

Biblical Interpretation: Part 2

Finding the original meaning

Interpreting Bible Narratives

Biblical narratives describe historical events that actually took place in time and space. Interpret narratives as part of the theme of the book; by treating smaller narrative as part of a bigger narrative.

- Focus on the main message of the narrative
- Consider the narrative in its larger context
- Don't be distracted by everything mentioned in the narrative
- Not all narratives have a message
- Because it happened then doesn't mean it should happen now

Read Acts 2:1-4

What is the main message of the passage?

What is the larger context?

Interpreting Letters or Epistles

- Consists normally of a salutation, body, and closing comments
- Examine the author's use of language (words) compared with his other letters

Read Philemon

Why was the letter written?

What is the tone of the letter?

What is the relationship between the author and recipients?

Interpreting Parables

Parables are a story based on real life situations

- Seek only one main point of the parable
- Not all the details are relevant, only those that support the main point
- Do not treat parables allegorically

Read Matt 13:24-30

Who was the original audience?

Why was the parable spoken (context)?

The same parable by multiple authors may focus on differing main points (see Mark 4:26-29)

Interpreting Books of Wisdom (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon)

- Context is very important
- Guidelines for everyday living, **not laws**
- Often told in a 'figure of speech' such as hyperbole

Interpreting Poetry

Poetry makes use of figurative language. Hebrew poetry also takes advantage of parallelism.

- Synonymous Parallelism: The two lines express the same or similar thought in different words (*Isa 1:3; Ps 33:2*)
- Antithetical Parallelism: A line contrasts the message or point of the line before it (*Ps 37:21; Pr 15:1*)
- Synthetic Parallelism: A line provides more information than the line before it (*Ps 9:10; 34:4; 58:3*)

What type of figurative language is used in the following verses? **Isa 19:2; Ps 92:12; Pr 11:5**

Interpreting Prophecy

1. Follow the normal principles of historical, grammatical, literary interpretation
2. Recognize the place of figurative and symbolic language
 - Figurative: (*Isa 22:22/Rev 3:7 Zech 13:7/Matt 26:31*)
 - Symbolic: (*Dan 8:1-8; Isa 9:2; 11:1; Jer 18:1-6*)
3. Determine if predictions are conditional or unconditional
 - Conditional: (*Jonah 3:4, 10; Jer 18:7-10; Deut 28*)
 - Unconditional: (*Gen 12:1-3; Jer 31:31-34*)

Do the following verses represent conditional or unconditional predictions? **Jer 26:12-13; Gen 3:15; Mal 3:1**

4. Determine if the prophecy has already been fulfilled
 - Immediate predictions: (*Jer 38:17-18*)
 - Old Testament predictions fulfilled later in Old Testament times (*Deut 28:53 and Lam 4:10*)
 - Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in New Testament times (*Isa 53:4-6; Dan 9:24-26*)
 - New Testament prophecies fulfilled in New Testament times (*Matt 20:18-19*)
 - Unfulfilled Old Testament and New Testament prophecies (*Mic 4:1-3; Matt 24:29-31*)

Which prophecies are already fulfilled and which haven't been yet?

Ex 14:4; Josh 6:26; Mic 5:2; Matt 26:31-34; Dan 12:1-2; Matt 25:31-33

5. Prophecy is associated with the Messiah and the establishing of His reign (*Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6*)
6. Anticipate near and far term fulfillment (*2Sam 7:12-16/Heb 1:5; Hab 1:5-6/Acts 13:41; Isa 61:1-3/Lk 4:16-21; Joel 2:28-32/Acts 2:17-21*)
7. Look for God's built-in interpretations (*Dan 7; Eze 17; Eze 37*)
8. Compare parallel passages (*Matt 24-25; Mk 13; Lk 17:22-37; 21:10-36*)

APPENDIX

Interpreting Bible Narratives

Read Acts 2:1-4 *What is the main message of the passage? What is the larger context?*

While waiting together the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit as evidenced by tongues as of fire resting on each one of them. In context, they were instructed by Jesus to remain in Jerusalem and wait until they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (*Acts 1:4-5*). They were then to be witnesses of Jesus and His resurrection in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (*Acts 1:8*).

Interpreting Letters or Epistles

Read Philemon *Why was the letter written? What is the tone of the letter?
What is the relationship between the author and recipients?*

The letter was written to convince Philemon to accept the returning slave, Onesimus, as a brother in the Lord and no longer as a slave. Paul bases his request on the strength of their relationship and his understanding of Philemon's character as demonstrated over time. It is a strong appeal leaving Philemon little choice. Paul reminds him that his request as an apostle could be an order and states that fulfilling his request is proper. To sweeten the request Paul offers to cover any financial loss he may have incurred reminding Philemon that he is in debt to Paul.

Interpreting Parables

Read Matt 13:24-30 *Who was the original audience? Why was the parable spoken (context)?*

This and other parables were spoken while Jesus was sitting in a boat and the crowds were standing on the beach. These were a series of parables on the nature of the kingdom.

Interpreting Poetry

What type of figurative language is used in the following verses?

Isaiah 19:2	Synthetic Parallelism
Psalms 92:12	Synonymous Parallelism
Proverbs 11:5	Antithetical Parallelism

Interpreting Prophecy

Do the following verses represent conditional or unconditional predictions?

Jer 26:12-13	Conditional
Gen 3:15	Unconditional
Mal 3:1	Unconditional

Determine if the prophecy has already been fulfilled

Which prophecies are already fulfilled and which haven't been yet?

Ex 14:4	fulfilled (<i>Ex 14:8-9; 23-30</i>)
Josh 6:26	fulfilled (<i>1Ki 16:34</i>)
Mic 5:2	unfulfilled
Matt 26:31-34	fulfilled (<i>Matt 26:56; John 21:1; Matt 26:69-75</i>)
Dan 12:1-2	unfulfilled
Matt 25:31-33	unfulfilled