- c. vocabulary (see examples in text)
- d. wordplays (see examples in text)
- e. grammar and syntax (see examples in text) - genitive constructions, wooden translations ("and" in Gen 1 KJV)
- f. matters of gender - inclusive, exclusive

5. *On Choosing A Translation*

- a. theologically biased - New World Translation, Lamsa • b. dynamic - NIV, TNIV, NAB, GNB
- b. more formal - NASU, NRSV
- c. free - REB, NJB

Chapter Three - The Epistles: Learning To Think Contextually

1. The epistles appear to be so easy to interpret ... (cf. Rom 6:23, Eph 2:8, et. al.)
2. The ease of interpreting them may be deceptive, especially re hermeneutics.
 - a. e.g. 1 Cor 7:25 - "I have no commandment from the Lord ... I give judgment"
 - b. Disfellowshipped from one church > go down the street
 - c. Spiritual gifts in ch 12-14 and their contemporary application
 - d. 11:2-16 re head covering
3. *The Nature of The Epistles*
 - a. They are not a homogeneous lot [cf. Deissman's distinction between between letters (personal correspondence) and epistles [following a specific artistic and literary form]]
 - b. Form of ancient letters
 - i. name of writer (e.g. Paul)
 - ii. name of recipient (Corinth)
 - iii. greeting (Grace and peace ...)
 - iv. prayer, thanksgiving (I always thank ...)
 - v. body
 - vi. final greeting and farewell
 - vii. variable element - #4, the body
 - c. NT epistles lack some of these elements
 - i. Hebrews which is part letter, part tract
 - ii. 1 John - no formal elements of a letter - clearly written for a specific audience
 - iii. James, 2 Peter are addressed as letters, but lack final greeting/farewell; but closest to "epistles" (or "tracts" for the whole church)
 - d. all are occasional documents
 - i. arising out of and intended for a specific occasion
 - ii. in the context of the first century
 - iii. because of a specific circumstance
 - iv. usually on the reader's side (not the author's)
 - v. they are theological, but not necessarily systematically ... they are "task" theology, answers to specific questions and issues due to the circumstance that occasioned them
 - vi. they are theologically directed toward a specific need
4. *The Historical Context*
 - a. Determine, via background study, as much as possible about the place, people, issues involved in a letter
 - b. Develop the habit of reading the entire letter at once
 - c. Divide the letter into parts (logically, thematically, etc.)
 - d. Reconstruct the letter (cf. example given of the 1st Corinthian epistle)
 - i. issues about the readers
 - ii. attitudes from the author
 - iii. specifics that brought about the letter
 - iv. natural, logical divisions
 - v. outline of the letter
5. *The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 1-4*

- a. Follow the guidelines that you used to outline/digest the entire letter only apply them to smaller sections of the writing
 - i. read that section
 - ii. list/note everything about the readers
 - iii. list/note everything about the author
 - iv. determine how the readers' problems and the attitudes/writing of the author "fit"
- b. Note these issues as demonstrated in the S/F text

6. *The Literary Context*

- a. Trace the arguments presented in the context
- b. In doing so, think paragraphs (thought units), not just words or sentences
- c. We must determine the answer to the questions "what's the point?"
 - i. do so by outlining and analyzing the content of each paragraph
 - ii. attempt to explain why X is the point and how it contributes to the argument in context
- d. See the example presented in the S/F text
- e. Note the summary of the analysis
 - i. the exegesis is self-contained (no need to go outside of the text for understanding)
 - ii. everything in the text fits into "the" argument
 - iii. everything makes sense

7. *One More Time*

- a. Consider Philippians 1:12-2:18
 - i. read it several times
 - ii. note Paul's argument
 - iii. note the occasion
 1. Paul in prison
 2. Philippians send a gift (via Epaphroditus)
 3. Epaphroditus becomes ill
 4. Paul writes to comfort the church
 - a. thanks them for their gift
 - b. lets them know that Epaphroditus is okay - he brings the message
 - c. he encourages them to live in harmony and to beware of the Judaizers
5. Note the paragraph/thought breakdown
6. Note the subject/theme shifts
7. Note the conclusion language (e.g., "therefore")
8. Note the argument forms

8. *The Problem Passages*

- a. Problem passages are often seen as such because they were not written to us and because we are not familiar with the setting/circumstances.
- b. In spite of our uncertainty about some matters, there must be some degree of certainty about others, else God would not have revealed via inspiration the letters themselves
- c. The point/purpose of the writing must be with our grasp.
- d. Good resources (commentaries, etc.) may help in these circumstances.
- e. Remember, scholars do not always have the answers.

Chapter Four - The Epistles: The Hermeneutical Questions

1. Stuart/Fee returned to prior hermeneutical questions:
 - a. What do these texts mean to us?
 - i. This is the crux; compared to this, exegesis is easy.
 - ii. While disagreements exist in exegesis, most agree as to the parameters of meaning.
 - iii. They are limits set by historical and literary contexts.
 - iv. Paul cannot convey meaning that he and his readers never heard of.
 - v. All meaning must remain a first century possibility.
 - b. There are no such parameters for contemporary hermeneutics, that is learning the meaning for our own day.
 - i. Everyone does hermeneutics, often knowing nothing about exegesis.
 - ii. Though differences exist, they are not as varied as one might think. This is due to a common ground of hermeneutics, one that is more implicit and explicit.
2. This chapter will first delineate the common hermeneutics of believers, show its strengths and weaknesses, and offer guidelines where it appears weak. The key issue has to do with problems of cultural relativity—what is strictly first century culture (and so belongs only there), and what transcends that culture for all times.
3. *Our common hermeneutics*
 - a. Whenever we read an epistle we bring our common sense to the text and apply what we can to our situation. This is practicing hermeneutics. We do not interpret Paul's call for his cloak to be our own.
 - b. Most issues in the epistles fit into this commonsense hermeneutics.
 - c. Problems develop when we encounter texts that are between commonsense application for all times and specific first century cultural applications.
 - i. More often than not, these hermeneutical difficulties are due to a lack of consistency.
 - ii. They sometimes bring in our theological baggage, traditions, contemporary norms, or existential concerns to the epistles.
 - iii. These things often generate selectivity in our hermeneutics, or skirting an issue that we are unsure of. (cf. issue of Paul's instructions to Timothy to drink wine not water; 1960s Jesus freaks and 1 Cor 11 re hair; what parts of 1 Cor 14 apply today and which do not re women in the church; cf. issues of infant baptism, two stage second coming, second work of grace, Calvinism, etc. 74-75)
4. *The Basic Rule*
 - a. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers (cf. HTSB handout - what it means to me, what it meant to original readers/hearers, what it mean to author, what God intended)
 - b. This demands exegesis before hermeneutic.
 - i. While exegesis may not tell you what it does mean, it will certainly tell you what it could not mean.
 - ii. Note S/F's slant on the "perfect" in 1 Cor 13. The assumption is that it could not possibly have reference to a completed new testament because the Corinthian church did not expect it. Consider 1 Corinthians 2 in this regard. The text plainly says that no man ever fully considered or understood what God had in mind/store re the establishment of the church ... yet he did it anyway. Much of OT prophecy and NT fulfillment may have escaped the grasp of OT Jews and NT Christians ... that does not mean it could not have occurred (or meant) as/what God intended it (to mean). the Holy Spirit sometimes revealed things not initially understood to those who first heard them. Consider Peter in acts 2:39 and his remarks about what the prophets did and did not know in 1 Peter 1:10.
5. *The Second Rule*

- a. “Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar specific life situations) with the first-century hearers, God’s Word to us is the same as his Word to them.” (75)
- b. This rule gives most theological texts and communal ethical imperatives in the epistles a sense of immediacy to contemporary Christians as it did to first century Christians.
- c. When we have completed exegesis and have discovered God’s word to those Christians, we bring ourselves under that same word (assuming that the historical distance and circumstances convenes - jla).
- d. Notice line: “The great caution here is that we do our exegesis well so that we have confidence that our situations and particulars are genuinely comparable to theirs.” (75, echoing my comment above)
 - i. This demands a careful reconstruction of all problems and particulars. (cf. 1 Cor 6:1ff re going to law)
 - ii. The key issue is how some texts might be applied beyond their specific particulars. The authors spend the rest of the chapter addressing four problems along this line.

6. *The Problem of Extended Application*

- a. When we find comparable particulars and contexts in today’s church, is it proper to extend the application of the original text to other contexts, or make the text apply in a totally foreign context than its first century setting?
- b. Consider 1 Cor 3:16-17 in this regard. Does this apply equally well to contemporary Christians as it did the first century Christians?
- c. If we assume so, having not been bypassed exegesis altogether through our assumption that everything applies to the individual believer today as it did then?
- d. S/F argue that comparable situations and particulars in their time and ours still restricts God’s word to us as limited by its original intent to them. The checks and balances of other passages can show such intent. (Note S/F raise an issue on 76/77 that appears to suggest that only what one learns via extended, i.e., personal, application, can truly be God’s word. This suggests a Barthian, personal encounter/existential approach. Barth’s position was driven by his view of God as “wholly other,” totally transcendent and so incomparable analogically to anything he did/created, e.g. man.)
- e. Case studies include text like “do not be unequally yoked” (2 Cor 6:14).

7. *The Problem of Particulars That Are Not Comparable*

- a. What do we do with texts that address first century issues that have no parallel in contemporary issues?
- b. S/F suggest three such types of texts in 1 Corinthians
 - i. Christians joining their pagan neighbors at feasts in idols temples
 - ii. the Corinthians’ challenge to Paul’s apostolic authority
 - iii. food sacrificed to idols and sold in the marketplace
- c. Solid exegesis presents Paul’s answers as follows
 - i. they were forbidden to attend the idol feasts
 - 1. on grounds that they would be a stumbling block
 - 2. on grounds that such eating is incompatible with life in Christ is experienced at his table
 - 3. on grounds that to do so would be to participate in the demonic
 - ii. Paul had a right to be supported as an apostle even though he was willing to forgo that right
 - iii. to purchase the marketplace could be eaten freely in one’s own home or someone else’s home, but in the latter only if it did not create a problem for someone else
- d. Though these texts do not seem to apply to us in our Western culture, they are very much germane in many Asian cultures.
- e. There are other kinds of texts that, while possible, are highly improbable to occur in our culture. How do these non-contemporary issues determine our hermeneutics?

- i. We must make sure that we do exegesis with particular care in order to determine a clear principle, one that will transcend historical particularity.
- ii. That principle must only be applied to genuinely comparable situations. (cf. stumbling block issue A, 78)
- iii. Note examples of contemporary parallels (79) re participation in demonic (e.g. spiritism, witchcraft, et. al.); support of ministers; issues of indifference vs. issues that really differ (eating meat from idols, keeping of days then, to contemporary moral issues today)
- iv. What makes something a matter of indifference?
 1. The epistles regarded as such (food, drink, keeping days)
 2. The matter is not inherently moral but cultural
 3. Sin lists in Scripture do not include these sorts of matters

8. *The Problem of Cultural Relativity*

- a. How does God's eternal word translate into historical particularity?
 - i. remember that epistles are occasional documents, that they are first century documents, that they are conditioned by the language and culture of that time, which spoke to real life, specific situations in that era
 - ii. some of those situations are so first century oriented that they obviously had little or no personal application to us today, except in a very distant sense, to some principle, etc.
 - iii. some situations are thoroughly first century, yet translatable into comparable settings
 - iv. yet others might simply remain in first century application only
 - v. difficulties arise because there is no divinely ordained culture (S/F - 81 - how would this be understood against God's thorough going theonomic OT kingdom; cf. Bahnsen, Rushdoony, et. al.)
 - vi. The authors suggest "that the recognition of a degree of cultural relativity is a valid hermeneutical procedure and an inevitable corollary of the occasional nature of epistles." (81)
 - vii. these guidelines are offered for distinguishing between culturally relative and transcendent of culture:
 1. distinguish between the central core of the message, and what is peripheral
 2. distinguish between what is inherently moral and what is not
 3. take note of those things where there is a uniform and consistent witness in the New Testament, but note also the differences it reflects (cf. examples cited here and elsewhere do not always sync with the principles stated - issues of women's ministries, etc., would find objection in the hermeneutical principles of others)
 4. learn to distinguish between principle and application
 5. determine the cultural options open to any New Testament writer
 6. remember that cultural differences between first century churches and contemporary churches are not always obvious
 7. remember to exercise Christian charity
 - viii. take note of the extensive examples provided by the authors. While rightly stating that the issues of the role of women in the church is not the same as the issue of homosexuality then, they argue that only one of them has particular relevance today (84-85).

9. *The Problem of Task Theology*

- a. The authors emphasized earlier that much of the theology and the epistles is task centered. This does not mean that one cannot find theology expressed within the epistles. In fact, it is one of the mandatory tasks of the Bible student. We are always forming biblical theology on the basis of sound exegesis. The local riders expression of theology in presuppositions and implications as well as through the explicit statements they write.
- b. They suggest a list of cautions as we go about the task of theology:
 - i. remember the limitations of our theological understanding
 - ii. remember that we often ask our questions of texts that by their occasional nature only answer their questions

Chapter Five - The Old Testament Narratives: Their Proper Use

1. The most common type of literature in the Bible is narrative. 40% of the Old Testament is narrative and three fourths of the Bible is Old Testament.
2. This present chapter focuses on how Hebrew narrative works.

