

Reviews of the Unabridged Version

“The great merit of Köstenberger’s and Patterson’s volume is its three-dimension account of biblical interpretation. The authors rightly focus on the history, literature, and theology of the Bible—what they call the hermeneutical triad. Call it hermeneutics in real 3-D. A three-stranded hermeneutical cord may not be easily broken, but it’s easy to grasp by following this introductory textbook. Another merit is the authors’ reminder that biblical interpretation is not only about method but about virtue: a heart-felt humility before the divine text is as important as any heady procedure.”

—Kevin J. Vanhoozer,

Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“This book on biblical interpretation combines training in exegesis with a basic knowledge of hermeneutics. It urges careful consideration of historical, literary, and theological issues. Thus, historically, it includes helpful chronological charts, and much on cultural history. Its literary focus includes canon, genre, and language. Its theological dimension includes application. Genre is crucial: thus narrative, poetry, and wisdom are distinguished in the Old Testament; and parable, epistles, and apocalyptic, in the New. Why responsible interpretation requires toil and labor receives careful explanation. This book contains plenty of common sense, sanity, and love of Scripture. I commend it especially to students, teachers, and even pastors, as helping all of us to use the Bible responsibly and fruitfully.”

—Anthony C. Thiselton,

Professor Emeritus of Christian Theology, University of Nottingham

“There are certain topics of must-reading for serious Bible students—hermeneutics is at the top. There are certain books of must-reading for a topic—Andreas Köstenberger’s work on hermeneutics is one of them. It is clear, concise, and yet deep, and manages to cover most of the needed areas. Thus it becomes an invaluable guide for the student working through the labyrinth of issues that make up the task of biblical interpretation. It will enable the reader to bridge the gap from understanding biblical portions

in their original cultural context and from showing their relevance to a modern audience. I recommend it very highly.”

—Grant Osborne,
Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“In this triad dance of history, literature, and theology, as they move across the floor of biblical interpretation, Köstenberger and Patterson excel at sorting through and clearly presenting massive amounts of material across a wide spectrum of cognate disciplines. Written in a down-to-earth style, the book is as accessible as it is broad, as practical as it is informed on contemporary discussions of these difficult matters. From the particulars of Greek grammar and discourse analysis to helpful introductions on canon, biblical theology, and appropriate application, here one again and again finds a welcome orientation to the bread-and-butter concepts, sound practices, and tools needed for handling the biblical text responsibly and the spiritual posture for approaching it reverently. I am impressed and looking forward to putting this book in the hands of my students, who will find here a rich, expansive resource from which to draw guidance for years to come.”

—George H. Guthrie,
Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible, Union University

“This book distills a wealth of wisdom from two seasoned scholars whose expertise spans both Testaments. Chapters are up to date without succumbing to the trendy. There is attention to both the theory and practice of interpreting Scripture, obligatory given the title. But the novel element of this volume is at least twofold. (1) It unabashedly privileges Scripture as recording a *history* that produced *literature* which conveys *theology* of eternal redemptive importance. (2) It strikes a balance between these three elements in a readable and engrossing style. No book on this subject can do everything. But this one is without peer as a classroom resource supporting the triadic reading it calls for at a level that is neither brutally rudimentary nor unrealistically advanced. It will enhance the teaching of this subject and draw students into the excitement of navigating hermeneutical frontiers.”

— Robert W. Yarbrough,
Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD'S WORD

*An
Introduction to
Biblical
Interpretation*

Andreas J. Köstenberger
and Richard D. Patterson

 Kregel
Academic

For the Love of God's Word: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

© 2015 by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson

This is an abridgment and revision of *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, © 2011 by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson.

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4336-7

Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 / 5 4 3 2 1

To all who love God's Word:

*“Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.”
—Psalm 119:97*

CONTENTS

Preface / 9

A Personal Note to Teachers, Students, and Readers / 13

Chapter 1: Introducing the Hermeneutical Triad: History, Literature,
and Theology / 17

PART 1—History

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage: Historical-Cultural
Background / 33

PART 2—Literature

UNIT 1: CANON

Chapter 3: The Old Testament Canon: Law, Prophets, and
Writings / 61

Chapter 4: The New Testament Canon: Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and
Apocalypse / 85

UNIT 2: GENRE

Chapter 5: Enjoying a Good Story: Old Testament Historical
Narrative / 103

Chapter 6: A Word from the Wise: Poetry and Wisdom / 123

Chapter 7: Back to the Future: Prophecy / 163

Chapter 8: Hearing the Good News: New Testament Historical
Narrative (Gospels and Acts) / 191

Chapter 9: Calling for Discernment: Parables / 215

Chapter 10: Going by the Letter: Epistles / 239

Chapter 11: Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Literature
(Revelation) / 271

