INVITATION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:
THE HERMENEUTICAL TRIAD
© Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson

PREPARATION: WHO, WHY, HOW OF INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: INVITATION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Why develop interpretive skill?
“Present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)
- God does not approve careless handling of his Word
- Interpreting Scripture is work, requires effort
- We will be judged for how we handle God’s Word
- God’s Word—not our opinion—is true and authoritative

What is the hermeneutical triad?

Theology
History
Literature

What are the three major literary aspects of Scripture?
- Canon: determine the place of your passage in the overall storyline of Scripture
- Genre: determine your passage’s genre and interpret it in light of genre characteristics
- Language: break your passage into discourse units, study key words, and properly identify and interpret figurative language

What are the three inescapable realities for the biblical interpreter?
- The reality of God and his revelation in Scripture (theology)
- The existence of texts requiring interpretation (literature)
- The reality of history: revelation in cultural context (history)

What are the seven interpretive steps taught in this book?
- Step 1: Preparation
- Step 2: Interpretation: History
- Step 3: Literature: Canon
- Step 4: Literature: Genre
- Step 5: Literature: Language
- Step 6: Theology
- Step 7: Application & Proclamation

INTERPRETATION: THE HERMENEUTICAL TRIAD

PART I: THE GROUNDING: HISTORY

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE STAGE: HISTORICAL-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

What is a proper chronological framework for studying Scripture?

A. OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period/ Figure(s)</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchal: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob</td>
<td>2167</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus: Moses</td>
<td>1447/6</td>
<td>Exodus–Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conquest: Joshua</td>
<td>1407/6</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judges: Othniel–Samuel</td>
<td>1367–1044</td>
<td>Judges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utd. Mon.: Saul, David, Solomon</td>
<td>1044–931</td>
<td>1-2 Samuel, 1 Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exiles: Assyria, Babylon</td>
<td>722, 605/586</td>
<td>Prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return: Cyrus, Ezra, Nehemiah</td>
<td>536/458/444</td>
<td>Ezra, Neh., Esther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of OT period: last OT prophets</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>Malachi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty/Key Figure(s)</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greeks: Alexander the Great</td>
<td>333–320</td>
<td>Hellenization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ptolemies/Selucid: Antiochus</td>
<td>320–164</td>
<td>Abom. of desolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Rule: Macc./Hasmoneans</td>
<td>164–63</td>
<td>Pharisees, Sadducees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans: Herods, Augustus</td>
<td>63–AD 73</td>
<td>Golden Age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Significance</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus, the Messiah, born</td>
<td>5 BC</td>
<td>Matt 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ miracles, teaching, 12</td>
<td>29–33</td>
<td>4 Gospels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death/Resurrection, salvation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Passion narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul converted</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Acts 9:1–19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul’s missionary journeys</td>
<td>47–60</td>
<td>Acts 13–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem Council</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Acts 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire of Rome, persecution</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish War</td>
<td>66–73</td>
<td>John 21:19; 2 Tim, 2 Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple destroyed</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Matthew 24 pars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of NT era</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART II: THE FOCUS: LITERATURE

UNIT 1: CANON


What are the three key themes in the Law, Prophets, and Writings?
- The Law: principle of believer’s righteousness before God
- The exodus: principle of believer’s redemption by God
- Covenant: principle of believer’s relation to God

What are the nature, purpose, and goal of the Law?
- Expression of God’s sovereign will and moral standards
- The redeemed should represent God and reflect his character
- Culminates in new covenant and believers’ union with Christ

Why is the exodus event crucial to understanding Scripture?
- The account is preserved in many places in the OT
- A key theme for God’s redemptive work, provision for believers
- Finds its culmination in the new covenant

What are the two basic types of covenant found in the Bible?
- Suzerainty treaty: the enacting party imposes stipulations upon the affected party (Mosaic covenant)
- Royal Grant: blessings of issuing party to another, unconditional in nature (Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, new covenant)