3. The Nature of Narratives - What Narratives Are

- a. Narratives are stories that retail historical events of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction for a given people in the present.
- b. In this regard, biblical narratives are parallel to non-biblical narratives. They are different, of course in that they are divinely inspired, and tell God's story.
- c. Bible narratives tell us about things that happened in the past, and have three basic parts: characters, plot, and plot resolution.
- d. Most narratives assume some sort of conflict or tension that needs resolving.
- e. The characters are: the protagonist (the lead character in the story), the antagonist (the person who brings the conflict), the agonists (other major characters involved in attention)
- f. the ultimate biblical protagonist is God, Satan, or his minions, are the antagonists, and God's people are the agonists
- g. the basic plot centers on how God's people created in his image serve him on this earth
- h. Satan attempts to thwart God's purpose, thus creating tension
- i. plot resolution, biblically speaking, centers on redemption

4. The Nature of Narratives - Three Levels of Narrative

- a. The top, or third, level is the one that focuses on God's redemption. It is sometimes referred to as the super story, or the meta-narrative. It addresses everything that goes on in the entirety of God's plan to redeem mankind.
- b. The second level focuses on how God redeems (works out his redemption for) his people through the ages. The second level includes all of the principles of covenant, law, etc. The authors stress God's plan as it is enacted through promise and fulfillment. I often emphasis this level as the realm of providence.
- c. The first, or bottom, level is where we find all of the hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels. I often refer to this as the street-level, referring to those events that occur right in front of us every day.

5. The Nature of Narratives - What Narratives Are Not

- a. "Old Testament narratives are not allegories are stories filled with hidden meanings." (92)

- b. “Individual Old Testament narratives are not intended to teach moral lessons.” (92) (I would modify this to say, “some” narratives, and/or note that they are not all “primarily intended” to teach moral lessons.) one moral lessons are often found, the primary objective is recognizing what God has done to and through Israel.
- c. Though Old Testament narratives might not teach directly, we illustrate what is taught explicitly elsewhere.

6. *The Characteristics of Hebrew Narrative*

- a. The Narrator
 - i. the narrator chooses what to say in the story
 - ii. this makes him comparatively omniscient - he knows what’s going on at all times and all places
 - iii. his role is to tell the story in such a way that you are drawn into the near
 - iv. the narrator is responsible for the point of view of the story
- b. The Scene(s)
 - i. the predominant mode of narration in Hebrew narrative is scenic.
 - ii. The action is moved along by a series of scenes that make up the whole, and might be likened to a contemporary movie/television drama.
- c. The Characters
 - i. In the scenic nature of Hebrew narrative characters are central
 - ii. the presentation of character has very little to do with physical appearance, but rather are matters of status or profession, or tribal designation.
 - iii. Two features of characterization stand out:
 - 1. characters are often presented in contrast or in parallel
 - 2. the usual mode of characterization occurs in the character’s own words and actions, not in the narrator’s
- d. Dialogue
 - i. the first point of dialogue is often a significant clue to both the story plot and character of the speaker
 - ii. contrastive dialogue often functions as a way of characterization
 - iii. the narrator often emphasizes crucial parts of the narrative by having one of the characters repeat or summarize the narrative in a speech
- e. Plot
 - i. narratives need a plot and the plot resolution, thus necessitating the narrative have a beginning middle and end
 - ii. together these focus on a build up of dramatic tension/conflict that needs resolved, thus generating interest in the resolution
- f. Features of Structure
 - i. Hebrew narratives used various structural features to catch the hearer’s attention. note that term hearer. Though written down, narratives were designed primarily for hearers, not readers. several different styles of structure were employed in order to keep hearers readily engaged.
 - ii. some of those structural features all are:
 - 1. repetition—keyword repetition, resumption of the narrative after interruption, stereo typical patterns (cycles in Judges and in Kings)
 - 2. inclusion—a unique form of repetition were in narrative is started and ended on the same note or in the same lie, a special form of inclusion known as chiasm involves a more elaborate structure, starting and ending the same, but in between it could be something like this A - B - C - C- B - A
 - 3. foreshadowing—something briefly noted in an early part of the narrative is picked up in detail later on

4. Cf. Commentaries for additional features of structure

7. *A Final Word*: Remember that as you read Hebrew narrative God is the ultimate character, the hero of the story.

8. *Reading Between The Lines*

- a. Using the book of Ruth as an example, we can learn much from what is implicit in a narrative, things that the narrator has put in the story that you might initially miss on first reading of the book.
- b. Though it appears that the book of Ruth is a love story between Ruth and Boaz, we must remember that it is ultimately a story of God's love for us, God's kindness.
- c. We do not want to look for hidden meanings, but we do want to find out every meaning implicit in the story.
- d. Note the following implicit story lines:
 - i. Ruth's conversion to Judaism is subtle; see 1:16
 - ii. Boaz, a righteous Israelite, his faithful specifically because he keeps the law. The law of gleaning in Leviticus was applied scrupulously in this setting.
 - iii. The narrative informs us that a non-Jewish woman became a part of the ancestry of King David, that's informing us of God's love for all mankind.
 - iv. The narrative tells us implicitly that Bethlehem was unique town during the period of judges because of the faithfulness of its citizenry.

9. *Some Final Cautions* - Be sure to avoid the following:

- a. Allegorizing: while there are clear allegorical parts of Scripture, we must remember that no historical narrative is at the same time an allegory
- b. Decontextualizing: don't ignore the complete historical illiterate context, as well as the individual narrative.
- c. Selectivity: don't pick and choose specific words and phrases to concentrate on while ignoring others in the overall sweep of the narrative. Listen to the entirety of the narrative.
- d. Moralizing: don't assume that principles for living, moral principles, are derived from every passage. This approach ignores the fact that narratives were written to show the progress of God's history of redemption, not to illustrate principles. (The authors' consistent emphasis on this point avoids a key question: is it not possible that God could reveal moral principles at the same time that he revealed his overarching plan to redeem man. Surely they must consider that the principles of Mosaic law, enacted in a uniquely historical setting, carries with it specific principles and practices of behavior. Their approach needs to be tempered in this regard.)
- e. Personalizing: assuming that everything you read apply specifically to you or someone close to you: becomes a very self-centered reading of the Bible
- f. Misappropriation: similar to personalizing, this error centers on the use of a text in an inappropriate way: it is to appropriate the text for purposes that are foreign to the narrative itself
- g. False appropriation: another form of decontextualizing; to read into a biblical narrative ideas that come from contemporary culture, ideas that are foreign to the narrative's purpose and point of view
- h. False Combination: draws from other/multiple places and passages to establish a combination that is not directly connected in the immediate passage itself
- i. Redefinition: redefining some passage to mean something other than what is/was intended in the text
- j. simply remember that no viable narrative was written specifically about you, or to you, immediately; while it applies, it is only after conducting proper exegesis that proper hermeneutics can determine so
- k. note the general principles on page 106 for interpreting narratives.

Principles For Interpreting Narratives

1. OT narrative usually does not teach doctrine directly.
2. OT narrative usually illustrates doctrine taught propositionally elsewhere.
3. Narratives record what happened, not what ought to happen ... Not every narrative has clear moral application.
4. Actions in narratives are not necessarily good examples to follow They may be just the opposite.
5. OT characters and their actions are often far from perfect.
6. OT narratives do not always end telling us what is good or bad - we are left to form that judgement from other teaching.
7. All narratives are selective and incomplete ... We have, however, what was intended.
8. Narratives do not necessarily address our theological questions. They have specific purposes/issues.
9. Narratives may teach implicitly or explicitly.
10. God is always the hero of biblical narratives.

Chapter Six - Acts: The Question of Historical Precedent

Introduction

1. Most people do not read Acts in the same way they read Judges or Samuel.
2. When we read Old Testament narratives we tend to moralize, allegorize, personalize, etc.
3. We do not usually think of Old Testament narratives as paradigms for Christian behavior or church life.
4. While we do not usually think of Old Testament history as setting biblical precedence, that's exactly the way we read the book of Acts. We assume that it is the history of the early church, as well as the normative model for the church at all times.
5. S/F assume that this is a hermeneutical difficulty.
6. "Many sectors of evangelical Protestantism had a "restoration" mentality." (108)
7. "In fact it is our lack of hermeneutical precision as to what Acts is trying to teach that has led to a lot of the division one finds in the church. Such diverse practices as the baptism of infants or believers only, congregational and Episcopalian church polity, the necessity of observing the Lord's supper every Sunday, the choice of deacons by congregational vote, the selling of possessions and having all things in common, and even ritual snake handling (!) have been supported in whole or in part on the basis of Acts." (108)
8. The main purpose of this chapter is to offer hermeneutical suggestions for the problems of biblical precedent, especially in Acts.
9. The authors do not believe that Luke's intention, which is the intention of the Holy Spirit, lends itself to pattern theology.

The Exegesis of Acts

1. S/F assume that Acts is a very readable book it is a difficult book for group Bible study, because people come to it for a variety of reasons. Some are interested historically, others apologetically, others devotionally, etc.
2. The varying purposes causes selectivity in our approaches.
3. S/F interest is to prompt alert study of Acts, to study the text through the terms of Luke's (Spirit's) interest, not just our own, and to spur new kinds of questions as we read.

Acts As History

1. Prior exegetical suggestions apply equally well here.
2. Luke was a Gentile, whose narrative is an excellent example of Hellenistic historiography.
3. These types of history were not written simply to keep records or to chronicle the past, but rather to encourage or to entertain, to inform, moral lives, or offer an apologetic.

4. Luke, greatly influenced by Old Testament narratives, also penned a religiously motivated history in the telling of the early Christian story.
5. Both Luke and Acts fit this kind of history.
6. There is divine activity going on in this story, and Luke is concerned that his readers understand this.
7. For Luke, the divine story begins with Jesus and continues to the ministry of the Spirit in the church. Both are assumed to be a continuation of God's story that begins in the Old Testament.
8. Luke's theological interests, therefore, are of special importance as we read and study Acts.
9. A proper exegesis of Acts must include not only purely historical questions like "what happened?" But also theological bonds such as "what was Luke's purpose in selecting and shaping the material in this way?" (110)
10. The issue of Luke's intent is fundamental. "If it can be demonstrated that Luke's intent in Acts was to lay down a pattern for the church at all times, and that pattern surely becomes normative, that is, is what God requires of all Christians under any conditions. But if his intent is something else, then we need to ask the hermeneutical questions in a different way." (110)
11. S/F assume that discovering Luke's intent can be difficult because we do not know how is and because Luke's interests seem varied. They maintain that his interest must be always kept in mind as we read/exegete Acts, noting both the what and the why of everything with what chronologically/logically prior.

The First Step

1. Read the book of Acts in one sitting, making observations and asking questions.
2. Make mental notes of such things as key people and places, recurring motifs, and natural divisions of the book.
3. Review and skim read, and jot down with references your prior observations.
4. Ask yourself, "why did you write this book?"
5. Because Acts is unique S/F will be more specific in guiding our reading and study.

Acts: An Overview

1. Note first the natural divisions as Luke presents them.
2. That division might occur in this way: Luke's interest in Peter (1-12); Luke's interest in Paul (13-28)
3. Or it might appear geographically according to the spread of the gospel (1:8) first to Jerusalem (1-7), then to Samaria and Judea (10-11) and finally, to the rest of the world (11-28)
4. S/F see another series of clues in 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:4; 19:20 ["Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7); "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." (Acts 9:31); "But the word of God grew and multiplied." (Acts 12:24); "And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem." (Acts 16:4); "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." (Acts 19:20)]
5. They suggest met ? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT HERE? Nice summary statements seem to pause for a moment before taking off in a new direction of some kind.
6. They assume, then, that acts is composed of six sections of the narrative given the demonstrated continual forward movement from its Jewish setting in Jerusalem, ultimately ending in Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, as the goal.
7. Those six sections are:
 - a. 1:1-6:7 - primitive Jerusalem church, everything is Jewish
 - b. 6:8-9:31 - first geographical expansion, by Hellenists, to Samaritans
 - c. 9:32-12:24 - first Gentiles (Cornelius), Antioch (Gentile center)
 - d. 12:25-16:5 - first geographical expansion in Gentile world, council to keep working among Gentiles

- e. 16:6-19:20 - further westward expansion in Gentile world, Jews rejecting and Gentiles accepting the gospel
- f. 19:21-28:30 - Paul, and the gospel, moves to Rome

Luke's Purpose

1. S/F make the key to understanding acts Luke's interest in the movement of the Gospel. Any statement of purpose that does not include this Gentile mission will have missed the point of the book, they claim. (111-112)
2. This movement is proven by what Luke does not tell us: no biography of the apostles, once the movement to gentiles get underway, Peter drops from the scene
3. There is no other geographical expansion except the one from Jerusalem to Rome. Other areas are simply not included.
4. Luke's interest does not seem to be standardizing things, bringing everything into uniformity. Only two elements are usually included in conversions: gift of the Spirit and water baptism, but without regard to order. The authors see no specific example being set forth as a model Christian experience.
5. They believe that much of acts is to serve as a model, but not in the specifics as much as in the overall picture. (114) The emphasis is on the joy of the expansion, and on the particulars that prompted it.

An Exegetical Sampling

1. Consider two narratives: 6:1-7 and 8:1-25 as examples.
2. 6:1-7 (ministry of the seven among the widows)
 - a. The authors see this section as a transition between the first and second panels of movement from Jerusalem toward Rome.
 - b. There is also the tension that exists between the Hebrews and the Greeks.
 - c. The background given on page 115 is simply for the purpose of setting the scene for the first expansion of the church outside his Jerusalem base (last lines on page.)
- d. 8:1-25 (Philip among the Samaritans)
 - i. S/F see the primary focus as the mission to Samaria, specifically as carried out by a Hellenist (one of the seven in Acts 6) ... And all of this is part of the expansion from Jerusalem to Rome
 - ii. They further note that this mission had both divine and apostolic approval (spiritual gifts given by apostles demonstrates that)
 - iii. See their discussion on what/when/why Samaritans received different "measures" of the spirit

The Hermeneutics of Acts

1. The primary question of this chapter: how did the narratives of Acts, or any other narratives, function as precedents?
2. Does Acts describe the early church as well as serve as the norm of the church at all times?
3. How do you establish this, if it is true?
4. Part of the problem, is that most biblical Christians tend to treat precedent as normative authority to some degree or another, but seldom consistently so.

Some General Principles

1. We must learn to differentiate between what happened in the early church, versus what *must* happen in the continuing Church.
2. Notice this assumption: unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described is not functioning in a normative, obligatory, way—unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.

