

How to Know What the Bible Means by What It Says: Interpreting the New Testament (Lesson 6)

Intro

- 27 books
- 9 authors

I. Gospels

A. Their Nature

- *euangelion* = “good news”
- half of the NT
- Historical Narratives.

B. Their Structure

- Follows the model of ancient biographies
 1. Birth of the subject
 2. Incidents/sayings selected and arranged so as to reveal important aspects of the subject’s character
 - Events often arranged topically/thematically rather than chronologically in order to make the writer’s theological point. This explains differences in the order of the same events as presented in the first three gospels.
 - The recording of incidents is not exhaustive (Jn. 21:25)
 3. Death of the subject. (A large portion of the biography dedicated to this).

C. Their Overall purpose:

1. evangelistic
2. to strengthen faith of believers (Jn. 20:30-31, Lk 1:1-4)

D. Two Types of Gospels

1. Synoptics (to see together; to share a common point of view). Record the same events from Christ’s Galilean ministry.
 - a. Matthew
 - b. Mark
 - c. Luke
2. Gospel of John: Focuses on Christ’s earlier Judean ministry.

E. Four portraits of the Savior

Matthew

- Audience: Jewish Christians and/or Jews considering faith in Christ
- Theme: Jesus is the King of the Jews and Messiah of Israel

Mark

- Audience: Written to a Gentile audience, esp. Roman, suffering persecution
- Theme: Jesus is the suffering servant of the Lord

Luke

- Audience: Theophilus (& Gentile believers?)
- Theme: Jesus is the perfect Son of Man, the Savior of mankind.

John

- Audience: All who read and will believe
- Theme: Jesus is the eternal Son of God

F. Interpretive Principles

Two Guiding Ideas:

1. The gospel writers are saying something about Jesus *in* each story
 2. The gospel writers are saying something *by the way they link* small stories together.
1. How to read individual stories
 - Question: What is the main message of this story?
 - a. Ask the standard narrative questions: Who, what, when, where, why, how?
 - b. Look for interpretive clues from the author regarding context (Lk. 14:7, Matt. 19:30)
 - c. Take note of repetitions
 - “abide” John 15
 - “woe” Matt. 23
 - ”You have heard that it was said... But I tell you...” Matt. 5
 - d. Concentrate on direct discourse
 - “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Mk. 4:40
 - “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; hear Him!” Matt. 17:5
 2. How to read a group of stories
 - Question: What is the gospel writer trying to say by the way he puts the smaller stories together? **CONTEXT DETERMINES MEANING**
 - Look for Connections:
 - a. Common themes or patterns between stories
 - b. Logical connections, such as Cause/Effect
 - c. Conjunctions or transitions between episodes
 - d. Compare/Contrast the characters
 - e. Focus on Jesus: His identity, mission, teaching, responses to Him

II. Parable/Allegory

A. Parables (Matt. 13:1-53; Mark 4; Luke 8:4-16, 15:3-10; etc.)

1. Definition

- a. Greek: “to throw alongside,” “comparison,” “analogy”
 - b. A short story involving human characters in everyday situations and which is used to illustrate or teach a single theological principle by way of comparison. (“The Kingdom of Heaven is *like*... “)
2. Context: Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by Israel’s Spiritual Leaders
Matt. 12:14-45
 3. Purpose: To Conceal and Reveal (Matt. 13:10-17)

B. Allegories

1. Definition

A story in which everything in the story symbolizes something else. (“And the one on whom the seed was sown...is the man who...”)

2. Examples:

- Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32)
- 4 Soils (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23; Mk. 4:13-20)
- Galatians 4

C. Interpretive Principles (see Anderson, *Hermeneutics* pgs. 23-25)

1. In parables, look for one main point or one point for each character
2. The main point must be one that Jesus’ original audience would have understood
3. Look for interpretive explanations Jesus Himself makes.
4. “Do not attempt to interpret details in allegories that [the text does] not explain” (Anderson, pg. 25)
5. Determine the situation, problem or question that prompted the parable originally.

III. Epistles

A. Their Nature

1. 22 of the 27 NT books
2. 81% of the NT
3. Two Groups
 - a. Pauline: Romans-Philemon
 - b. General (“Catholic”): Hebrews-Jude (+ Revelation)
4. Situational (except Romans and Hebrews)

B. Structure: Greco-Roman letter format

1. Opening Salutation
 - a. Writer’s name
 - b. Recipient’s name
 - c. Greeting
2. Prayer, blessing, thanksgiving
3. Body
 - a. Occasion that prompted the letter
 - b. Situation being addressed
4. Final greeting and farewell

C. Interpretive Principles (see Lesson 3)

1. Identify the Historical Cultural Context: S.O.A.P.S.
2. Be sensitive to the literary contexts
 - What comes before and after the passage
 - The conventions of letter-writing (cf. Galatians)
3. Principlize and Apply
 - a. Identify the KEY ELEMENTS in the original situation
 - b. Search for a parallel contemporary situation that contains those same KEY ELEMENTS
 - c. Make your applications specific

IV. Apocalyptic: The Book of Revelation (Anderson, *Hermeneutics* pgs. 27-28)

A. Its Nature

1. An encyclical letter to 7 churches
2. A Prophecy
3. A Narrative
4. A Vision

B. Characteristics

1. Visionary
 - a. Heaven opened
 - b. Symbols and mysterious numbers, figures, beasts, etc.
2. A new message/revelation brought by a heavenly messenger
3. Concentration on future events
4. Against a backdrop of persecution (Diocletian)
5. Foretelling the final confrontation between God and Satan
6. The establishment of God's Kingdom reign
7. The final message: God is going to win.

C. Interpretive Challenges

1. The Preterist View: *Revelation* already fulfilled in the 1st century
2. The Historical View: *Revelation* a map of Church History
3. The Symbolic View: *Revelation* symbolizes the struggle between Good and Evil
4. The Prophetic/Futurist View: *Revelation* depicts real future events.

D. Interpretive Principles

1. Interpret literally, except where the context clearly calls for a symbolic meaning.
2. Refer to the Old Testament when Interpreting images and symbols (Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah)
3. When principlizing, focus on the main idea of the passage. Don't sweat the details.
4. Keep in mind the historical-cultural context of persecution in chs. 1-3:
 - a. Exhortations to be "overcomers"
 - b. Hope offered to those who are suffering
 - c. A challenge given to those who are complacent