What is the function and content of each covenant?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covenant</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noahic</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>No more flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrahamic</td>
<td>Foundational</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Land, seed, blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic</td>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>Suzerainty</td>
<td>Blessings and curses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidic</td>
<td>Messianic</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Built on Abrahamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Culmination</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Predicted by Prophets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is an understanding of the nature of the covenants essential?
- The basic moral stipulations in the Suzerainty/Mosaic covenant are perpetuated in the new covenant and the teachings of the NT
- Royal Grant types form a chain of covenants whose provisions are being fulfilled and will be consummated in the new covenant
- In Christ the promised Messiah, the biblical teachings concerning the Law, exodus, and covenants find fulfillment
CHAPTER 4: THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON: GOSPELS, ACTS, EPISTLES, AND APOCALYPSE

What is the central message of the various portions of the NT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NT Portion</th>
<th>Central Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gospels</td>
<td>The Messiah came, died and rose, and will return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistles</td>
<td>The Messiah gathers Jews &amp; Gentiles into church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apocalypse</td>
<td>The Messiah will come again, restore creation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the framework set by the Book of Acts for Paul’s letters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Background Event</th>
<th>NT Letter(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14; 16:6</td>
<td>Churches planted in Galatia</td>
<td>Galatians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Jerusalem Council</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:1–5</td>
<td>Paul &amp; Timothy</td>
<td>1–2 Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:11–40</td>
<td>Church plant in Philippi</td>
<td>Philippians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:1–9</td>
<td>Church plant in Thessalonica</td>
<td>1–2 Thessalonians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:1–17</td>
<td>Church plant in Corinth</td>
<td>1–2 Corinthians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19; 20:13–38</td>
<td>Church plant in Ephesus</td>
<td>Ephesians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28:30–31</td>
<td>Paul preaches in Rome</td>
<td>Prison Epistles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNIT 2: GENRE

CHAPTERS 5: ENJOYING A GOOD STORY: OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

What is the nature of narrative, and what are modes of narratives?
- Built around discourse, episode, or scenes
- Simple reporting of events
- Dramatic mode: focus is on oral discussion within the narrative
- Pure description
- Commentary: parenthetical information supplied by the narrator

In what forms are narratives most commonly cast?
- Stories: recall true episodes in the lives of biblical personages
- Accounts: contain information of actual historical events
- Reports: on historical conditions, battles, or lists of needed data

What types constitute OT historical narratives?
- External elements: author, narrator, reader
- Internal elements: setting, plot, characterization

What styles are most prominent in OT narrative?
- Repetition of actions, motifs, themes, dialogues, or word play
- Highlighting of some detail or individual character trait
- Irony emphasizing a reversal of what is expected or said
- Satire: ridicule of what seems improper or ill-conceived

CHAPTER 6: WORDS OF WISDOM: POETRY AND WISDOM

What are the most common characteristics of biblical poetry?
- Parallelism: repetition, contrast of ideas, or supplementary ideas; in form of terrace, ladder, acrostic, or emblematic parallelism
- Terseness: succinct presentation free of unnecessary details
- Concreteness: reader identifies with what the poet is portraying
- Imagery: reality portrayed in manner generating reader response
- Figurative language: involving symbolism

What types of figurative language occur most prominently in biblical poetry, and what are the chief structural patterns?
- Most are figures of comparison (i.e., metaphor or simile)
- Building blocks: monocolon (single line), bicolon (parallel thought over 2 lines), tricolon (3 lines), or blocks of 4 or 5 lines
- Distinctive subunits of a full poem (e.g., strophe or stanza)

What specific figures of comparison feature the person of God?
- Anthropomorphism: ascription of human characteristics to God
- Zoomorphism: ascription of animal traits to God (e.g., lion)

What structural indicators are most common in biblical poetry?
- Bookending (or inclusio): return to subject/words at end of unit
- Stitching: successive units linked by same word, phrase, or idea
- Hinging: authors uses independent unit to form transition between preceding and succeeding units