3. Note the following three categories of doctrinal statements:
 - a. Christian theology, what we believe
 - b. Christian ethics, how we should live
 - c. Christian experience and practice, what we do (jla - this must be viewed as overlapping with b.)
 - d. These doctrines are known on two levels, primary and secondary
 - i. Primary doctrinal statements come from explicit propositions or imperatives
 - ii. Secondary doctrinal statements are derived only incidentally, by implication or by precedent (jla - S/F apparently fail to grasp the import of implication as on par with explicit statements)
4. The authors contend that most everything Christians derived from the biblical text is in the third category, Christian experience or practice, and always at the secondary, that is implicit, level.
5. Note the discussion at the bottom of page 119-120 relative to the observance of the Lord's supper, the practice of baptism and the day of assembly.
6. "It is a general maxim of hermeneutics that God's word is to be found in the intent of the Scripture."
7. They assume that Luke's broader intent was showing how the church emerged is a chiefly Gentile, world wide phenomenon, and how the Holy Spirit provides for universal salvation based on grace alone (120),
8. They assume that the recurring motif that nothing could hinder the spread of the Gospel makes this a model for understanding Acts.
9. They do not believe that the specific details in these narratives should be seen as normative models. They view them as incidental to the main point of the narrative, and because of ambiguous details they assume they see, not central to the narrative itself. (120)
10. Note the following principles regarding the hermeneutics of historical narrative:
 - a. Acts may be regarded as normative for Christians is related primarily to what the narrative was intended to teach. (jla-they assume their understanding of that intent is "the" way to view it)
 - b. One is incidental to the primary intent does not have the same teaching value as the narrative itself.
 - c. Historical precedent, to have normative value, must be related to intent. Does the narrative established precedent?
11. Note the discussion on page 122 about baptism, practice, age, mode, essentiality, etc. The authors assume, seemingly, that because Christendom is divided on these matters, they must be incidental to the teaching of Acts, and thus not normative.

Some Specific Principles

1. Do not use analogy based on biblical precedent as authority for present-day actions.
2. Though not the author's primary purpose, some narratives do have illustrative and pattern value. New Testament writers often use historical precedents from the Old Testament. We, however, do not have God's authority to reproduce this sort of exegesis and analogical analyses that the New Testament authors had. It must also be noted that where precedent justifies present action, that the precedent doesn't establish a norm for specific action. Precedent illustrates the principle, not necessarily a specific action. To use a biblical precedent to justify some action, it is best that that principle of action is taught elsewhere, in addition to the passage where the precedent is alleged to exist.
3. Biblical precedents may be regarded as repeatable patterns, even if not normative. Biblical precedence do not necessarily demand that all Christians in every place in every time must repeat that pattern, or else be disobedient to the word.
4. The strongest case for practices and patterns demands: the existence of a singular pattern, the repetition of that pattern, design approval of that pattern, cultural application beyond initial use/practice

Chapter Seven - The Gospels: One Story, Many Dimensions

Introduction

1. As noted with the epistles and the book of Acts, the Gospels appear to be easy to interpret.
2. Since they are sayings and narratives, teachings about Jesus, one should be able to follow the principles of interpreting the letters for one and the principles of the historical narratives for the other.
3. Though true, it isn't that easy.
4. The four Gospel accounts are a unique literary genre that has few parallels.
5. S/F contend that the major hermeneutical difficulty lies with understanding "the kingdom of God" passages.
6. How do these passages translate into our own cultural setting?

The Nature of The Gospels

1. Difficulties in the Gospel stem from two facts:
 - a. Jesus did not write anything
 - b. There are four separate accounts
2. None of the Gospels came from Jesus himself. The authors speculate that had he written something, it would have looked more like an Old Testament prophetic book than what we know to be the Gospels.
3. The parallel they (S/F) offer, how we understand Paul through both the epistles and Acts, is intended to show the difficulty we have in understanding the gospels. The gospel accounts contain both narrative about Jesus' life as well as accounts of his teaching woven together.
4. Not only were they not written by Christ, they were written by others in a language (Greek) that he did not normally speak (Aramaic). The issue is compounded by multiple accounts of the same sayings/settings that are not identical.
5. God revealed these accounts in this way, so they must be accessible.
6. The four accounts appear to address different Christian communities in the early church, each having a slightly different need.
7. Two levels of interest in Jesus are addressed in the gospel accounts:
 - a. The historical - that this is who Jesus is and what he said
 - b. The existential - how this translates into the lives of later communities did that did not speak Aramaic or Greek and did not live in Palestine but some other setting
8. The four accounts function as hermeneutical models for us ... We must retell the story in our own contexts.
9. "Exegesis of the four gospels, therefore, requires us to think both in terms of the historical setting of Jesus and the historical setting of the authors." (130)

The Historical Context

1. The first task of exegesis is to have an awareness of the historical context. This necessarily involves a reconstruction of the situation that the author is addressing.
2. This makes interpreting the Gospels somewhat more difficult, because they are two-level documents: we must deal with the historical context of Jesus himself, and we must deal with the historical context of the individual authors and their reasons for writing.

The Historical Context of Jesus - in General

1. To understand Jesus you must understand first century Judaism, which means you must become familiar with background information that can only come by reading good sources.
2. One important element of the historical context has to do with the form of Jesus' A teaching. He taught, not only in parables, but in a whole variety of forms including hyperbole, proverbs, similes and metaphors, questions and irony, to name a few.

The Historical Context of Jesus - in Particular

1. Reconstructing historical aspects of Jesus' life can be difficult because the four Gospels often provide very little context.
2. Jesus' teachings and actions were delivered orally during a period of 30 years or more, during which time the entirety of the Gospels did not exist.
3. The individual stories and sayings that were passed on (pericopes) are usually transmitted in their original contexts (jla-assumed).
4. Some of these stories are referred to as "pronouncement stories," which appear in the narrative only for the sake of the same that concludes it.
5. A major difficulty is that so many of the sayings of Jesus were transmitted without their original context. On three separate occasions (1 Cor 7:10; 9:14; Acts 20:35) Paul cites some of Jesus' sayings without alluding to the original historical context. The latter saying in Acts is not found anywhere in the Gospel accounts, and therefore has no context whatsoever. (jla-the nature of the saying, and the context in which it appears in Acts, does not demand that you need an historical context in the life of Jesus in order for the saying itself to make sense.)
6. S/F note that the original contexts were not available to the authors but that they put them in place, under the influence of the Holy Spirit as they saw fit. This accounts for the disparate nature of context of the same saying from one gospel account to another and the apparent thematic grouping of sayings in others. (jla-Matthew and John, apostles, would have known "context" regarding the sayings/actions more so than Mark and Luke. Additionally, is it not the case that the recorded sayings are sufficiently contextually oriented within the pericope itself as to identify their intent/meaning?)
7. Matthew has five topical collections of sayings that end with "When Jesus finished these sayings ..." that appear to have been specifically and thematically arranged for Matthew's purpose/s.
8. One issue, then, is whether or not Jesus' audience for any given teaching was his close disciples, the larger crowds, or his opponents. Knowing the specific audience does not necessarily affect the meaning of any saying, but it can broaden our perspective and help us understand the point of what Jesus said.

The Historical Context of The Evangelist

1. The concern here is not about the literary context in which each evangelist placed Jesus materials, but about the specific historical context of each author that prompted him to write in the first place.
2. The Gospels are anonymous we can detect each author's interest by the way he selected, shaped and arranged his materials.
3. Mark's account, for example, focuses on Isaiah's "suffering servant" theme. Because Jesus' identity as that suffering servant would not have been readily understood at first he is silent until the right moment.
4. Lessons about discipleship, therefore, do not appear until Jesus explains his own suffering, showing that the cross and servant hood are the marks of genuine discipleship.

The Literary Context

1. The literary context has to do with the place of a given pericope in the context of any gospel.
2. To some extent that context was fixed by its original historical context, which may have been known to the evangelist. But much of the material in the Gospels owe their present context to how those evangelists arranged them according to their own needs, all under the influence of the Spirit.
3. The present concern is twofold:
 - a. To help us exegete or read that understanding a given saying or narrative in its present context
 - b. To help understand the nature of the composition of the Gospel as wholes, and so interpret any one of them by themselves, not just as isolated facts about the life of Jesus

Interpreting Individual Pericopes

1. To interpret the epistles we emphasized that you must learn to “think paragraphs.”
2. In the Gospel accounts we must learn to think and follow large blocks of teachings.
3. S/F emphasize this by focusing on two things: thinking horizontally and thinking vertically. This is their way of keeping in mind the two realities noted earlier: there are four counts, and they are two-level documents.

Think Horizontally

1. To think horizontally means that, in stating a specific passage in one Gospel account, you must be aware of the parallels in others.
2. Though none of the evangelists probably intended their gospel to be read in parallel with the others, that God has provided four accounts means that they cannot be read totally in isolation from each other.
3. Caution: studying gospels and parallel is not an attempt to fill out the story in one gospel with details from another. Parallel readings tend to harmonize all details and blur distinctives in each Gospel. While that might help us understand some aspects of the historical Jesus, it does not necessarily help us understand each gospel account itself.
4. Thinking horizontally has two benefits:
 - a. The parallels often give appreciation for the distinctives of each account
 - b. The parallels help us to be aware of different kinds of contexts in which these materials lived in the church
5. The authors warn about presuppositional reading: we assume that each gospel was written independently of the others, but evidence exists which indicates some of the writers knew of and depended on other accounts. Verbal similarity in Matthew, Mark and Luke in their narratives indicates a high probability that they were aware of each other’s writings. Though the stories were initially told in Aramaic, the Gospel accounts are written in Greek. The Greek word order can be extremely free, the similarities often extend even to precise word order among the synoptics. It is unlikely that three people in three parts of the Roman Empire would tell the same story with the same words, even using the same style of prepositions and conjunctions, yet this happens repeatedly in the synoptics. (jla-remember inspiration)
6. Note the similarity of language in the feeding of the 5000 account. (136ff) John’s account seems to be the most independent telling of the story. The other three appear to be inter-dependent.
7. The best explanation of the interdependence of the synoptics is that Mark wrote first, and that Luke and Matthew had access to Mark’s Gospel and used it as a source for their own. See the example cited on page 137 and following.
8. Thinking horizontally and knowing that Matthew and Luke referred to Mark can help us interpret any one of the Gospels as we read it. It also shows how similar materials were used in new contexts in the early church.

Think Vertically

1. Thinking vertically means that when reading or studying a narrative for teaching in the Gospels we must be aware of both historical contexts: that of Jesus and that of the evangelist.
2. Caution: thinking vertically is not primarily to study the life of the historical Jesus. While that is important, we need to understand that the Gospels as they are presented to us is what God to the Spirit Cave, not our own reconstructions of them. Good interpretation requires appreciating any given saying in its original context first, and then in its present canonical context (i.e., in parallel, combining both aspects of historical context, etc.)

3. Using the example of the parable of the vineyard workers, we want to know what does it mean in its present context and Matthew? Thinking horizontally, we examine what is on either side of the parable in Matthew, and how it follows Mark.
4. Thinking vertically, however, we must examine how the parable functions in Matthew's Gospel. Though thinking vertically and horizontally often feel the same point, we must remember to consider each independently.

Interpreting The Gospels As Wholes

1. Literary context demands that we learn to see what goes into the composition of each of the accounts of the Gospels that makes them unique.
2. A must read the Gospels understanding what their interest in Jesus is, what he did and what he said, but also their reasons for telling the story again to their own readers.
3. We must remember that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were officers, not just compilers. Authorship, however, does not mean that they were creators of the material they wrote. In many cases they were there quarters of Jesus words and actions, accounts of which they merely transmitted, but the spirits help. They creatively structured and rewrote the material to meet the specific needs of their audiences. What is important here is that they did not create the material wholly of their own.
4. Three key principles come into play concerning the composition of each account:
 - a. Selectivity - each evangelist selected narratives and teachings that suited their purpose, one of which was simply the preservation of the material. John specifically indicates that he was selective in what he wrote.
 - b. Arrangement - Because churches and audiences have special interests, each rider arranged and adapted what was selected according to their purpose. John's purpose, distinctively apologetic, was to present material to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah, and lead others to believe in him that they might have life.
 - c. Adaptation - Adaptation explains much of the so-called discrepancies among the accounts. The cursing the fig tree, for example, is told in our for its symbolic theological significance. Matthews accounting of focuses on the lesson of faith. Each account is the work of the Spirit, who inspired both Mark and Matthew.
 - d. As an example consider three aspects of Jesus ministry is presented in Mark:
 - i. His popularity with the crowds
 - ii. Discipleship for the few
 - iii. Opposition from the authorities
 - iv. Marked selects and arranges marriages in order to present Jesus' public ministry. He selects five different kinds of narratives that paint a specific picture of Christ.

Some Hermeneutical Observations

1. The Teachings and Imperatives
 - a. When exegesis has been done with care, the teachings and imperatives of Jesus in the Gospels will be brought into this century in the same way we deal with the epistles. Cultural relativity combined with redemptive concern will always be first and foremost in our hermeneutics.
 - b. We must always examine our assumptions about the meaning of Jesus' words and cultural context.
 - c. Much of what Jesus taught must be understood in the context of expanding Old Testament law. For many that law presents an impossible ideal, which prompts them to use many hermeneutical ploys to get around these imperatives as normative authority today.

d. The imperatives, however, according to the authors, are not the law in the sense that we must obey them in order to become or remain a Christian. Our celebration does not depend on perfect obedience to them. They are descriptions, they allege, by the way is imperative of what Christian life must be like because of God's prior acceptance of others. (Jla-reformed theology never views anything on our part as imperative as it relates to salvation-it is always wholly of God.)

2. The Narratives

- a. The narratives in the Gospels often function in more than one way.
- b. The authors state that the miracle stories were not recorded to offer morals or serve as precedence, but were rather offered to function as illustrations of the power of God's kingdom coming through in Jesus' ministry. Though they might illustrate faith, that was not their primary function. (Jla-S/F often find a singular purpose in scripture that they appear to stringently defend. They seem to do so without allowing correlative purposes.)

