

How to Know What the Bible Means by What It Says:

Interpreting the Old Testament (Lesson 5)

Intro

- Problems experienced by the early church after the Apostolic Age (2nd c.)
- How to interpret and apply the OT?
- The apostles didn't have a problem with this. See Romans 15:4 & 1 Corinthians 10:11
- So Bible scholars from the Alexandrian School (allegorists) came up with the 4-levels of meaning model to interpret any OT text: Literal, Allegorical, Moral, Mystical.
- The way to interpret OT texts is the same as for any Biblical passage: the Authorial Intent Approach. This is the only model that takes into account the historical-cultural and literary contexts in which the passage was originally written.

I. Old Testament Literary Genres

- A. Historical Narratives
- B. Law
- C. Prophets
- D. Poetry
- E. Wisdom Literature

II. Historical Narratives

A. "Narrative" = "Story"

1. Comprise nearly half of the Old Testament
 - Make us participants in the story as we live through the characters' struggles.
2. Their purpose: To teach theological truth.

B. The Literary Characteristics of Narratives: Plot ["plot 1" slide]

1. Characters: Protagonists & Antagonists
 - a. God is the main character, whether participating in the action directly or as an unseen presence off-stage
 - b. Flawed (The Good Guys don't always wear white hats.)
2. Setting
 - a. Time (time of rebellion? time of revival?)
 - b. Place (leaving the Promised Land indicated a lack of trust in God)
3. Events
4. Conflict
 - a. Internal
 - b. External
 - c. Frequently between God and His stiff-necked people
5. Resolution of the Conflict
6. Narrative Viewpoint
 - a. Sometimes interpretive. (2 Kings 17:7)
 - b. Most often objective (neutral)
 - Allows characters' actions to speak for themselves and to determine the meaning of the story

C. The Theological Meaning of Old Testament Narratives

1. Derives from the actions of the characters
2. Narratives *show* us how to live or how not to live.
3. Are smaller incidents in a larger story.

D. The One Story of the Bible:

- God is bringing His people, to His place, for His purpose, in His time. (yellow handout)

E. The One Story of the Old Testament

1. An unbroken narrative: Genesis 1 through 2 Kings 25. 1 & 2 Chron. a retelling of 1 & 2 Kings. Picks up again in Esther & Daniel (taking place in captivity), Nehemiah & Ezra (return from captivity).
2. Context Determines Meaning: What role does this incident play in the bigger story of the book? Of the Bible? (Compare/Contrast Rahab vs Achan. Ironic. Theological principles: Deliverance based on true faith demonstrated by action. Application: There are no unlikely candidates for coming to salvation in Christ.)

III. Law

A. The Narrative Context

- The Law is part of the larger story of Israel's exodus, wandering, and conquest (Genesis 12 through 2 Kings 25)

B. The Covenant Context

Middle Eastern Suzerain/Vassal Treaty

- a. An account of favors the Lord has done for the vassal in the past
- b. Resultant obligations of the vassal to his lord are stipulated
- c. A copy of the treaty to be kept in the temple of the vassal's gods & read publicly and annually
- d. Blessings/Curses
- e. Witnesses (Deut. 30:19)
- f. Sacrifice made to seal the deal

The Mosaic Covenant:

1. Associated with Israel's conquest and occupation of the land
 - "land" occurs 197 times in Deuteronomy
2. Its blessings are conditional (Deut. 28)
3. Is no longer a functioning covenant (Heb. 8:13)
4. Is no longer applicable to believers *as law* (Matt. 5:17)
 - Jesus came to fulfill the righteous demands of the Law
5. Must be interpreted through the grid of the New Testament (Rom. 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:11 2 Timothy 3:16)

C. The Interpretive Journey and the Law

1. Step 1: What did the text mean to the original audience?
 - a. Circumstances: Mt. Sinai? River Jordan?
 - b. Scope: How to approach God? How to relate to others? How to live in the land?
2. Step 2: What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?
 - a. Not sacrifice of animals, but of Christ
 - b. Not a theocracy, but secular government