What further methods indicate structural change?
- Introductory particles, words, phrases, or transition of emphasis
- Change of subject matter
- Refrain: may indicate end of individual unit within poem
- Chiastic structure: second half of poem takes up same words, themes, or motifs as first half but in reverse order

What literary devices distinguish an author’s style of composition?
- Rhyming, rhythm, or emphasis expressed by unusual word order
- Allusion to earlier commonly known events, sayings, or writings
- Ellipsis: absence of a word in one line to be understood in both
- Ballast variants: word in one line replaced with one or more words in the other
- Fixed word pairs: standard words in successive parallel lines

What is the nature of true wisdom according to Scripture?
- True human wisdom finds its norm in the knowledge and application of the principles of godly wisdom
- True human wisdom is rooted in the fear of God

What types of proverbial wisdom literature are most common in the Bible, and what other types occur in biblical wisdom literature?
- Proverbs: descriptive (portraying life) or prescriptive (direction for wise living); comparative or contrastive
- Conditional proverbs: dealing with consequences of action
- Declarative proverbs: state emphatically a point of wisdom
- Purely instructive proverbs: aim to arrest reader’s attention

CHAPTER 7: THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE: PROPHECY

What are the role of the prophet and the subgenres of prophecy?
- The prophet is called of God to convey God’s word to his people in accordance with his nature and standards for human conduct
- Announcements of judgment: contain the Lord’s charges and the announcement of specific judgment, whether in present or future
- Salvation oracles: contain announcements of God’s promise of deliverance for his people, whether in the near or distant future
- Instructional accounts: include information for and disputes between God and his people
- Exhortation speeches: motivation toward repentance or reform
- Satire: criticism of issue, person, or ills of society
- Wisdom sayings: expressed in the forms of proverbial wisdom
- Narratives: deal with the prophet’s call or activities, or with outstanding events occurring during the prophet’s ministry
- Vision/dream reports: the prophet receives a dream or vision
- Hymns/songs, prayers, or letters

What is essential for interpreting prophecy?
- Historical-cultural context in which the prophecy is delivered
- The subgenre of prophecy inherent in the passage
- The proper employment of lexicography and syntax
- The distinct structural and stylistic devices used by the prophet
- The vital constraints of the theological context
• The determination of whether the prophecy pertains to the present and/or the near or distant future, whether the prophecy is declarative or conditional or progressively applicative, and whether prophecy is partially or completely fulfilled in the NT
• Valid application of the principles of prophetic text to life today

CHAPTER 8: HEARING THE GOOD NEWS: NT
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (GOSPELS & ACTS)

What are the external and internal elements in interpreting the Gospels?
• External elements: author, narrator, and reader
• Internal: setting, plot, characterization, style, narrative time

What are key structural elements in the canonical Gospels & Acts?
• Matthew: Five major discourses of Jesus, oscillating pattern of narrative and discourse
• Mark: From Galilee to Jerusalem; turning point is Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi
• John: Book of Signs (seven signs of Jesus), Book of Exaltation (cross and resurrection)
• Acts: From Jerusalem to Rome; from Jews to Gentiles

CHAPTER 9: CALLING FOR DISCERNMENT: PARABLES

What is a parable, how is it different from a historical narrative, and what is the range of parables told by Jesus in the Gospels?
• A parable is a true-to-life or realistic story
• It is not a true story though it is told with verisimilitude
• Parables range from short similitudes to allegorical parables:
  - Similitude
  - Short parable
  - Story parable
  - Allegorical parable

What are guidelines for interpreting parables?
• Determine the structure of the parable
• Determine the literary context of the parable
• Establish the historical context to understand the earthly details
• Note points of identification with readers, climax of parable
• Determine main point of parable as well as any secondary points
• Determine the original intent of the parable
• Base entire interpretive process on sound exegetical procedure
• Draw findings together and summarize meaning of parable
• Apply central truth(s) of parable to contemporary situation