3. A Final, Very Important Word

- a. The authors stress our inability to properly interpret the gospel accounts without a clear understanding of the concept of God's kingdom in Jesus' ministry.
- b. They emphasize that the basic theological framework of the entire New Testament is eschatological.
- c. Early Christians understood that Jesus' coming, death and resurrection, and the importation of the spirit, were all related to direct their expectations about the coming of the end, thus a new, messianic age.
- d. This new age was also known as the kingdom of God.
- e. John the baptizer's message about the coming Kingdom attracted a lot of attention. The Messiah was coming soon. The kingdom is coming soon.
- f. Jesus' own ministry emphasized that the kingdom is coming soon.
- g. After Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, God poured out his Spirit, thus demonstrating that the kingdom had arrived.
- h. Early Christians needed to understand that the end they expected was really the beginning of the end.
- i. Early Christians lived between the beginning of the end and the end of the end.
- j. Understanding that they already are part of the kingdom, yet had to continue to live in the world until the end of time, becomes the hermeneutical key to much of the New Testament. This tension of already, but not yet, demands that we are called to life in the kingdom now in anticipation of life in the kingdom then.

Chapter Eight - Parables: Do You Get The Point?

Introduction

1. Prior material concerning the Gospels holds true for parables.
2. The many are easily understood, the parables, like the epistles and the Gospels, often suffer a fate of misinterpretation, thus necessitating further study.

The Parables In History

1. Part of the reason why parables might be misunderstood has to do with something Jesus himself said.
2. When asked about their purpose, Jesus seems to have suggested that they contain mysteries that could not be understood. It appears that he interpreted the parable of the sower in a semi-allegorical way, thus apparently giving license to allegorical interpretations.
3. The parables are intended to be simple stories for those on the outside to whom the real meaning and the ministries were hidden, which meanings belonged only to those on the inside, who could uncover the hidden meanings by means of allegory.
4. Note the example of Augustine and the parable of the good Samaritan. The novel, it is not at all what Jesus intended. The parable was given in answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?"

5. There is no indication that most of the parables were ever intended for any sort of inner circle, who could decipher hidden meanings. Luke specifically cites three instances (15:3; 18:9; 19:11) where parables were given to two people, with the clear implication that they were intended to be understood.
6. Additionally, we note, that the lawyer to whom Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan obviously understood its intention. The priests and Pharisees obviously understood the parable of the tenants. The issue is not understanding, but rather letting the understanding change their behavior.
7. One of the keys in understanding parables has nothing to do with hidden interpretive meanings, but rather simply discovering the original audience to whom they were spoken.
8. As with the Gospel accounts, we must realize that they often came down to us without a specific context.
9. Jesus' apparent reference to the hidden meaning of parables hinges on the use of the term that he used in his native Aramaic. His use of the parables was part of the very riddle (from their perspective) of his ministry to them. They saw but really didn't see... they heard but really didn't hear... not because of inability to see or inability to hear, but rather because they failed to see and hear in a way that led to their obedience.
10. We must realize that parables were fully intended to be understood.

The Nature of The Parables

1. The Variety of Kinds - Not all parables are alike
 - a. True parable (good Samaritan) - a story with a plot (lost sheep, prodigal son, great banquet, vineyard workers, rich man and Lazarus, ten virgins)
 - b. Similitude (yeast and dough) - illustrations from every day life used to make a point
 - c. Metaphor/simile (salt of the earth) - seem to be like similitude, but their point is different
 - d. Epigram (grapes from thorn bushes) - pithy saying, proverb
 - e. Allegory like (wicked tenants) - details in the story intended to represent something else
2. How The Parables Function
 - a. The most important aspect of parables is how they function.
 - b. Their primary function is as a means of calling forth a response on the part of those who heard them.
 - c. In this sense the parable is the message.
 - d. Our attempt to interpret them destroys what they were originally, like interpreting a joke. The point of the joke is to get caught, because one understands the point of reference in the joke itself. Interpreting the joke no longer catches the hearer in the same way, and that it loses its punch.
 - e. The same thing can be said of parables. They were spoken in such a way that the hearers had an immediate identification with the points of reference within the parable itself. The parables caught them where they were. Interpreting them successfully requires rebuilding the setting in which they were first told, including cultural awareness, language, etc.

The Exegesis of The Parables

1. Finding The Points of Reference
 - a. As just noted, understanding a joke means understanding the initial points of reference and recognizing the unexpected turn in the joke itself.
 - b. The same principles apply to understanding parables. Unless we understand the initial point of reference, we will never grasp the unexpected turn in the parable.
 - c. What do we mean by point of reference? Consider the example that Jesus told when he was invited to dinner by a Pharisee named Simon. Jesus offered a parable, an illustration, and in Simon's and the prostitute's hearing that was intended to "catch" Simon.
 - d. The story, about men who owed money to a lender, had an obvious point. Who would be more appreciative of a forgiven debt, the one who owed 500 denarii or the one who owed 50 denarii?

- e. The story needs no interpretation: the money lender and the two debtors are the only points of reference. Their identity is immediate and needs no explanation. God is like a money lender, and Simon and the prostitute are like the two debtors. The parable is an indictment/judgement on Simon, and calls for his repentance/response.
- f. Note that this is an example of parable, not allegory. True allegories are stories where each element in the story means something quite different to the story itself. Allegory would have attributed unique meaning to each of the debtors, to the amount of their debts, and any other details one could find. The point of the parable is not in the points of reference but in the intended response demanded by the parable itself.

2. Identifying The Audience

- a. In our prior illustration, the audience was obvious. Both Simon and the prostitute were the initial hearers.
- b. When the audience is obvious in the Gospel accounts the task of interpretation demands three things:
 - i. Listen to the parable again and again
 - ii. Identify the points of reference intended by Jesus that the original hearers would have connected with
 - iii. Determine how those original hearers would have identified with the story, thus what they would have heard
- c. Consider the parable of the good Samaritan
 - i. The lawyer knew what the Bible talk about loving one's neighbor
 - ii. It is apparent that he was ready to redefine the term neighbor to suit himself
 - iii. There are only two key points of reference in the story: the man in the ditch and the Samaritan
 - iv. The other details exist only for effect
 - v. The two men who passed by, the priest and the Levite, represented the lawyer himself, someone who is an expert in the law
 - vi. Getting to the poor was a big thing to the Pharisees. They demonstrated how much they loved neighbors as themselves through getting.
 - vii. The lawyer is caught in the story.
 - viii. The story is told from the point of view of the man in the ditch, and a lawyer has been set up.
 - ix. Obviously whoever passes by and helps the man in the ditch would be the hero of the story. But the first two men who pass by, his preferred heroes, offer nothing. The only person who helps is the Samaritan, and anyone who helps, specifically by giving, must be the hero.
 - x. In the end, he only grudgingly acknowledges the Samaritan as the hero, without directly referencing him.
 - xi. The expert in the law, had neat little systems that allowed him to love within his own expectations and limitations, but not within God's.
 - xii. His willingness to redefine neighbor to suit himself was his ultimate undoing.
- d. The parable of the prodigal son provides similar insight.

3. The "Contextless" Parables

- a. Consider the parable of the workers in the vineyard
 - i. Three main points of reference: landowner, full-day workers, one-hour workers
 - ii. Original audience: those would identify with the full-day workers
 - iii. Point: God's grace/generosity is open to all, not just to those who think they deserve it to the exclusion of others
- b. The same principles are found in the prodigal son, the lost sheep, etc.

4. The Parables of The Kingdom

- a. The examples to this point have been parables of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.
- b. Consider parables that expressly focus on the kingdom. (S/F note that the prior examples are also parables of the kingdom.)

- c. The expression “the kingdom of God is like...,” must be understood to mean “it is like this with the kingdom of God...” parables that begin with expressions like this are telling us something about the nature of the kingdom, not just one point of reference or one detail.
- d. Like all parables, remember they are stories that call for response.
- e. Consider the parable of the seed sower:
 - i. The four types of soil are like four types of responses to the preaching of the kingdom
 - ii. The point of the parable is the urgency of the hour: take heed how you hear
 - iii. Most of these parables are addressed to the multitudes as potential disciples
 - iv. Because these are parables of the kingdom, we find them proclaiming the kingdom as already/not yet, with an emphasis on the already... the kingdom has already come... the hour is already at hand
 - v. The present moment is, therefore, one of great urgency
 - 1. Judgment is impending
 - 2. Good news: salvation is offered to all
- f. The authors examine two parables that illustrate this message: the parable of the Rich fool and the parable of the shrewd manager.
 - i. The point of the parable of the Rich fool is the urgency of the hour. The kingdom is here now. To live for possessions, for self, when the end is right at the door, is foolish. The fool’s desire for possession of property makes no sense in light of the present moment.
 - ii. The parable of the shrewd manager demonstrates that he recognized the urgency of the situation, and acted accordingly. It does not indicate his actions were approved, only that he acted when necessary.

The Hermeneutical Question

- 1. The hermeneutical task posed by the parables is unique.
- 2. When they were originally spoken they seldom needed interpretation. They had immediate application for the original audience, and appropriately call them where they were.
- 3. We encountered them in written form, much later, in a totally different context, and therefore lack the immediate understanding of the points of reference the original hearers had.
- 4. Two suggestions are offered:
 - a. Remember that the parables are written in a specific biblical context
 - i. Through rediscovering that context, via the process of exegesis, we rediscover the point of the parable
 - ii. We are then free to translate that same point into our context
 - iii. It might be helpful to retell the story of the parable with new points of reference, new hearers, who are much more culturally connected to our context... and to do so in such a way that the relevance of the original parable comes through
 - b. Remember the hermeneutical suggestion that all of Jesus’ parables are in some way vehicles that proclaim the kingdom
 - i. To understand them we must immerse ourselves in the meaning of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry
 - ii. Which requires becoming familiar with that message via background reading

Chapter Nine - The Law(s): Covenant Stipulations For Israel

Introduction

- 1. In addition to the patriarch narratives found in Genesis, the three defining narratives for Israel as a people are in Exodus.
 - a. Their deliverance (the actual exodus) from slavery in Egypt
 - b. The return of God’s presence to distinguish Israel from every other nation
 - c. God’s commission of Israel as a people for his name at Sinai

2. Israel, in order to be a people for God, had to learn how to become a community and a people in special relationship with God. They had to learn how to jettison Egyptian and Canaanite culture and adopt God's ways.
3. The law was God's gift to Israel to teach them how both of these were to occur:
 - a. How to be a community of God's people ...
 - b. Who were in special covenant relationship with God
4. The law also set boundaries concerning their relationship/s with the nations around them.
5. To understand the law, we must understand its role in Israel's history.

What Is The Law?

1. The term "law" means many things:
 - a. In plural, to the "laws" — 600+ specific commands—that Israel was to keep to show loyalty to God
 - b. In singular, to refer to all of those laws collectively
 - c. In singular, to refer to the "book" of the Law (Torah/Gen-Deut)
 - d. In singular, to refer to the whole OT system (used by NT writers)
 - e. In singular, to refer to the OT law as interpreted by rabbis (used by some NT writers)
2. The first two uses are the focal point here - helping Christians to read these two uses.
3. Additionally, that the books of Moses (Pentateuch) is called "the law" demands we understand:
 - a. The commandments themselves are found in four of the five books called law (all but Genesis)
 - b. These books contains much more than the lists of laws, material that is primarily narrative
 - c. The covenantal law between God and Israel cannot be understood apart from the narrative in which it is found
4. Christians are often faced with this hermeneutical problem: how do any of these laws/legal formulations apply to us today ... Or do they?

Christians and The Old Testament Law

1. Christians do not need to show loyalty to God by keeping the OT law ... We are under a new covenant.
2. We could not do so anyway ... There is no temple for OT sacrifices.
3. If this is true, and it is, what did Jesus mean in Matthew 5:18? (nothing will disappear until the law is accomplished/fulfilled)
4. S/F suggest six guidelines for Christians to understand the OT law:
 - a. The Old Testament law is a covenant
 - i. Covenant = binding contract between two parties
 - ii. Each has obligations to the covenant
 - iii. Suzerain-vassal covenant (overlord/servant)
 - iv. Vassal demonstrated loyalty via obedience to the stipulations of the covenant
 - v. Parts of suzerainty covenant: preamble, prologue, stipulations, witnesses, sanctions, document clause
 - vi. It is its covenant nature that makes the law so important to understanding the OT:
 1. It is essential to Israel's story
 2. It is central to (understanding) the message of the prophets
 - b. The Old Testament is not our Testament.
 - i. No OT laws are binding today unless so stipulated/renewed in NT
 - ii. God still expects obedience of his people as demonstration of their loyalty, but not the same OT obedience - the "how" of obedience has changed
 - c. Two kinds of old-covenant stipulations have clearly not been renewed in the new covenant.
 - i. Israelite civil laws - specify penalties for crimes to OT Jews

- ii. Israelite ritual laws - found in Ex-Deut, the largest single block of OT laws, instructed Israel how to worship God acceptably (priestly commands, sacrifices, etc.)
- iii. In this regard note: Jesus did not say that we are still under the law (Lk 16:16-17) ... He said that that law could not be changed. When he came to fulfill that law, he also established a new covenant.
- d. Part of the old covenant is renewed in the new covenant.
 - i. Though civil and ritual laws of OT do not apply, ethical laws from the OT are often restated in NT.
 - ii. These laws apply because they support the two principles on which the law and the prophets hung:
 1. First great commandment - love God with all heart, soul, strength and mind
 2. Second great commandment - love neighbor as yourself
 - iii. Jesus excerpted some OT laws and gave them (via different aspects) new application (Mt 5:21ff) in terms of love for neighbor
- e. All of the Old Testament law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not still the command of God to us.
 - i. God's OT laws often protected Israel in ways that do not directly apply to us (Deut 22:8 re parapets).
 - ii. These laws demonstrate God's concern for Israel and show how the law is a part of Israel's story, thus giving us an inkling of our story under the new covenant.
- f. Only what is explicitly renewed from the OT law can be considered part of the NT law of Christ.
 - i. S/F assume that all 10 commandments are repeated, thus included, in the NT covenant (Jl - specific Sabbath laws?)
 - ii. They note that no other specific OT laws apply/are binding on Christians.