UNIT 3: LANGUAGE

Chapter 12: Context is King: Discerning Discourse
Structure / 305

Chapter 13: A Matter of Semantics: Discerning Word
Meanings / 329

PART 3—Theology

Chapter 14: Making the Connection: Getting Our Theology from
the Bible / 359

Chapter 15: Getting Down to Earth: Using the Tools, Applying the
Word / 375

Reference List / 393

Glossary / 395

Scripture Index / 411

Subject Index / 441

PREFACE

WRITING A HERMENEUTICS TEXT is not an easy task. Having taught courses on biblical interpretation on the college, graduate, and doctoral levels for many years, we can attest to the fact that hermeneutics is one of the hardest subjects to teach—but also one of the most important. The present volume is dedicated to all serious students of Scripture who love God’s Word and want to mine it for its precious spiritual truths and life-changing practical insights.

The book you’re holding in your hands (or reading on your screen) is an abridgment of *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*. We’re grateful to those who suggested preparing this essential digest of the larger book for high school, home school, and college students and anyone who is interested in a solid course of instruction on studying and applying God’s Word. Special thanks are due Nathan Ridlehoover, who used a draft of this book in class and made numerous helpful suggestions for connecting with readers and keeping jargon at bay.

In *For the Love of God’s Word*, we have retained all the essential core knowledge from *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*. We cut or thinned out advanced material (e.g., history of interpretation, original languages, and discourse analysis). Also cut were sample exegesis sections and material on preaching from the different genres of Scripture. The material at the end of chapters was trimmed (especially bibliographies). The chapter on figurative language was cut, but some core information moved to the chapter on poetry and wisdom literature.

We gratefully acknowledge the loving support of our wives, Margaret and Ann, during the process of writing the original volume and preparing this abridgment. They have faithfully stood by our side for many years. Thank you so much!

I (Andreas) would also like to express my gratitude to my esteemed colleague and friend, Dick Patterson, for embarking with me on the adventure of writing this text. I could not have asked for a better collaborator, equally conversant with and committed to exploring the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of Scripture. It has been a great privilege to work with you, Dick, and your seasoned scholarship sets a wonderful example for others to emulate.

I would also like to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to those who, by instruction and example, taught me how to interpret the Bible: my first hermeneutics teacher, Robertson McQuilkin; my Greek exegesis instructor, William Larkin; my advanced hermeneutics teacher, Grant Osborne; and my doctoral mentor, D. A. Carson. While I have charted my own course, standing on the shoulders of these spiritual giants has enabled me to see farther than I would otherwise have been able to see. Especially Grant Osborne's *Hermeneutical Spiral* and D. A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* have made a lasting impact on me, and in many ways this volume represents a tribute to the formative influence of these men.

I (Dick) would like to express my gratitude to my distinguished and well-respected colleague and friend, Andreas Köstenberger, for his vision, direction, and dedication to the completion of this text. I have profited from my interaction with the fruits of his dedicated scholarship and have enjoyed collaborating with him in our mutual concern for the "hermeneutical triad." It has been my privilege to be asked to serve with you, Andreas. Your wide-ranging expertise and commitment to Christ have set a high standard for all of us to follow.

I would also acknowledge the contributions to my training by the excellent graduate faculty at UCLA in my early days, such as Giorgio Buccellati, and my dear mentor and professor of Greek and theology, Marchant King, all of whom not only provided vital information, but also shared both their love of the subject matter and their lives with me. I also acknowledge the contributions of so many colleagues in the Evangelical Theological Society, whose commitment to Christ and his Word have served as motivating examples to me to make God's Word my guidebook for life (Ps. 119:111).

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Liz Mburu, Corin Mihaila, Alan Bandy, and Scott Kellum for writing serious first drafts of

the original chapters on the Gospels and parables, the Epistles, apocalyptic, and application, and to Michael Travers for providing some material on figures of speech.

To God alone be the glory!

A PERSONAL NOTE TO TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND READERS

THIS BOOK IS TEACHING a simple method for interpreting the Bible, the *hermeneutical triad* of history, literature, and theology. In essence, we propose that for any passage of Scripture, you'll want to study the *historical setting*, *literary context*, and *theological message*. The first element of the hermeneutical triad is *history*. Studying the historical setting provides a proper grounding, since all Scripture is rooted in real-life history. God revealed himself in history, and the genres and language in which God chose to reveal himself reflect the historical context.

Second comes *literature*. Studying the literary context is the focus of Bible study, since Scripture is a piece of writing, a text that has three major components: (1) canon; (2) genre; and (3) language. In studying the literary dimension of Scripture, we locate a passage's place in the canon, determine its genre, and interpret it in keeping with its genre characteristics, doing justice to the language used (which normally will involve outlining the passage to determine its flow of thought and performing relevant word studies).