CHAPTER 10: GOING BY THE LETTER: EPISTLES

What is the customary format for ancient letter openings?
• Identification of sender(s) and addressees
• Salutation or greeting (e.g., “X to Y, greetings”)
• Prayer or health wish

What is the customary format for ancient letter closings?
• Prayers or prayer requests
• Commendations of fellow workers
• Final greetings (in some cases autographed)
• Final instructions and exhortations
• Grace benediction

What are some types of ancient letters found in the NT?
• Letters of friendship
• Diatribe: series of questions and answers
• Apologetic letter of self-commendation
• Paraenesis (exhortation)
• Letter of introduction or commendation

What are some ingredients found in NT letters?
• Quotations or allusions to the OT or extrabiblical writings
• Creeds or hymns
• Domestic codes (House tables)
• Slogans
• Vice and virtue lists

What are the guidelines for interpreting epistles?
• Reconstruct the original situation behind the writing of the letter
• Discern the major parts of the letter (opening, body, closing)
• Look for conventional elements included or left out by the writer and determine significance
• Determine the structure and argument of the epistle by paying close attention to grammatical, semantic, and rhetorical elements
• Interpret each passage in light of the message of the entire letter
• Seek to discern what is purely occasional from general, abiding principle embedded in the theological basis for ethical teaching

CHAPTER 11: VISIONS OF THE END: APOCALYPTIC

What is apocalyptic?
• A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework
• An otherworldly being mediates revelation to a human recipient
• A transcendent reality is disclosed which envisages end-time salvation involving another, supernatural world
• The writing seeks to interpret a set of present earthly circumstances in light of future supernatural events

How should I interpret symbolic language in Revelation?
• Recognize symbolic imagery in the description of people and beings, colors, numbers, institutions, places, and events
• Look for interpretations of those symbols within the vision
• Determine if the symbol stems from an allusion to the OT
• Compare the symbol with other apocalyptic writings to see if it is a common symbol with a standard meaning
• Look for connections between symbol and cultural context
• Consult scholarly treatments of the symbol
• Be humble and aware of alternative interpretations

UNIT 3: LANGUAGE

CHAPTER 12: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT:
GRAMMAR, SYNTAX, AND DISCOURSE

What is discourse, and what are the most important features of discourse (discourse analysis)?
• Discourse is any coherent sequence of phrases or sentences, whether a narrative, logical argument, or poetic portion of text
• Major discourse features: (1) boundary markers, (2) cohesion or coherence, (3) relations, (4) prominence, and (5) situation

What are some of the larger syntactical features found in Scripture?
• Zeugma: special type of ellipsis
• Aposiopesis: breaking off of speech or statement
• Brachylogy: omission of element of thought
• Hendiadys: two or more expressions conveying the same idea
• Pleonasm: repetition of idea resulting in form of redundancy
• Assonetic: absence of connectives
• Parenthesis: interjection of independent additional thought
• Anacoluthon: incomplete thought

CHAPTER 13: THE MEANING OF WORDS: LINGUISTICS,
SEMANTICS, AND EXEGETICAL FALLACIES
What are linguistics and semantics, and why are these important for biblical interpretation?
- Linguistics is the study of languages
- Semantics is the science of determining word meanings
- Learn how language works and how word meaning is discerned

What is the most important factor in determining word meanings, and what method of study is most effective?
- Context: both immediate and larger discourse context
- The most effective method is a semantic field study

What are guidelines for determining word meanings in Scripture?
- Select the word(s) to be studied significant for interpretation
- Locate all the instances of the word by using tools such as The Book Study Concordance or a Greek or Hebrew concordance
- Conduct contextual study of every passage containing the word
- Categorize these passages according to word meaning and sketch the word’s semantic range
- Determine which of the possible meanings applies to passage