The Role of The Law In Israel and in The Bible

1. Though the law does not apply to us directly, we must remember that it functioned in part to lead us to Christ (cf. Gal 3:24ff)
2. Without it we would not understand what it meant for Israel to be God's people.
3. Though the law could not save (cf. Rom 3:20; Gal 3, 5), it was a gift from God to Israel to set them apart from their pagan neighbors. It showed them how to love God and one another, one reason why OT writers often express delight for the law.
4. Israel's problem was not just that they could not keep the law, but also in that they chose not to do so.
5. They saw that nations became like the gods they worshiped, and they became like the idols they often worshiped - without eyes to see and without ears to hear. They became filled with greed, capriciousness, immorality, etc., like the Baals of the Canaanites.
6. The OT law showed Israel then (and us today) what God's character was like, and what God wanted their (Israel's) character to be like (and thus ours today).
7. The law, though it could not save, presented examples of what it was like to show loyalty to God.
8. Two kinds of law are worthy of note:
 - a. Apodictic Law - the "do" and "do not" laws of the OT; to set a standard by example; limited in wording, but comprehensive in spirit (def - demonstrative, clearly established; cf Lev 19:9-14); hermeneutic note: the law shows us how impossible it is to please God on our own
 - b. Casuistic Law - case-by-case law; conditional law, what may or may not be the case and what ought to be done if it does; single out particular cases that apply only to some but not necessarily to all; constitutes a large portion of the 600+ commands in OT; none renewed in NT; principles of casuistic law show background for NT teaching on redemption (cf. Deut 15:12-17; cf. Discussion re slavery 174ff)

The Old Testament Law and Other Ancient Law Codes

1. OT law is not the earliest law known. There are others older. OT law, however, shows higher standards, however.

- a. Laws of Eshnunna (Akkadian law code, circa 1800 BC) - slaves are “less” than nobility
 - b. Law Code of Hammurabi (Babylonian, circa 1726 BC) - murderer’s daughter is put to death, but not murderer
2. OT law shows sins and punishment without deferential regard to sex, social status, etc.

The Old Testament Law As Benefit to Israel

1. Though the law could not provide eternal life and lead to complete righteousness before God ...
2. We must remember that it was not designed to do so.
3. When its own purposes are understood, there are numerous benefits to the law

The Food Laws

1. Food laws are not arbitrary.
2. They had a serious protective purpose.
3. Most of the food restrictions were due to:
 - a. Foods carrying disease in Sinai’s/Canaan’s climate
 - b. Foods not economical to raise in agrarian context of Sinai/Canaan
 - c. Food favored for religious sacrifice by peoples Israel was not to imitate
 - d. Foods that were rather low in allergens (cf. Lamb - least allergenic of major meats)

Laws About The Shedding of Blood

1. Sin demanded/deserved punishment.
2. But sinners could escape punishment via blood/animal sacrifice.
3. Substitutionary atonement prepared the way for the work of Christ.

Unusual Prohibitions

1. Often designed to keep Israel from following fertility cult practices among the Canaanites.
2. Protection against sympathetic magic: the idea that symbolic actions (and things - jla) can influence the gods and nature (cf. Similarity of shapes, colors, etc., as they applied to potions)
3. God’s prohibition of these practices was not arbitrary but graciously beneficial.

Laws Giving Blessings To Those Who Keep Them

1. All of Israel’s laws were designed to be a means of blessing for the people of God (jla - everything God does falls into this category)
2. Some laws specifically state blessings that would come from obedience to them:
 - a. Tithing
 - b. Caring for the needy

In Summary: Some Do’s And Don’ts

1. Do see the OT as inspired for you. Do not see it as God’s direct command for you.
2. Do see the OT law as the basis for the old covenant and Israel’s history. Don’t see it as binding without cause.
3. Do see God’s character revealed in the OT law. Don’t forget God’s mercy is equal to the severity of his law.
4. Do see the OT law as a paradigm. Don’t see the OT law as complete or technically comprehensive.
5. Do remember the essence of the law (the 2 great and 10 commandments) are in NT (jla-not sabbath). Don’t expect to find OT law cited by prophets or the NT.
6. Do see the law as a gift to Israel which, when obeyed, brought blessings. Don’t view the OT law as arbitrary or as limiting anyone’s freedom.

Chapter Ten - The Prophets: Enforcing The Covenant In Israel

Introduction

1. There are more books of the Bible that come under the heading of prophecy than any other.
2. These books were written between 760 and 460 BC.
3. The minor prophets were only minor in size, length. They were originally grouped together in one large book known as “the book of the 12,” or simply “the 12.”

The Nature of Prophecy

1. Prophetic books are often the most difficult to interpret and understand.
2. This is usually due to misunderstandings in their function and form.

The Meaning of Prophecy

1. The primary difficulty for most students is due to an inadequate and inaccurate understanding of the word “prophecy.”
2. It is usually defined as foretelling or prediction, something that we often look first in understanding them.
3. Consider these stats: less than 2% of Old Testament prophecies are Messianic, less than 5% anticipate the new covenant age, and less than 1% are predictive.
4. While the prophets did predict the future, it was more often than not the immediate future of Israel, Judah and surrounding nations.

The Prophets As Spokespersons

1. The primary function of prophets was simply to speak for God to their own contemporaries.
2. The emphasis is on speaking. Of hundreds of prophets in Israel, only 16 had messages collected and written in book form.
3. In some cases, such as Elijah and Elisha, we know more of what they did and what they said. What they said was plainly presented in the context of their times. Some of the material about prophets is a combination of their prophecy and their biography, as is the case with Nathan, Huldah, Jonah, and Daniel.
4. Generally, in Old Testament narrative, what we hear is *about* prophets and very little *from* prophets.
5. The length of the longer books of prophecy is due to the fact that they are mostly collections of spoken oracles, not always in chronological sequence and delivered/recorded poetically.

The Problem of History

1. The problem of historical distance complicates our understanding of prophecy.
2. The original audience had distinct advantages over those who read the prophets’ message/s secondhand, and much later, in a totally different language and culture.
3. Because we are removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, we have trouble putting prophetic words in proper context.

The Function of Prophecy in Israel

Four things need to be understood in order for us to have a clearer understanding of the role and function of Old Testament prophets.

1. The prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.
 - a. The prior chapter examined the relationship between God and his people by means of understanding covenant relationships.
 - b. God not only gave Israel his law, he enforced it through the role of the prophets.

- c. Through the prophets God reminded later generations after Moses, that if the law was followed, they would be blessed; if it were not followed, they would be punished.
 - d. The prophets did not invent the blessings or curses they announced... they originated with God.
 - e. The law contained certain categories of corporate blessings for covenant faithfulness: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety.
 - f. The law also contained categories of corporate punishments: death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, distraction, deceit, deportation, destitution and disgrace.
 - g. What God communicated to the prophets reflects the same categories.
 - h. Depending on the time, much of what the prophets addressed focused on curses. Statistically, most of what they announced in the 8th, 7th, and early 6th centuries BC were curses because Israel was about to suffer destruction circa 722 BC. The same thing applied to the impending end of the southern kingdom circa 587 BC. It only makes sense: because both nations were heading for punishment during these periods of time, the message of the prophets is more curse/s than blessing. The purpose of curse-centered messages was to induce repentance.
 - i. The message of the prophets changed, however, after the period of captivity. Punishment now complete, God resumed his basic message to the prophets, one of mercy, and its attendant blessings.
 - j. Look for this simple pattern as you read the prophetic books:
 - i. Identification of Israel's sin or of God's love for his people,
 - ii. Prediction of curse or blessing, depending on the circumstance.
 - k. This is what the message of the prophets usually conveys.
2. The prophets' message was not their own, but God's.
- a. Each of the prophets had his own unique style, vocabulary, emphases, idioms and concerns.
 - b. In spite of that we must realize that it is God who called them to prophesy, a truth embedded in the very nature of the word prophet, and the Semitic verb "to call."
 - c. It is for this reason that we see so much emphasis on reminders like: thus saith the Lord, so says the Lord, declares the Lord, this is what the Lord says, this is what the Lord said to me, give them a message, etc.
3. The prophets were God's direct representatives.
- a. The prophets were like ambassadors sent from heaven to relay the sovereign's will to his people.
 - b. They themselves were not radical social reformers or innovative religious thinkers.
 - c. The reforms and thoughts that *God wished to impart* was the basis of their message.
 - d. The message of the prophets is not merely God's word as the prophet saw it, but God's word as God wished the prophet to present it.
4. The message of the prophets is not original.
- a. Through inspiration the prophets revealed the essential content of the original Mosaic covenant's warnings and promises.
 - b. Though the wording might be new, the concepts were as old as the law. Their message simply restates what we find in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy.
 - c. Their job involved rephrasing and or restructuring the message so that it might appear to have a certain kind of newness, but it was always God's message as found in the law. (cf. Hos 4:2 which summarized five of the ten commandments in one word per commandment; cf. Jesus' use of the same in Mk 10:19; Mt 18:18-19; Lk 18:20.)
 - d. Even messianic prophecies, like those found in Isaiah, were not new.
 - e. They might reveal new details about the life of the Messiah, but the original message was still rooted in the law (cf. Deut 18:15ff; Jn 1:45).

The Exegetical Task

1. The Need For Outside Help

- a. The 1st chapter of this book addressed this simple notion: God wrote his book for us to understand so we must be able to understand it without any outside help.
- b. This notion lacks proper perspective: some parts are obvious on the surface, but others are not. Some are profound, some are simple.
- c. The prophetic books require time and study, not just casual reading.
- d. We must become familiar with their historical, cultural, and political settings that are so different from our own.
- e. To become familiar with their backgrounds, the authors recommend:
 - i. Bible dictionaries - they provide articles on the historical setting of each book, basic outlines, special features, and issues of interpretation that readers must understand. They help us become acquainted with how God's message came to the profits to God's people in particular situations.
 - ii. Commentaries - they provide lengthy introductions to each book, they provide explanations of the meaning of individual verses.
 - iii. Bible handbooks - these works often combine the best features of both Bible dictionaries and commentaries.

2. The Historical Context

- a. To understand the historical context of the prophets, we must understand their times.
- b. This includes understanding the broad historical context of their work as a whole.
- c. It also demands understanding the specific context, for example, that of a single oracle.

3. The Larger Context

- a. The prophetic books come from a rather narrow band of Israel's history (760–460 BC).
- b. We have no prophetic utterances from Abraham's day or David's day though prophets and prophecies occurred during each.
- c. Why are the writings of the prophets concentrated during the three centuries between Amos and Malachi?
- d. The answer: this is the period in Israel's history that called specifically for covenant enforcement mediation, the major task of the prophets.
- e. These years are characterized by the following three things:
 - i. Unprecedented political, military, economic and social upheaval
 - ii. A high-level of religious infidelity and disregard for the law of Moses
 - iii. Shifts in populations and national boundaries, including shifts in the balance of power on the international scene
- f. The division of the kingdom into two parts, North and South, and the differences in their general religious strength, demanded that the message of the prophets address those differences. The prophets spoke largely to the events surrounding each kingdom's fall.

4. The Specific Context

- a. Each prophecy was delivered in a specific historical setting.
- b. Knowing the date, audience, and situation, when knowable, helps us understand each prophecy.
- c. Note the example cited in Hosea 5:8–10. The date, 734 BC; the audience, northern Israel; the cities, Jerusalem and Bethel; the situation, war; the coalition, between Israel and Syria; the invasion of Judah; the involvement of Assyria; etc. All come to play in understanding this passage.

5. The Isolation of Individual Oracles

- a. In understanding the epistles, the authors stressed "think paragraphs."
- b. Concerning prophets, the authors stress "think oracles."
- c. Remember, that the eclectic nature of prophecy is revealed in their run-on fashion of reporting God's message.

- d. The messages, spoken and recorded at different times and places over the many years of their ministry, were eventually collected and written down, sometimes without regard to divisions to indicate where one usage ends and another one begins.
 - e. There are exceptions: the early chapters of Zechariah and Haggai date their prophecies.
 - f. Note, for example, Amos 5: keep in mind that explanatory titles not inspired, that changes of subject, issues of social injustice, prediction of miseries, the use of the term “day of the Lord,” criticism of hypercritical worship, and an overview of Israel’s past sinful history, that eventually leads to exile, which is predicted, all comes into play in understanding this passage.
 - g. We must always ask whether or not any given passage/chapter is a single oracle, or component parts of many oracles.
6. The Forms of Prophetic Utterance
- a. The Lawsuit - God often takes Israel to court (figuratively) to show that they are guilty of sin, have violated his covenant and are, therefore, to be punished.
 - b. The Woe - warning of impending punishment, death, etc.; some distress (woe) exists; it exists for this reason (usually their sin); followed by a prediction of doom
 - c. The Promise - also known as a salvation oracle; usually includes a reference to the future, mention of a radical change (Israel’s repentance and subsequent restoration) and a mention of blessing
 - d. The Enactment Prophecy - the prophets often acted out their messages; Isaiah walked “naked” for three years (to show that Israel would be stripped and lead away captive); Ezekiel’s model city; Zechariah’s two shepherds
 - e. The Messenger Speech - most common form of prophecy; prophets remind Israel they are God’s spokesman and call them back to God’s law
 - f. The Prophets As Poets - in part for effect and ease of memorization (cf. Longman’s “How To Read The Psalms”)
 - i. Synonymous parallelism - the second line reinforces the first (Is 44:22)
 - ii. Antithetical parallelism - the second line contrasts the first (Hos 7:14)
 - iii. Synthetic parallelism - the second line adds new information to the first (Obadiah 21)

Some Hermeneutical Suggestions

Exegesis requires that we set the prophets in their respective contexts so we can hear and understand what God says to Israel. The authors have three areas of concern in this regard:

1. A Caution: The Prophet As Foreteller Of The Future
 - a. More often than not the future they told was immediate and applied directly to Israel. (cf. Ezek 25-39)
 - b. Note the specific warnings about Is 49:23. Some interpreters ignore context, intent, wording re this passage.
 - c. We must be careful not to make prophecies say what we want them to say. Always seek God’s intent.
 - d. We must always understand that temporal meanings are to be understood in light of an eternal plan.
 - e. Note, especially, the prophetic perspective of chronological events: straight on view vs. side view; our perspective does not always show the proper “distance” between them.
 - f. Remember - eschatological language is often metaphorical.
2. A Concern: Prophecy And Second Meanings
 - a. Initial fulfillment - to original, intended audience
 - b. Sensus plenior - fuller meaning, to secondary audience (cf. Mt 2:15 and Hos 11:1 re “out of Egypt;” Ex 17:1ff; Num 20:1ff; 1 Cor 10:4 re Christ the rock, baptism, etc.; remember it is a function of inspiration; we only know of sensus plenior after the fact from God’s word, not our imagination.)
3. A Final Benefit: The Dual Emphasis On Orthodoxy And Orthopraxy - We must have both correct belief and correct practice.