Third is the climax of biblical interpretation: *theology*. While the biblical message is grounded in history and conveyed through literature, exploring the theology of a given passage of Scripture is the ultimate goal in interpretation, since, as mentioned, Scripture is first and foremost God's revelation or self-disclosure to us.

Throughout the book, we use the hermeneutical triad as a compass on our interpretive journey through the canonical landscape. Thanks for joining us on this exciting journey of life-giving discovery and adventure. May God richly bless you as you serve him and study his Word.

Your fellow servants,
Andreas Köstenberger and Dick Patterson

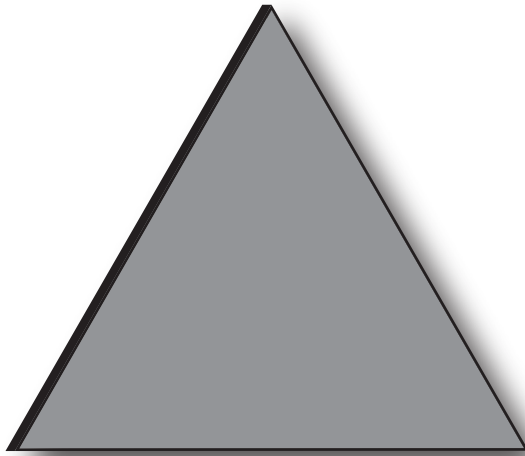
CHAPTER 1 OBJECTIVES

1. To convince the reader of the need for, and the rewards of, skilled interpretation.
2. To persuade the reader of the cost of failed biblical interpretation.
3. To set forth the essential characteristics of the biblical interpreter.
4. To preview the purpose and plan of this book.
5. To introduce the student to the hermeneutical triad of interpreting Scripture.

CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE

- A. Introduction
- B. Need for Skilled Biblical Interpretation
- C. Cost of Failed Biblical Interpretation
- D. Characteristics Required of the Biblical Interpreter
- E. Purpose and Plan of This Book
- F. Developing Interpretive Virtues
- G. Guidelines for Biblical Interpretation: Overall Method
- H. Key Words
- I. Assignments
- J. Key Resources

THEOLOGY



HISTORY

LITERATURE

Chapter 1

INTRODUCING THE HERMENEUTICAL TRIAD: HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

COME ON IN, AND STAY for a while! Make yourself at home, and acquire vital skills in understanding the most important book ever written—the Holy Scriptures. The volume you are holding in your hands invites you to embark on the quest of sound biblical interpretation or as it is also called, “hermeneutics.” As in Jesus’s parable of the wedding feast, the invitation goes out to all who care to listen. And as in Jesus’s parable, the terms are not set by those invited but by the one who issues the invitation and by the book to be interpreted.

In our quest to understand the Bible, *author*, *text*, and *reader* each have an important part to play. Every document has an author, and the resulting text is shaped by his or her intention. It is this authorial intention the interpreter must aim to recover. The text is not “just there,” left to be interpreted any way a given reader chooses. When my friend talks to me, I dare not give her words my own preferred meaning. The rules of proper communication demand that I seek to understand the meaning *she* intended to convey.

It follows that the text of Scripture, likewise, is not neutral, that is, malleable to a great variety of interpretations that lay equal claim to represent

valid readings of a given passage. Nor is the text autonomous, that is, a law unto itself, as if it existed apart from the author who willed and wrote it into being. It is an authorially shaped and designed product that requires careful and respectful interpretation.

There is therefore an important *ethical* dimension in interpretation. We should engage in interpretation responsibly, displaying respect for the text and its author. There is no excuse for interpretive arrogance that elevates the reader above text and author. The “golden rule” of interpretation requires that we extend the same courtesy to any text or author that we would want others to extend to our statements and writings (Matt. 7:12). This calls for respect not only for the intentions of the human authors of Scripture but ultimately for God who chose to reveal himself through the Bible by his Holy Spirit.

This volume is based on such respect both for the ultimate author of Scripture and for its human authors. We are committed to taking the text of Scripture seriously and to practicing discerning listening and perception. We aim to take into account the relevant historical setting of a given passage and to pay close attention to the words, sentences, and discourses of a particular book. We purpose to give careful consideration to the theology of the Bible itself and to interpret the parts in light of the canonical whole. Last but not least, we seek to operate within the proper framework of the respective genres of Scripture.