What are the major exegetical fallacies interpreters must avoid?
- The etymological or root fallacy
- Misuse of subsequent or previous meaning (Semantic anachronism or obsolescence)
- Appeal to unknown/unlikely meanings or background material
- Improper construals of Greek or Hebrew grammar or syntax
- Improper appeal to alleged parallels
- Improper linkage of language and mentality
- False assumptions about technical meaning
- Improper distinctions made regarding synonyms
- Selective or prejudicial use of evidence
- Unwarranted semantic disjunctions or restrictions (including illegitimate totality transfer)
- Unwarranted neglect of distinctive characteristics or style
- Unwarranted linking of sense and referent

CHAPTER 14: A WAY OF SPEAKING: INTERPRETING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

What is a figure of speech, and how does it work?
- A figure of speech is a device of comparison
- Every figure of speech consists of the tenor and the vehicle
- Example: “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1)
  \[ \text{Tenor} \rightarrow \text{Vehicle} \]
- Interpreting figures of speech involves understanding the message or image the vehicle conveys regarding the tenor

What is the difference between a word’s denotation and its connotation?
- Denotation refers to the simple dictionary definition of the word
- Connotation: the entire meaning of the word, including its denotation and any added nuances contributed by the context

What are the most important types of biblical figures of speech?
- Anthropomorphism: ascription of human characteristics to God
- Euphemism: substitution of less offensive for an offensive term
- Hypocatastasis: device implying comparison by direct naming
- Image: a word picture that renders an abstract idea concrete
- Metaphor: imaginative identification of two objects or ideas
- Metonymy: the substitution of one word for another

PART III: THE GOAL: THEOLOGY

CHAPTER 15: MAKING THE CONNECTION: GETTING OUR THEOLOGY FROM THE BIBLE

What is Biblical Theology?
- Biblical theology is the theology of the Bible (OT & NT)
- It is the theology of the biblical writers themselves rather than that of the contemporary interpreter

What are the guidelines for the study of Biblical Theology?
- Determine the focus of your study (e.g., study of theme)
- Determine the relevant biblical passages
- Engage in contextual study of each relevant passage in light of historical context and stage of salvation history
- Determine the original message to the intended recipients
- Trace the Bible’s teaching on your chosen theme
- Systematize the biblical teaching on your topic
- Make proper contemporary application

APPLICATION & PROCLAMATION: GOD’S WORD COMING TO LIFE

CHAPTER 16: GETTING DOWN TO EARTH: USING THE TOOLS, PREACHING AND APPLYING THE WORD

What are the steps for preaching or teaching from narratives?
1. Identify and interpret the scenes of the narrative cycle
2. Analyze scenes to determine the unit of text for lesson/sermon
3. Determine the structure of the textual unit
4. Design the lesson/sermon around the structure of the textual unit

What are the steps for preaching or teaching from the Psalms?
1. Identify the classification of the Psalm
2. Identify the structure of the Psalm
3. Design the lesson or sermon around the structure of the Psalm

What are the steps for preaching or teaching from Proverbs?
1. Determine passage’s place in the overall structure of the book
2. Identify the type of collection
3. Design the lesson or sermon around the structure of the text

What are the steps for preaching from prophetic literature?
1. Determine limits of individual oracle and place in structure
2. Determine genre and/or subgenre of the oracle and its structure
3. Design the lesson/sermon around the structure of the textual unit

What are the steps for preaching from apocalyptic literature?
1. Carefully identify the boundaries of your passage
2. Carefully identify and interpret the OT allusions in your passage
3. Cautiously identify and interpret the symbols in your passage
4. Fit passage into overall structure of book, identify its structure
5. Design your message around the structure of your passage

What are the steps for preaching from epistles or speeches?
1. Identify the structure of the whole letter
2. Analyze the structure to determine textual unit for lesson/sermon
3. Examine the text clause by clause
4. Design a lesson or sermon outline from the structure of the text

What are the steps for applying the biblical text to life?
1. Determine the intended purpose of the author
2. Evaluate the level of specificity of the original application(s)
3. Identify cross-cultural principles
4. Find appropriate applications that embody broader principles