Chapter Eleven - The Psalms: Israel's Prayers And Ours

Introduction

1. The difficulty in interpreting psalms is due specifically to what they are.
2. As we do with other literary genres we assume that because they are God's word they contains a message from God to us. But much of Psalms is actually words spoken to or about God ... and that this kind of scripture is just as much a part of the revelation as the first kind.
3. Psalms are basically prayers and hymns address to God, or about God in song.
4. How do these words spoken to God function as God's word to us? They are not propositions, imperatives or narratives that function primarily as doctrinal/moral instruction.
5. Yet, they are profitable for/to us when we realize their divinely intended purposes.
6. They help us express ourselves to God and consider his ways.
7. One of the most popular Psalms, the 23rd, conveys God's loving care and our dependence on him via the symbolism of a shepherd and his sheep. But not every psalm yields such obvious meaning at first.
8. Some psalms (cf. 88) are negative, expressing the misery of the writer. Some are primarily historical, others messianic, oriented toward wisdom, focused on the glory of Israel's kings, and some seem to wish for the destruction of enemies. How are all of these motives to be understood?

Some Preliminary Exegetical Observations

Psalms constitute a distinct kind of literature and must be read and interpreted with special care. We must understand their *nature*, their various *types*, as well as their *forms* and *functions*.

1. The Psalms As Poetry - as we read and interpret the psalms we must remember that they are musical poems.
 - a. Hebrew poetry, by its very nature, was addressed to the mind through the heart (i.e., much of the language is intentionally emotive.)
 - i. We must be careful not to over exegete the psalms by finding special meaning in words, phrases where none was intended.
 - ii. Our English translations do not always convey the beauty or the intended (accurate) meaning of the psalms.
 - b. The psalms themselves are musical poems.
 - i. They must be read and understood as musical poems, not as law, epistles, narrative, gospels, etc.
 - ii. They address the emotions, evoke feelings, not propositional thinking (at least not directly - jla). They are intended to generate a response (as is all of scripture - jla), but a response specifically because of their emotive appeal.
 - iii. Though reflecting doctrine, they are more than collections of doctrinal truths.
 - iv. The figurative pictures of truth (e.g., God as a fortress - Ps 46:1) must be understood in light of the nature of both figurative language generally, and the psalms specifically.
 - v. In this regard, note the (correct - jla) understanding of hyperbole in Ps 51:5's statement "in sin did my mother conceive me" by the authors.
 - c. The vocabulary of poetry is purposefully metaphorical.
 - i. To understand poetic metaphors we must look for their intent.
 - ii. Mountains that leap like rams, enemies spewing swords from their mouths, God as a shepherd, fortress, rock, shield, etc., all demand we first grasp what each metaphor was intended to signify.
 - iii. Remember, we must not press the metaphors beyond what they were intended to convey.
2. The Psalms As Literature - we must understand that the psalms have several distinct literary features:
 - a. Psalms are of several different types: There are psalms of lament, thanksgiving, etc. (more later)
 - b. Each psalm is also characterized by its formal structure.
 - i. Recognizing formal structure within each type of psalm helps us understand subject transitions,

- ii. The level of attention attributed to various topics,
- iii. And thus a level of appreciation for the message of each psalm. (see exegetical examples below)
- c. Each type of psalm was intended to have a given function in the life of Israel. Some were intended to be sung in celebration of Israel's king, for example.
- d. There are also various patterns within the psalms.
 - i. Arrangements, repetition of words/sounds, stylistic plays on words, etc., are found throughout.
 - ii. Psalm 119, for example, is an extended acrostic using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as headings in each of its respective octets that lists the benefits of learning and obeying God's law.
- e. Each psalm has its own integrity as a literary unit.
 - i. They must be treated as wholes, not as single verses or thoughts as in Proverbs. Don't decontextualize.
 - ii. Every psalm has a specific pattern of development through which its ideas are presented, developed, etc., leading to a conclusion.
 - iii. Each verse within the psalm must be understood within the context of the psalm itself, and not just as an independent thought. The entirety of the psalm provides the framework of meaning for interpreting/understanding its parts. (cf. Ps 51:16, 19 and the complete context of the psalm)

The Use Of The Psalms In Ancient Israel

1. Psalms were functioning songs used in worship by Israel, that is they served the function of making a connection between themselves and God.
2. Some were intended for personal use (Ps. 63), others for corporate use (Ps 75; 147-150).
3. They were often used as worship aids when the children of Israel brought sacrifices to the temple.
4. Some were employed by "professional" singers while others worshipped, but apparently became used by others in various situations.
5. At some point the psalms were collected into five "books." Some are grouped according to their unique characteristics.
6. Miscellaneous thoughts:
 - a. The dating of the psalms cannot be done with certainty.
 - b. They are pan-cultural, pan-geographic.
 - c. Based on titles (not generally accepted as original/inspired), David wrote roughly half (73) of them.
 - d. After the exile and rebuilding of the temple Psalms was a formal collection, a temple hymnal, familiar to most of the Jews in general.

The Types Of Psalms

The psalms are divided into seven different (sometimes overlapping) categories. (cf. 212ff for refs)

1. Laments
 - a. The largest group of psalms, more than 60
 - b. Some are individual, some are corporate
 - c. Individual laments express/assume deep trust in God, help a person to express struggles (of varying kinds)
 - d. Corporate laments do the same thing for, obviously, a larger group of people.
 - e. The laments in Psalms express a deep, honest fervor felt by God's people.
2. Thanksgiving Psalms
 - a. These psalms expressed joy when things went well.
 - b. They render thanks to God for his faithfulness, protection, benefit, etc.
 - c. There are six community/corporate thanksgiving psalms and ten individual ones.
3. Hymns of Praise

- a. These psalms, some joy, some misery, centered, focus on praising God for his greatness.
 - b. God, regardless of the vantage point of the one offering praise, deserves praise.
4. Salvation-History Psalms
- a. These psalms review the history of God’s saving works for Israel.
 - b. They focus especially on his deliverance of the nation from Egypt and his creation of Israel as his own special people.
5. Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation
- a. Some are covenant renew liturgies designed to lead Israel to renew their devotion for God to the level of Sinai commitment.
 - b. Some are Davidic covenant psalms, which focus on praising God for choosing the seed line from David to the Messiah (ultimately).
 - c. Some are royal psalms and deal specifically with kingship, including royal lament, royal thanksgiving, etc. Kingship in Israel was a divine blessing because it depicted God’s concern for Israel and provided stability and protection under his guidance.
 - d. Some are enthronement psalms, dedicated to the installation of a new king in the nation. Some see them as Messianic.
 - e. Some are Songs of Zion, the city of Jerusalem. They focus on the role of Jerusalem as the divinely decreed center of worship to Jehovah, the presence of God’s temple, etc.
6. Wisdom Psalms - Eight psalms (even Proverbs 8) fit in this category of psalms that praise the value of wisdom and the wise life.
7. Songs of Trust - These ten psalms focus on our need to trust in God regardless of what we are going through in life.

An Exegetical Sampling

1. Psalm 3: A Lament

a. Address

- i. The psalmist identifies the one to whom the psalm/prayer is directed, God.
- ii. Ps 3:1 - The cry “Lord” shows this. It is repeated in verse 7.

b. Complaint.

- i. The psalmist identifies and complains his trouble and why he needs God’s help.
- ii. Ps 3:1-2. David describes his enemies and how bad things are.

c. Trust.

- i. The psalmist expresses trust in God, which serves as the foundation for his complaint. The psalmist assumes that God is able to help him as he (God) sees fit.
- ii. Ps. 3:3-6 shows who God is, how he answers prayer, how he keeps his people secure when things appear hopeless, etc. This all shows God to be trustworthy.

d. Deliverance.

- i. The psalmist cries out for deliverance from his situation.
- ii. Ps 3:7 specifically calls for deliverance. (Note - the request for help follows immediately after an expression of trust.)

e. Assurance.

- i. The psalmist expresses assurance that God will deliver (cf., trust above).
- ii. Ps 3:7 (“Strike all my ...”) shows assurance. (Note metaphorical description of God’s victory.)

f. Praise.

- i. The psalmist offers praise for God’s blessings in his life.
- ii. Ps 3:8 praises God for his faithfulness.

g. Lessons learned:

- i. The importance of balanced prayer
 - ii. Requests should be balanced by appreciation
 - iii. Complaints should be balanced by expressions of confidence
 - iv. The psalms is intended as a guide.
 - v. The same pattern appears in group laments.
2. Psalm 138: A Thanksgiving Psalm
- a. Introduction.
 - i. The psalmist summarizes how God has helped.
 - ii. Ps 138:1-2 - David shows that he intends to praise God for his love and faithfulness.
 - b. Distress.
 - i. God's deliverance in a given situation is described.
 - ii. Ps 138:3 - No specific distress is described in this psalm. It is simply assumed.
 - c. Appeal.
 - i. The psalmist repeats the appeal made to God.
 - ii. Ps 138:3 - God is praised for having responded to David's appeal.
 - d. Deliverance.
 - i. God's deliverance is described.
 - ii. Ps 138:6-7 - God paid attention to David, an undeserving supplicant, preserved his life in time of trouble, and rescued him from his enemies.
 - e. Testimony.
 - i. God is praised for his mercy.
 - ii. Ps 138:4-5, 8 - David testifies of God's goodness. God is so good that even the greatest on earth willingly praise him. He can always be counted on and his love and mercy are endless.

A Special Note On the "Imprecatory Psalms"

1. The psalms as a whole express a wide range of emotions.
2. Some of those emotions, while not inherently sinful, might lead to sin.
3. And some of those emotions might be better verbalized than acted upon.
4. It is in this way that S/F introduce the imprecatory (imprecari - spoken curse) psalms.
5. They demonstrate anger toward others, specific situations, etc., but they do so to/through God rather than the objects of our anger.
6. These psalms are usually found in laments.
7. They often are a cry to God for justice, not just punishment, and appeal to covenant curses (cf., prior chapter.)
8. These pleas are often to be understood in light of eternal justice, not temporal justice.
9. These psalms are often hyperbolic of the same sort of the covenant curses themselves.
10. These psalms do not contradict Jesus' command to love our enemies. Remember, love does mean to have a warm fuzzy feeling about ... It is always an active element of Jesus' life, thus it is more what you do than what you feel. Biblical commands are about doing love, not feeling love.
11. The imprecatory psalms, on the other hand, are about feeling anger, not doing anger.
12. Note: The term "hate" in the Psalms does not always mean "despise." It also means to "be unwilling or unable to put up with" or to "reject." (cf., God toward Esau in Mal 1:3; Ps 139:22).

Some Concluding Hermeneutical Observations

How do we understand the words spoken to God (as in Psalms) as they function for us as a word from God? They must be viewed as opportunities to speak to God in words he inspired others to speak (or a record via inspiration that they spoke - ?- jla).

1. Three Basic Benefits of The Psalms

- a. The psalms can serve as a guide to worship.
 - i. Those who worship God can use the psalms as a formal means of expressing their own thoughts and feelings, or as a guide to do so.
 - ii. They can help us express our concerns when we lack skills to find the proper words.
- b. The psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God (re joy, disappointment, anger, etc.)
 - i. Though they do not always give specific doctrinal instruction ...
 - ii. The psalms provide examples of godly articulation of our strongest feelings.
- c. The psalms demonstrate the importance of reflection and mediation on things that God has done for us.
 - i. The psalms invite us to pray.
 - ii. They invite us to controlled thinking about God's word.
 - iii. They invites us to reflective fellowship with others.
 - iv. They help shape our lives in purity and charity.
 - v. Unlike any other literature, they lift us to a position where we can commune with God.
 - vi. They capture a sense of greatness of God's kingdom.
 - vii. They help us grasp a sense of what being with God through eternity will be like.
 - viii. They show us that regardless of what happens in life, God will always be with us.
 - ix. There is always a reason to wait for the Lord's deliverance.
 - x. To cry out to God for help is not a challenge to his faithfulness but a declaration of it.

2. A Caution

- a. The psalms, like the rest of scripture, never guarantee a pleasant life.
- b. To claim that they do so is to be guilty of overliteralization.
- c. God never promised a life of no worry, ultimate happiness, etc., in this existence.
- d. David's life, for example, was filled with deep tragedy, yet his laments and praises and thanksgivings show how much his faith was centered in God.
- e. God deserves to be praised for his greatness even in the midst of our misery.
- f. Some view life as follows: "Life is a swirling, sucking, eddy of despair, punctuated by brief moments of false hope, in an ever-darkening universe."
- g. But, as Ecclesiastes, "it is enough" ... That is to say that God's glimmers of hope in this seemingly, cruel, dark world are enough to cause/prompt us to be faithful to him no matter what. Psalms, in its own way, echoes that sentiment.