- c. No pressure from Canaanite religion, but pagan worldviews.
- d. Not under the Old Covenant, but a New Covenant
- 3. Step 3: What is the outstanding and abiding theological principle in the text?
 - a. God's character and holiness
 - b. the nature of sin
 - c. concern for others
- 4. Step 4: Does the New Testament modify or qualify this principle and, if so, how? (Exodus 20:14 and Matthew 5:28)

IV. The Prophets

- A. The Prophetic Books (according to size)
 - 1. Four Major Prophets (Isaiah—Daniel)
 - 2. Twelve Minor Prophets (Hosea—Malachi)
- B. The Narrative Context (Genesis 12 through 2 Kings 25)
- C. The Prophetic Office: God's Prosecuting Attorneys
 - 1. Israel has violated the terms of the Covenant and deserves judgment
 - 2. Call the people back to covenant obedience
- D. The Prophetic Message
 - 1. You have broken the covenant. Repent!
 - a. Idolatry
 - b. Religious ritual instead of personal relationship
 - c. Social injustice
 - 2. No repentance? Then judgment! (Predictive)
 - 3. Future hope for a glorious restoration (Predictive)
- E. The Prophetic "Voice"
 - 1. Near-far Fulfillment (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:22-23)
 - 2. Conditional/Unconditional Fulfillment (Jeremiah 18:7-10)
 - 3. Figurative Language (Anderson 17-20)
- F. The Interpretive Journey and Prophecy
 - 1. When principlizing (Step 3) be aware of recurring themes:
 - a. God desires relationship over ritual.
 - b. Unfaithfulness to God causes Him pain.
 - c. Social Injustice is as serious a sin as idolatry.
 - 2. "Take the words of prophecy in their normal, grammatical sense" (Anderson 28).
 - 3. "View prophecy as focusing primarily on the Messiah, His judgments, and His kingdom. (Revelation 19:10)" (Anderson 28).

V. Poetry and Wisdom Literature.

- A. Some Types of Psalms
 - 1. Praise
 - 2. Lament/Complaint
 - 3. Imprecatory
 - 4. Law (Ps. 119)
 - 5. Acrostic (Ps. 119)
 - 6. Songs of Ascent
 - 7. Thanksgiving
- B. Structure of Hebrew poetry: Parallelism
 - 1. Synonymous Parallelism (Isaiah 2:4)

2. Antithetical Parallelism (Prov. 10:1)
3. Climatic Parallelism (Psalm 29:1)
4. Emblematic Parallelism (Prov. 25:12)

C. Wisdom Literature

1. The Wisdom Books: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
2. The Goal of Wisdom Literature: The Formation of Godly Character Applied to Real-World Situations
3. The Viewpoint of the Wisdom books
 - a. The Book of Proverbs: The Basic Approach to Life
 - Not universal principles or promises, but things that are *normally* true
 - b. Job: The Suffering of the Righteous
 - i. *Most* of life is rational, BUT...
 - ii. Tragedy can strike even the wise and righteous
 - iii. In tragedy, rely on the Creator
 - c. Ecclesiastes: The Failure of the Rational Approach to Provide Ultimate Meaning in Life
 - Meaning in life only found in a relationship with God
 - d. Song of Solomon: The Irrationality of Romantic Love between Husband and Wife

D. General Principles for Interpreting Biblical Poetry

1. Psalms:
 - a. Do not primarily teach doctrine or moral behavior
 - b. Are models of how to talk and sing to God in seasons of:
 - i. Well-being, resulting in gratitude
 - ii. Anguish, resulting in honest expressions of emotional pain
 - iii. Surprise at God's gifts, resulting in expressions of joy
2. Identify and analyze each parallelism
3. Identify and visualize each figure of speech
4. Enter into the emotional world of each image
5. Be aware of the progress of revelation
 - The doctrine of death and the afterlife is vague in the OT