

MODULE 7: SESSION 6

APPLIED THEOLOGY

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Interpretation Part 2

Identifying the Figures of Speech in Your Chosen Passage

Special Issues Part 2: Symbolism, Prophecy, Parable, Allegory

Study Synthesis Part 1: Evaluating and Categorizing Your Observations

NOTE: Assignment change: The Bible Study Assignment #4 will be due with your final project, not at the next BTI – you will need next time’s lecture to help you with it –

ALSO: Summer 2 BTI syllabus will be coming out soon, hopefully in the next couple weeks

1. Identifying Figures of Speech Review:
 - a. Always take a passages literally unless there is a good reason for not doing so.
 - b. Take the passage figuratively when it tells you to do so
 - c. Take the passage figuratively if it is a simile (“like” or “as”)
 - d. Take the passage figuratively if a literal interpretation is contrary to the context or the purpose of the passage.
 - e. Be aware that figurative language is a major technique in prophecy and poetry. Don’t be surprised to find it there.
 - f. Take a passage figuratively if the literal sense would involve an impossibility or absurdity.
 - g. Take a passage figuratively if the literal would involve immorality.
 - h. If a figurative statement is followed by a literal explanation, the figurative sense is confirmed.

2. Passages:
 - a. John 11:1-4 (ESV) – 1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4 But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”
 - i. Yes, Lazarus actually would die. But Jesus’ actions later explained his statement. The illness would not lead to his permanent death.

- b. Acts 19:17-20 (ESV) – 17 And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.
 - i. Metaphor for people getting saved. Not that the message itself was getting bigger.
 - c. Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV) – 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.
 - i. Involves an absurdity – an angel from heaven or the apostles would not preach a contrary gospel.
 - d. 2 Corinthians 4:1-4 (ESV) – 1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
 - i. Metaphors for something covered and something unable to comprehend.
 - e. 1 Peter 4:8-11 (ESV) – 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
 - i. Love like a blanket that covers
 - ii. Speaking as if (simile) speaking the very words of God
3. Special Issues (continued)
- a. Symbolism

- i. Definition: An object (real or imaginary) or action which is given a meaning in order to portray rather than describe the qualities of something else.
- ii. EXAMPLE symbols:
 1. Jesus as the Lamb of God
 2. Believers as Sheep
 3. Shaking the dust off your feet
- iii. Principles for Interpreting Symbols
 1. Note the three elements of symbolism:
 - a. The object (e.g. "Lamb")
 - b. The referent (e.g., Jesus)
 - c. The meaning (e.g. Jesus as a sacrifice)
 2. Remember that symbols have their base in reality
 - a. The symbol (object) has meaning that matters.
 - b. Lambs and lions really exist so a meaningful resemblance can be inferred
 - c. Rev 17:3 – Beast with seven heads and 10 horns – doesn't exist in reality BUT the elements have a basis in reality: heads and horns
 3. Determine what meaning, if any, is openly assigned by the text itself
 - a. Revelation 11:8 (ESV) – 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. (Jerusalem)
 4. If the verse doesn't give the meaning, check other passages, the nature of the symbol, and the major characteristic the object and the referent have in common
 - a. "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)
 - b. Check other passages that refer to "Lamb of God"
 - c. Analyze nature of the symbol: meek, for the purpose of slaughter
 - d. Major characteristic they have in common: sacrifice
 5. Be careful not to assign the wrong characteristic of the symbol to the referent
 - a. IE: A lion is savage and strong
 - b. Satan is said to be a lion (1 Peter 5:8) because he is savage
 - c. Jesus is said to be a lion (Rev 5:5) because he is strong
 6. Resist the temptation to draw too many parallels
 - a. There is generally ONE major resemblance

7. Remember that one referent can be depicted by many symbols:
 - a. Holy Spirit = water, oil, wind, and a dove
8. In prophecy, don't assume that because it contains symbols then everything is symbolic (major fault in interpreting Revelation)
 - a. Rev 19:19 – the “beast” is a symbol but the “kings of the earth and their armies” in the same verse is not symbolic.
9. In prophecy, don't symbolize descriptions of the future that are plausible.
 - a. Rev 8:12 – 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars will be struck and not give light. This is plausible.

b. Prophecy

i. Why is Prophecy important?

1. It gives comfort (Thessalonian believers were comforted by knowledge of the Rapture in 1 Thess 4)
2. It gives hope – in the midst of a violent and God-hating age, we look to the future for relief
3. It converts the lost – Acts has several examples of men preaching from OT prophecy and people coming to faith
4. It purifies and sanctifies – knowing that Christ could return at any moment influences us to live more holy lives now.
5. It motivates evangelism -- 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 (ESV) – 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.
6. It clarifies God's plans for the future

ii. Guidelines for Interpreting Prophecy

1. Normal principles of historical, grammatical, literary interpretation. You don't change methods for prophecy.
2. Take words in normal grammatical sense.
3. Recognize that figurative and symbolic language will be heavy, but still always represents real events.
4. Remember that prophecy focuses primarily on the Messiah and establishing of His reign
5. Recognized the principle of “foreshortening” or the mountain peak principle or the near and far fulfillment principle
 - a. From the perspective of the prophets, the coming of Christ as two mountain peaks with a valley in

between. They could see the mountain peaks but not the valley – the church age.