Chapter Twelve - Wisdom: Then And Now

Introduction

1. Hebrew wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, parts of Song of Songs and some psalms) is unfamiliar to most Christians.
2. When properly understood and used, wisdom literature is a helpful resource for Christian living.

The Nature Of Wisdom

1. “Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.”
2. The goal is achieved by applying God’s truth to life.
3. Though simple enough in principle, the accomplishment of it is somewhat difficult. The difficulty arises because some of the Old Testament wisdom material is misunderstood, and thus misapplied.
4. Abuse Of Wisdom Literature
 - a. People often read these books only in bits and pieces and fail to see their overall message.
 - i. When we read bits and pieces of wisdom literature, taken out of context, they appear profound and seemed quite practical, but apart from their overall context, they can often be misapplied.
 - ii. The line from Ecclesiastes 3:2 “ a time to be born and a time to die” sounds like fatalism. When it’s your “time” to go, then you go. This does not mean that God predictively/determinedly sets out our lifespan ahead of time.
 - b. Readers sometimes misunderstood wisdom terms, categories, styles and literary modes, all leading to misuse.
 - i. The term “fool” in Proverbs has reference to the unbeliever, the infidel, not to somebody who lacks mental ability.
 - ii. Misunderstanding contextual definitions as well as stylistic idioms and wisdom literature causes confusion.
 - c. Students often fail to follow the line of argument presented.
 - i. There are some statements presented within the context of wisdom literature, and other literature as well, that will lead to an incorrect understanding of life when those statements are taken out of context. Example cited, Job 15:20: “All their days the wicked suffer torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for them.” This appears to be an inspired teaching that evil/wicked people can never be happy. In context, this is an argument presented by one of Job’s friends who is trying to convince Job that he is suffering because of his own sin. His friend was wrong in his assumption, and was wrong in the line of argumentation that he presented. Taking it out of context, and assuming that simply because it is in the Bible it must be right, leads us to a wrong conclusion.
 - ii. The purpose of this chapter is to examine what wisdom literature is and is not so that we will be able to understand these books on their own terms and use them well. The focus will be on the book of Proverbs.
5. Who Is Wise?
 - a. Wisdom, the ability to make godly choices in life, is not just something abstract, it only really exists when a person thinks and acts according to truth in making those choices.
 - b. Obviously, some people have more wisdom than others, and some have devoted themselves to gaining wisdom more than others.
 - c. In the context of wisdom literature these people are identified as “wise.”
 - d. The wise person practice wisdom, he did not just know it.
 - e. Our entire lives might be easily summed up as the consequences of our choices.
 - f. Everything we do involves choice and the actions resulting from those decisions.
 - g. Some are immediate, almost instinctive, and others are quite deliberate, having been determined long ago.

- h. Ancient cultures, and thus their wisdom literature, had as their goal the making of the best choices, in order to achieve the best life.
- i. Biblical wisdom literature added this dimension: the only good choices are godly choices.
- j. The biblical perspective, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10) addresses the importance of those good and godly choices.
- k. Biblical wisdom has nothing to do with intelligence. It is not about quickness or skill.
- l. It is all about our relationship with God, which comes from our ability to please him, by doing his will.
- m. Responsible, successful living with the goal, and it applies in all areas of life.
- n. Wisdom literature, therefore, focuses on our behavior.

6. Teachers Of Wisdom

- a. In ancient Israel some people devoted themselves not only to attaining wisdom but also the teaching others how to attain it.
- b. These wise men often occupied a position in society parallel to priests and prophets.
- c. Some were inspired by God to write portions of the Old Testament.
- d. They often serve as surrogate parents to those seeking wisdom, and become fathers and mothers to those they teach.
- e. Parents often sent children to these wise men and women so that they would learn wisdom attitudes and lifestyles.

7. Wisdom In The Home

- a. Wisdom was taught in the home more than any other setting.
- b. The emphasis is on life skills that shape behavior.
- c. The sword of wisdom is found frequently in Proverbs. Proverbs subordinates all its advice, wisdom I’m all sources, to God’s wisdom.
- d. Though the advice might be strongly practical and concerned with secular issues, it should always acknowledge the highest good a person can achieve is to do God’s will.

8. Wisdom Among Colleagues

- a. The ability to make right choices, the practical application of wisdom, is often refined by means of discussion and argument.
- b. Thus wisdom comes by means of lengthy discourse, either in a monologue intended to be read and reflected upon (e.g., Ecclesiastes) or in dialogue among numerous persons trying to shape and inform each other’s opinions on truth and life (e.g., Job).
- c. The wisdom found in the book of Proverbs is called proverbial wisdom.
- d. The wisdom found in Ecclesiastes and Job is usually called speculative wisdom.
- e. The wisdom found in the song of Solomon is called lyric wisdom. (Each of these is discussed further below.)
- f. Note: speculative wisdom is intended to be highly practical and centered in experience rather than merely theoretical.

9. Wisdom Expressed Through Poetry

- a. Various literary techniques are used as aids to teach and prompt students to remember wisdom.
- b. These techniques are to make them learnable and memorizable.
- c. The careful wording of poetry, its cadences and stylistic qualities make them easier to commit to memory than standard prose. Is for this reason that poetry became medium of Old Testament wisdom literature. Most of that literature is composed in poetry.
- d. Some of the techniques used include: parallelisms (synonymous, antithetical, synthetic), acrostics, alliteration, numerical sequences and countless comparisons (similes, metaphors, etc.). We also find parables, allegory’s, riddles and other poetic techniques.

10. The Limits Of Wisdom

- a. Ancient near Eastern wisdom literature did not contain exclusively godly or Orthodox wisdom.
- b. There existed a class of wise teachers and scribes who were supported, sometimes by royalty, to collect, compose, and refine wisdom proverbs and discourses.
- c. Though much of this wisdom resembles the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, there are some distinctive features that set it apart:
 - i. it lacks the emphasis on the Lord as the origin of wisdom,
 - ii. it lacks the emphasis on the purpose of wisdom being to please the Lord,
 - iii. it might not cover all of life,
 - iv. though practical it may not address wisdom from the theological perspective found in the Bible
- d. There are even biblical examples of wisdom rendered in evil causes. Solomon gained great wealth and fame through his wisdom, but it did not keep him from turning away from God.
- e. Wisdom, to be what God wants to be, must be fully subordinated to obedience to God in order to achieve its proper end.

Wisdom In Proverbs

1. The book of Proverbs contains what is called “prudential wisdom.” It is wisdom couched in memorable aphorisms (maxims) that can be used to help us make responsible choices.
2. The books of Ecclesiastes and Job make use of speculative wisdom as a way of wrestling with the great issues of life.
3. Proverbial wisdom focuses on practical attitudes and behavior in everyday life. It teaches what might be best called “old-fashioned basic values.”
4. Proverbs contains a collection of pithy statements and advice designed to help children attain a reasonable level of success in all areas of life.
5. It affirms that, all things being equal, there are basic attitudes and behavior patterns that will help a person become a responsible adult.
6. Proverbs often presents a sharp contrast between wise and foolish choices. Foolish choices lead to:
 - a. Violent crime
 - b. Careless promising pledging
 - c. Laziness
 - d. Malicious dishonesty
 - e. Sexual impurity (especially odious to God and harmful to an upright life)
7. Righteous choices on the other hand lead to:
 - a. Caring for the poor
 - b. Respect for leaders
 - c. Disciplining children
 - d. An awareness of the dangers of alcohol
 - e. Proper regard for parents
8. Though specifically religious language appears in Proverbs, is not the dominant style of language.
9. Not everything in life has to be religious to be godly. Proverbs can help serve as a corrective to the extreme tendency to spiritualize everything as though there were something wrong with anything that is material.
10. Uses And Abuses Of Proverbs
 - a. Hebrew proverbs are called meshallim - figures of speech, parables, or specially contrived sayings.
 - b. A proverb is a brief, particular expression of truth.
 - c. The brevity of the statement makes it less likely to be coldly precise and universal.
 - d. Long, qualified, elaborate, detailed statements of fact, however are difficult to understand and just as difficult to remember.

- e. It is for this reason that Proverbs are phrased in a catchy one, so that they might be more easily remembered.
- f. Many of the proverbs in Hebrew have a sort of rhythm, I sound repetition, are some unique vocabulary quality that makes them particularly easy to learn. The English proverb “look before you leap” and “a stitch in time saves nine” both take advantage of this sort of rhythmic, repetitious style. It is what makes them memorable.
- g. To reword them in more specific, elaborate, detailed explanations of behavior is to rob them of their punch and effectiveness.
- h. In similar fashion Hebrew proverbs must be understood reasonably and taken on their own terms. They are not intended to state everything about a truth, but they point in that direction. When taken literally, they might be technically inexact. But as guidelines for shaping behavior they are unsurpassed.
- i. Remember that proverbs tend to use figurative language and express things suggestively rather than in detail. (see the example cited from Proverbs 6:27–29; 9:13–18; etc.)
- j. For this reason we must remember that a proverb should not be taken too literally or to universally.
- k. Note how the latter proverb cited above (9:13–18) folly is personified as a prostitute trying to entice some and into her home, But how the food is characterized by someone who’s fascinated with the forbidden pleasure she might offer. The message of this proverb is to stay away from folly and to resist its enticements just as you would resist the enticements of a prostitute.
- l. Remember that proverbs are often inexact statements pointing to the truth and figurative ways. We must not assume that they are always direct, clear cut promises from God. (Proverbs 16:3 is a good example here.)
- m. When proverbs are stated on their own terms and understood is a special category of suggested, general truth that they are, to become important tools for living.

Some Hermeneutical Guidelines

1. Proverbs Are Not Legal Guarantees From God

- a. We must remember that proverbs advise us of a wise way to attain certain selected practical goals, but that they are not to be understood in terms of a divine warranty for success.
- b. The blessings, or goals, anticipated in proverbs are *likely* to follow if one will choose the actions outlined within the proverbs themselves.
- c. Proverbs never guarantees automatic success. Remember that Ecclesiastes and Job reminded us that there’s very little that’s automatic about the good or bad events that take place in our lives.
- d. Note the examples cited from Proverbs 22:26–27; 29:12; and 15:25. Taking these passages literally will cause extreme interpretations and make us miss the intent of the proverb itself.

2. Proverbs Must Be Read As A Collection

- a. Each proverb, while inspired, must be balanced with others and understood in the context of the entirety of Scripture.
- b. The more we read individual proverbs in isolation from the rest, the more likely we are to misread, and therefore misapply, their intent.
- c. Note the example cited: Proverbs 21:22, Proverbs 22:14.
- d. They must be understood against the general backdrop of all that the book of Proverbs says relative to wisdom, might, temptation, etc.

3. Proverbs Are Worded To Be Memorable, Not To Be Theoretically Accurate

- a. We must always remember that no single proverb is a complete statement of all truth. This principle of course applies to any single statement of Scripture, not just the proverbs.
- b. Remember that they are often briefly and parabolically stating principles.

- c. They are intended to stimulate an image in your mind that is memorable, or to include sounds that are pleasing to the ears, but are also memorable.
 - d. The last chapter the book of Proverbs focuses on the benefits of a good wife in an acrostic ordering. The order is not intended to be a literal pattern for every virtuous woman to follow, but simply emphasizes my means exaggeration the joy that a good wife brings to her family.
4. Some Proverbs Need To Be “Translated To Be Appreciated”
- a. Some of the wisdom expressed in Proverbs comes from allusions to practices and institutions that no longer exist, though, and to Old Testament Israel.
 - b. In order for them to make sense we must translate them into practices and institutions that have meaning for us today.
 - c. Very few people today live in societies where there are kings. We do not usually live in the flat roof houses of Bible times. But biblical references to these, and other, items foreign to us appear very frequently.
 - d. Remember these following principles in order to understand the meaning of Proverbs:
 - i. Proverbs are often parabolic (i.e., figurative)
 - ii. Proverbs are intensely practical, not theoretically theological.
 - iii. They are worded to be memorable, not necessarily precise.
 - iv. They are not designed to support selfish behavior, but the opposite.
 - v. They reflect ancient culture and may need “translation” to grasp their meaning.
 - vi. They are not guarantees from God but poetic guidelines for good behavior.

Wisdom In Job

1. The book of Job is a carefully structured dialogue between Job and his friends.
2. Keeping track of who says what, when, where, why and how helps us to understand what’s being said.
3. But failure to do so leads to all sorts of wrong advice and incorrect conclusions.
4. The significance of Job as a whole has a very important goal: to establish convincingly to the reader that what happens in life does not always happen because God desires it, makes it happen, or because it is fair.
5. This truth is set forth in opposition to Job’s friends’ wisdom.
6. They’ve regularly state that God is not involved in the daily affairs of life but that he is judging us through the events of life.
7. What they say to Job is what they believe happens to anyone in life, regardless whether not they are good or evil. Everything that happens is a direct result of whether that person has been pleasing to God or not.
8. They are horrified when Job insists he did nothing wrong to deserve the sorts of miseries that have befallen him.
9. They assume that when life goes well, you’ll have no problems. But, when things go badly, it must mean that God is punishing you.
10. The Scriptures do not teach that suffering is always and necessarily the result of specific sin.
11. The reader of the book of Job sometimes learns what is simply the world’s wisdom—it appears logical but it is really wrong. But if he reads further, in consideration of the whole of the text, he will learn what is really God’s wisdom.

Wisdom In Ecclesiastes

1. The book of Ecclesiastes is often puzzling, and difficult, because it contains several passages that appear to be self-contradictory, and others that seem to contradict something else in the biblical revelation.

2. This confusion has led to opposing interpretations: is Ecclesiastes to be understood as an expression of cynical wisdom, which serves as a kind of oil regarding the outlook on life that should be avoided; or is the book to be understood more positively, as an expression of how one should enjoy life under God in a role in which we all die in the end? (See Kidner's discussion of the two viewpoints of Ecclesiastes in his text on wisdom literature.)
3. One of the key issues in understanding Ecclesiastes is to grasp the meaning of the term that is frequently interpreted as vanity, meaningless, or futility. It occurs 37 times in the book of Ecclesiastes (73 times in the Old Testament as a whole). The word means vapor or breath or wisp of air.
4. The question is, what does it mean to the writer of Ecclesiastes? Does he mean to say that everything is ephemeral? Is he saying that all things are useless? Is it both?
5. How one answers these questions depends on the understanding of other things that the author says in the text.
6. There are 4 realities that dominate the thinking presented in Ecclesiastes:
 - a. God is the single, indisputable reality, the creator of all things, the one who's the source of all life, including its burdensome nature;
 - b. God's ways are not always understandable;
 - c. On the human side, what happens in this world doesn't all seem to add up, the way things happen does not seem to be the way things should happen;
 - d. The great equalizer is death, which happens to all people.
7. If death is our end, and there is no afterlife, then obviously everything is vain that we do in life: it only counts here and now.
8. It still might be argued, that even if the only real certainty about this life is the certainty of death, we should still live life as a gift from God.
9. But if one looks at the entirety of the book as a foil, that is as a contrast to what the rest of the Bible teaches, in the final chapter in Ecclesiastes can be understood as ending the book with a corrective warning: fear God and keep his commandments.
10. According to this foil theory, most of the book represents a brilliant artful, argument for the way one would look at life if God did not play a direct intervening role in life, and if there were no life after death.
11. Both of these interpretations miss the great themes of Scripture where God assures us of his faithfulness towards those who trust in him.
12. Perhaps, however, that the best way to understand the expression of speculative wisdom in Ecclesiastes, is to realize that it only reminds us of the hard questions in life, those that ultimately point the Christ's death and resurrection for the answer.

Wisdom In Song Of Songs

1. Song of Songs, a lengthy love song and a ballad about human romance, was written in the style of ancient Near Eastern lyric poetry.
2. It fits into the category of biblical wisdom literature because:
 - a. It was written by Solomon
 - b. It deals explicitly with the category of wisdom in Proverbs, specifically making the wise choice of marital and sexual fidelity
3. Though sexual temptation is ubiquitous, it need not cause God's children to stray.
4. God designed marriage to be more than a place of sexual fulfillment.
5. The romance that is intended to be in marriage is part of God's plan for man and woman, a plan that, by design, ultimately reflects God's character.
6. Though often approached as purely allegorical, the book refers specifically to the bliss of sexual fulfillment in marriage.

7. To understand it we must remember:
 - a. To appreciate the overall ethical context of the book
 - i. Monogamous, heterosexual marriage was the only context for sexual activity in God's revelation
 - ii. The attitude presented is one of faithfulness in marriage.
 - b. To keep the genre of the book in mind. It parallels the love poetry of the Old Testament (and elsewhere in Near Eastern literature). They were presented at weddings and had great meaning for those involved.
 - c. The book suggests godly choices rather than describing them in a mundane manner.
 - d. To keep in mind the differences in culture between the time of Song of Songs and our time.
 - i. Today we discuss sexual, physical techniques
 - ii. Ancient writers addressed romance
 - iii. Today we address self-indulgence
 - iv. Ancient writers addressed the need to respond faithfully to one another.
 - v. Today romance comes before marriage.
 - vi. In the Song of Solomon romance characterizes marriage.

Chapter Thirteen - The Revelation: Images Of Judgment And Hope

Introduction

1. Revelation, unlike the rest of the New Testament, is not narratives, letters, etc., with plain statements of fact and directives.
2. It is filled with angles, demons, beasts, dragons, trumpets, earthquakes and imageries, symbols and numbers throughout.
3. Though John speaks clearly, even stating that there are blessings for those who read Revelation, the interpretive problems are many.
4. The symbolism is rich and diverse, easy to understand in some places and almost beyond comprehension in others.
5. The setting, while firmly in the first century, deals with future events, but it does so not only through an abundance of symbols, but also with a huge dose of old testament perspective as well. The number of old testament references varies: S/F count 250+ references, others nearly 400.
6. This chapter is not an attempt to resolve all issues. They also caution against easy answers and dogmatic positions, especially so in light of the multiple (they cite 5) major interpretive methods employed in studying the book.
7. In spite of it all, if God gave it, he gave it for a purpose, and though distant from it, we can still understand something God intended. But first, there must be exegesis before there is hermeneutics.
8. They recommend Bauckham's *The Theology of The Book of Revelation* as the best introduction to the work.

The Nature Of The Revelation

The first thing that must be done in understanding the book is to understand something about its style of writing. Just what kind of literature is it? As we study it, we come to understand that it is a blend of three types of literature: apocalypse, prophecy and letter. The first does not exist as a literary style today. We have some connection to literary forms of writing like epistles, narratives, psalms, etc., but apocalypse is unique.

1. The Revelation As Apocalypse
 - a. The taproot (source of an idea, work, etc.) of apocalyptic writing are the old testament prophetic books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and parts of Isaiah.
 - i. Like prophetic literature, apocalyptic is concerned about judgment and salvation.
 - ii. It was born in periods of persecution and/or oppression.

- iii. It's concern is not how God will act in present history, but rather how he will act when he brings an end to history and vindicates his people. (In this sense it is even more so eschatological than the gospel records. - jla)
 - iv. That end of history is understood to be both the triumph of all good and the final judgment of all evil.
 - b. Unlike most prophetic books, apocalypses are literary works from start to finish.
 - i. The prophets were primarily spokesmen for God. Their written works are "afterthoughts" in that regard, that is they are the written record of their work "after" their messages were first delivered orally.
 - ii. Apocalyptic literature was intended to be written from the beginning.
 - 1. It has a distinct style, structure and form.
 - 2. Its writing was specifically commissioned by God.
 - 3. The prophets were specifically commissioned by God to speak (at first), and then later their oracles were recorded in writing.
 - c. Most of the content of apocalyptic literature is presented in dreams and visions.
 - i. It's language is usually quite cryptic.
 - ii. It is often quite symbolic.
 - iii. It frequently contained literary devices to give an apparent sense of age.
 - iv. Some were written anonymously, allegedly by ancient "worthies."
 - d. The apocalyptic images are more fantasy than reality.
 - i. The non-apocalyptic prophets used symbolic language, but it usually involved real images (salt, cakes, et.al.)
 - ii. Apocalyptic images include beasts with many heads and horns, a woman clothed with the sun, locusts with heads of men and tails of scorpions, etc.
 - e. Because they were literary, these writings were very formally stylized.
 - i. Time and events are often divided into neat packages.
 - ii. Symbolic numbers are used in abundance.
 - iii. The final versions would have lots of visions that were carefully arranged, number (in sets), put together to express something unique, and with sets of visions following hard on the heels of each other.
 - f. Revelation fits all of the above categories with one exception; it is not anonymous.
- 2. The Revelation As Prophecy
 - a. John's name is probably cited because of his sense of the end as already/not yet (cf. 145ff).
 - b. He did not just anticipate the end. He knew that the end had already started.
 - c. Prior apocalyptic writings written in the name of prophets/worthies occurred before the Spirit came in its fullest sense. They wrote in anticipation of that coming and wrote in an age when there was no legitimate biblical prophecy.
 - d. John wrote "in the Spirit," that is under the influence of the Spirit of God.
 - e. John's book is unique in that it is both prophecy and apocalyptic.
 - i. It has all the characteristics of apocalyptic (minus anonymity) noted before.
 - ii. And it is intended to be a prophetic word to the early church.
- 3. The Revelation As Epistle
 - a. Though clearly both apocalyptic and prophetic, the book of Revelation also bears marks of an epistle.
 - b. It was written in the form of a letter.
 - c. It contains smaller, shorter, letters to the seven churches of Asia.
 - d. John speaks to readers in the first/second person.
 - e. Additionally, there is an occasional aspect to the work. The needs of the seven churches occasioned its writing.

The Necessity Of Exegesis

1. The first task of the exegesis of the Revelation is to seek the author's and so the Holy Spirit's, original intent.
 - a. The primary meaning is what John (God - jla) intended to mean.
 - b. It must have been something that the first readers would have had the ability to understand.
 - c. Note: secondary meanings, though possible, are outside exegetical concerns here.
2. One must be especially careful of overusing the concept of "the analogy of Scripture" in the exegesis of the Revelation.
 - a. Scripture must be understood in light of other scripture.
 - b. That does not mean that we must make other scriptures keys to unlock Revelation.
 - c. Though John uses images similar to those in Daniel in Ezekiel in new ways, we must not assume that John's readers were familiar with other NT writings as keys to understand those images.
 - d. S/F emphasis that the keys to understanding Revelation must either be built into the text itself or known to the original audience in their own historical context.
3. Because of the apocalyptic/prophetic nature of the book, there are added difficulties exegetically due to issues with its unique imagery.
 - a. We must be sensitive to the rich background of ideas that have gone into the composition of the text.
 - i. The origins of the ideas/images does not necessarily tell us the meaning/use in Revelation.
 - ii. They may have been adopted and transformed in new ways.
 - b. Apocalyptic imagery is of several kinds.
 - i. Some images are constant (cf. contemporary political symbols).
 - ii. Some images are fluid. Christ is both a lamb and a lion in Revelation. The woman in ch. 12 is good, the one in ch. 17 is not.
 - iii. Some of the images are given clear meanings in the text. (Lamp stands = churches; dragon = Satan).
 - iv. Some images are very general (e.g. four horsemen in ch. 6).
 - c. When John provides an interpretation/meaning of the images, those interpretations must be the firm starting point for meaning. S/F identify six key images here. (1:13, 18, 20; 12:9; 17:9, 18).
 - d. One must view the visions as wholes and remember not to press details allegorically.
 - i. The visions, in this sense, are like parables.
 - ii. The whole of the vision is telling us something.
 - iii. The details are for dramatic effect or to emphasize the whole in some way.
4. John expects his readers to hear his echoes of the Old Testament as the continuation and consummation of that story.
 - a. The doxology to Christ reflects the language of the sacrificial system in Exodus.
 - b. The announcement of his coming includes references to Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12.
 - c. There are several other examples cited in context.
 - d. Exegesis of Revelation requires an awareness of these old testament images.
5. The Revelation, like apocalypses, rarely give detailed chronological accounts of the future.
 - a. The message of Revelation is beyond this concern.
 - b. Its primary purpose is to show that, in spite of the way things look, God is in control of all things.
 - c. Though the church may suffer persecution, their ultimate reward is victory.

The Historical Context

1. To understand Revelation you must be able to reconstruct its historical context.
2. Reading the text through several times can help us do this.
3. Read to get the big picture without trying to understand everything.
4. Read the book to get a feel for the book.

5. Make notes of your reading, looking for clues/indicators of specific topics.
6. Try to grasp the various motifs (patterns/images of writing) used to understand the overall historical context. Suffering, for example, is prevalent throughout the work and specific tools, images, encouragements are found to help early readers learn how they were to overcome their trials. Look for keys that would have helped them then.
7. Look for main themes:
 - a. The church and state are at war
 - b. It looks at first like the state will win
 - c. Danger times are ahead (including suffering and death)
 - d. Things will get worse, but then they will get better
 - e. Don't give up before the end
 - f. This book will encourage you
 - g. Christ/God are in control
 - h. God will judge those who persecute you
8. Note the distinction between tribulation and wrath:
 - a. Tribulation (suffering and death) befalls the church; it comes from the enemies of God
 - b. Wrath (punishment, retribution, judgement) comes to the enemies of God because they persecuted the church
 - c. This distinction is found throughout the new testament (2 Th 1:3-10)
9. Note the two key questions presented in the book:
 - a. How long until our enemies are judged?
 - i. A little longer
 - ii. Remember final judgment is certain
 - b. Who can stand against the wrath of God/Christ/Lamb?
 - i. The persecuted are not affected.
 - ii. The enemies will not be able to stand.

The Literary Context

1. To understand any of the visions in the book we must wrestle with the background and meaning of the images (*content* issues) and how that vision *functions* in the book as a whole.
2. The book unfolds like a drama
 - a. The earliest scenes set the stage,
 - b. Reveal the main characters
 - c. Introduce us to the plot/problem
3. Outline:
 - a. Chapters 1-3 = stage, main characters (John, Christ, the church)
 - b. Chapters 4-5 = further stage setting, God on his throne, Christ as the Lamb
 - c. Chapters 6-7 = start the unfolding of the drama; the first of the series of visions of seven (the first four items form one picture, the next two present two sides of another reality, the last revealed after interludes)
 - d. Chapters 8-11 = God's temporal judgment against Rome
 - e. Chapter 12 = the theological key to the book; Satan attempted to destroy Christ and was destroyed instead (already/not yet); cf. Gen 3:15 (jla)
 - f. Chapters 13-14 = the empire's vengeance against the church
 - g. Chapters 15-16 = the empire is doomed
 - h. Chapters 17-22 = the tale of two cities; Rome and the heavenly Jerusalem

The Hermeneutical Questions

1. The hermeneutical issues with Revelation are like those of the prophetic books. God's word to us is first God's word to them. Remember, though, that in the case of the prophets and the Revelation that both address things yet to be.
2. What was "yet to be" often had some temporal immediacy to it. From our perspective it has been completed.
3. The understand that, in the prophets, Judah already completed captivity, and that, in Revelation, Rome's judgement already occurred.
4. The Revelation promises freedom through suffering, not freedom from suffering.
5. Our difficulty is often that we see the closeness of the temporal punishments to the timing of the ultimate eschatological realities.
6. Much of the language surrounding the temporal judgments sounds like it refers to the final judgment.
7. Suggestions to address these hermeneutical issues:
 - a. Remember that pictures of the future are just pictures.
 - b. Pictures that are intended first to express the certainty of God's judgment should not be interpreted to deal with "soon-ness." (Short \neq very soon; short = limited)
 - c. Pictures with both a "temporal" and "eschatological" connection should not be viewed as simultaneous for us today, though it may have been for the original audience.
 - d. Be care when looking for secondary, yet to be fulfilled, aspects of images, especially when we have no keys to substantiate them.
 - e. Images that were initially intended to be eschatological are still to be understood that way.