- b. IE: When Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue of Nazareth as recorded in Luke 4 he STOPPED at the words “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” – literally stopping mid-verse because the next phrase was “and the day of the vengeance of our God.”
- c. The FIRST part refers to Christ’s FIRST coming but the part he DID not read when he said that TODAY, the Scripture is fulfilled, was the part about his SECOND coming – because it hadn’t happened yet.
- d. Example: The prophecies of the Day of the Lord in Joel 2 were foreshadowed and demonstrated in Acts 2 as Peter preached about, but the final fulfillment of Joel 2 awaits the kingdom reign of Christ.

6. Look for built-in interpretations (Daniel does this for example)

iii. NOTE: Going to come back to important issues in prophecy

c. Parable

- i. Most famous parables are those of Jesus (but there are some in the OT as well)
- ii. Purpose of parables of Jesus – to reveal truth to his followers and conceal truth from his enemies.
- iii. Parables are an extremely interesting study – we will restrict ourselves to properly interpreting them
- iv. Proper Interpretation of Parables:
 - 1. Determine the ordinary meaning of the story
 - 2. Determine the situation that prompted the parable
 - a. In the gospels, what was happening or a question that was asked right before often clues you into the purpose of the particular parable.
 - b. This is a MAJOR interpretive principle for parables
 - c. EXAMPLE: Following an exhortation –
 - i. Mark 13:33 (ESV) – 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.
 - ii. Followed by: Parable of the Doorkeeper: Mark 13:34-37 (ESV) – 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 Therefore stay awake – for you do not know

when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

3. Determine the main truth being illustrated by the parable
 - a. Generally, a parable is teaching is single main truth
 - b. IE: Parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:
 - c. Luke 15:4-6 (ESV) – 4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’
 - d. Jesus explained, Luke 15:7 (ESV) – 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
 - e. BUT: in support of the main point, details of the story help support spiritual truths
 - i. 99 sheep are those who have already repented
 - ii. Sheep represents the lost sinner
 - iii. Shepherd represents Jesus
 - iv. BUT: Don’t carry it beyond what is reasonable – the open country and other details simply add color to the story. Don’t allegorize every detail. Remember the main point.
4. Validate the main truth with supporting cross references from more direct teaching such as the epistles.
5. Note the actual or intended response of the hearers
 - a. Matt 7:24-27 – Jesus told the parable of the two houses, one built on the rock and other on the sand, representing the choice to build your eternity on the rock of the gospel or the sand of your own righteousness
 - b. RESPONSE: VV28 – The crowds were astonished
 - c. BY THE WAY: That was Jesus’ closing illustration for the sermon on the mount.
- d. Allegory
 - i. Narrative or word picture which may or may not be based in real life with many parts pointing to spiritual realities.

- ii. PARABLE = one main point based in real life
- iii. ALLEGORY = many points of comparison based in real life or fiction
- iv. NOTE: A passage is not allegorical just because you decide it is – an allegory is obviously such

Sample allegories in Scripture

Psalm 23:1-4	The Lord as the believer's Shepherd
Psalm 80:8-16	Israel as a destroyed vine
Proverbs 5:15-20	Marital fidelity as a cistern
Prov 9:1-6	Wisdom as a homemaker
Isaiah 5:1-7	Israel as an unproductive vine
Ezekiel 13:8-16	Israel's prophets as a collapsed wall
Ezekiel 17	Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt as two eagles and Judah as a vine
John 10:1-6	Jesus as a Shepherd
John 15:1-6	Jesus as a Vine
1 Cor 3:10-15	Christian workers as builders
Galatians 4:21-31*	Hagar and Sarah as two covenants*
Ephesians 6:11-17	The Christian's spiritual defense as armor

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- v. NOTE: on Gal 4:21-31 – Paul's use of Hagar and Sarah as two covenants
 1. This gets into the EXTREMELY important question of the NT's use of the OT –
 2. Paul's use of Hagar and Sarah as an allegory (he even says what he is saying is an allegory) is often used to supposedly prove that you can allegorize much of the OT.
 3. Let's be more precise:
 - a. In using Hagar and Sarah as an allegory, Paul did NOT erase the original intended meaning of the text, as do proponents of NT priority.
 - b. In today's language, Paul's allegory would be called a sermon illustration.
 - c. AND: He is an apostle writing Holy Spirit superintended work – this is the HS using the OT properly – doesn't give us the right to turn the OT into one giant resource of allegories.

¹ From Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 222.

- vi. NOTE: on Song of Solomon – long held by many to be an allegory – BUT: The book itself gives no indication that it is allegorical. It contains many figures of speech but is not an allegory. It is a poem extolling human love and marriage.
 - vii. Two big rules for allegory:
 1. Don't interpret details that are not explained without good cross-reference reason to do so.
 2. Determine the main point and interpret all parts of the allegory in relation to that main point.
4. Important Issues in Prophecy² (we will look at this again when we do a survey of Eschatology, but this is an important issue worth doing twice)
- a. Differences Between Millennial Views –
 - i. Premillennialism--
 1. Christ will return in the Rapture at the end of this age and will reign with His saints on the earth for 1,000 years as King.
 - a. Premillennialists differ on their views of the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation.
 - b. At GBC, we hold to a pre-tribulation rapture.
 2. In the Millennium, the nation Israel will experience the blessings of God promised in the OT of land, nationality, and King.
 3. Therefore, the church today is not fulfilling these promises to Israel as a nation.
 - ii. Amillennialism (“no millennium”)
 1. Kingdom is now in existence between Christ's two advents. Christ is ruling from heaven and will not reign on the earth for 1,000 years. (Even though Revelation 20 have SIX explicit references to a 1,000-year reign of Christ)
 2. The kingdom is either the church on earth (Augustine's view which is now perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church) OR the saints in heaven (B.B. Warfield's view). There is not future reign of Christ on earth and the 1,000 years is a symbolic number meaning a really long time.
 3. The promises to Israel about land, nationality, and king are now being fulfilled spiritually among believers in the church.
 4. God's promises to Israel were conditional and have been transferred to the church because Israel failed to meet the condition of obedience to God.

² Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pp230ff.

5. Christ is ruling in heaven now where he is seated in the throne of David and Satan is currently bound between Christ's two comings. (BTW – why do we need Spiritual armor of Eph 6 if that's the case? Why the warnings that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion of 1 Peter 5?)
- iii. Postmillennialism –
1. Christ will come after the millennium
 2. The church is not the kingdom but it will bring the kingdom in before Christ returns – a utopic earth by means of the preaching of the gospel.
 3. Christ will not be on earth during the kingdom time. He will return after the kingdom time.
 4. The millennium is not a literal 1,000 years.
 5. The church, not Israel, will receive the promises to Abraham and David in a spiritual sense.
- iv. NOTE: We don't settle the question by referring to historical figures and whoever is the oldest must hold the right view. Just a couple notes, though:
1. Clement of Alexandria (AD 155-216) is likely the father of amillennialism and Origen (185-254) along with him
 2. Origen is also much the father of allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
 3. Numbers of reformers were amillennial – John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, *John Calvin*, Ulrich Zwingli
 4. But William Tyndale and most Anabaptists were premillennial.
 5. Postmillennialism first taught by Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) – held by Jonathan Edwards, Charles Wesley. Charles, Hodge.
 6. In the Early Church, those who held to premillennialism – Clement of Rome, The Didache (basically first ever systematic theology (ca 105), *The Shepherd of Hermes* (important Christian writing ca 140 AD), Barnabas, Polycarp, Ignatius, Papias, Justin Martyr, Ireneaus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and many others.
 - a. IF we are using the era and preponderous of believers in any of the three systems, then premillennialism wins both on being the oldest and the most supported view.
- b. Hermeneutics of Two Views:
- i. Amillennialism
 1. The kingdom is in the church.

2. The unity of the people of God.
3. Israel and the church are interchangeable – the promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church.
4. The “Spiritualizing” of Prophecy – seeing a so-called spiritual sense to literal prophecies.
 - a. IE: The promise in Isaiah 11:6-9 that ferocious animals will be tame *actually* refers to Saul of Tarsus who was changed from a vicious hater of the church to a gentle follower of Christ.
5. POINT: The hermeneutic system is bringing a set of beliefs to the Scripture before it is ever opened

ii. Premillennial

1. Normal, grammatical interpretation
2. Israel will be in the land with a King.
3. Israel and the Church are two distinct but highly related programs of God.
4. Consistency in interpretation across all Scripture.
 - a. Millard Erickson, in his systematic theology, writes, “There are no biblical passages with which premillennialism cannot cope, or which it cannot adequately explain...on the other hand, the references to two resurrections (Rev 20) give amillennialists difficulty. Their explanation that we have here two different types of resurrection or two spiritual resurrections strain the usual principles of hermeneutics...nor is the premillennialist interpretation based on only one passage in the Bible” (p. 1116).

5. Study Synthesis Part 1

- a. Evaluating and Categorizing your observations
- b. Our passage: Ephesians 4:31–32 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
- c. We’ve gone through all the other processes together – now, I’ve taken all my best observation and formed THREE MAJOR categories or statements from the 70+ that we started with:
- d. Three Major Observations:
 - i. God requires that we rid ourselves of internal sinful attitudes and external sinful actions toward other believers.
 - ii. God requires that we put on Godly internal attitudes and external actions toward other believers.

- iii. We are to forgive others with the standard being how God has forgiven us.
 - e. NOW: I've synthesized that to ONE SUMMARY STATEMENT – exegetical proposition
 - i. *What is inside matters to God and determines our actions.*
6. Assignment – DUE with Final Project – [This is more detailed than what is in the syllabus]
- a. Evaluate and categorize your best observations
 - b. Form an interpretive summary statement (exegetical proposition)
 - c. Use resources such as commentaries to answer as many of your questions as you can.
 - d. Use resources to add any insights to your conclusions and to correct any faulty interpretation you may have made. Make a bullet point list of any additional info you get from commentaries or other resources.

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