Why would we want to take the time and exert the effort to learn to interpret Scripture correctly? First of all, we will want to do so because we are seekers of *truth* and because we realize that truth sets free while error enslaves. Many cults have arisen because of their flawed interpretation of Scripture. There is an even more powerful motivation, however: embarking on the quest for accurate biblical interpretation out of our *love* for God, his Word, and his people. If you and I truly love God, we will want to get to know him better, and this involves serious study of his Word.

As seekers of truth and as lovers of God and others, then, we set out to discover revealed truth and to acquire biblical wisdom as one sets out to mine gold and precious stones. Our conviction that God’s Word is the most precious commodity there is fuels a desire to extract even the last ounce of meaning from the biblical text no matter how much effort or learning it takes to recover it. In our quest for revealed divine truth, we will be prepared to pay whatever price it takes to hear God speak to us in

and through his Word and to proclaim his life-giving message authentically and accurately to others.

NEED FOR SKILLED BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

“Do your best,” Paul wrote in his final missive to his foremost disciple, “to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In a day when people are confronted with a flood of information and are struggling to keep up and set priorities, Paul’s words bring into sharp focus what ought to be our primary object of study: Scripture, “the word of truth.” Like Peter, we ought to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). We ought to be driven by a hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:6); we ought to be longing for the life-transforming, “living and active” word of God (Heb. 4:12).

In keeping with Paul’s exhortation, we need to work hard at interpreting Scripture. We must “do our best” as “a worker.” Biblical interpretation is hard work. The one who wants to master the handling of God’s Word must be like the apprentice of a master craftsperson. Over time, and through practice, that apprentice will learn to skillfully use many tools. Likewise, the biblical interpreter must know what interpretive tools to use and how to use them. This is what it means to “correctly handle” the word of truth.

While the analogy holds well between the realm of craftsmanship and biblical interpretation, the argument is clearly from the lesser to the greater. If it is important for craftspeople to wield their tools skillfully, how much more important must it be for those who are called to handle God’s “word of truth” with utmost care and expertise? No sloppy or shoddy work will do. Everything must be done in proper sequence, appropriate proportion, and with the purpose of producing an end product that pleases the one who commissioned the work. Background information, word meanings, the context of a given passage, and many other factors must be judiciously assessed if a valid interpretation is to be attained.

Also, no worker labors without regard for the approval of the one who assigned a particular task. Once again, the argument is from the lesser to the greater: for in the case of biblical interpretation, the one to whom we have to give an account is none other than God himself. It is *his* approval we are seeking, for if God approves, no one else’s approval, or disapproval, ultimately matters. Our love for God and our conviction that God’s Word

is so precious that we ought to spare no effort to comprehend it as precisely as possible will be powerful motivators as we embark on our interpretive journey. In so doing, we will long to hear God's words of approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter the joy of your master."

COST OF FAILED BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Not only are there great rewards for faithful biblical interpretation, there is also a considerable cost if we fail in this effort. This cost, too, is mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:15. It is shrinking back in shame at God's judgment by the one who is unwilling to acquire the skills needed to interpret Scripture accurately. The equivalent of improper biblical interpretation is shoddy workmanship, due either to a lack of skill or carelessness. In the area of hermeneutics, this translates into fallacies arising from neglect of the context, proof texting (reading one's preferred meaning *into* the text rather than deriving it by careful study *from* the text), improper use of background information, and other similar shortcomings.

Scripture is full of examples of those who failed in the task of biblical interpretation and were severely chastised, because their failure did not merely bring ruin on these individuals themselves but also on those they taught and influenced. A case in point are the false teachers Hymenaeus and Philetus, who erroneously taught that the final resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:17–18). Biblical interpretation is not an individualistic enterprise. Rather, it takes place in the community of believers, and the failure or success of the interpretative task affects not merely the interpreter but other believers as well.

Biblical interpreters are charged with a sacred task: handling Scripture with accuracy. They are entrusted with a sacred object, God's Word of truth, and their faithfulness or lack thereof will result in God's approval or in personal shame. God's Word commands our very best because, in the ultimate analysis, it is not a human word, but the Word of God. This means that our interpretive enterprise must rest on a robust doctrine of biblical revelation and a high view of Scripture—as Jesus taught, Scripture is "the word of God" and thus "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Though conveyed through human means, using human language and thought forms, Scripture is ultimately the product of divine inspiration and therefore completely trustworthy.

CHARACTERISTICS REQUIRED OF THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETER

Rather than adopting a critical stance toward Scripture, we should rather submit to it as our final authority in all areas of life. An essential quality required of the biblical interpreter is therefore *humility*. As sinners saved by grace, we must humbly submit to Scripture rather than arrogantly asserting our right to critique Scripture in light of our modern or postmodern presuppositions and preferences. Instead of accepting only the teachings we find acceptable in keeping with contemporary sensibilities, we should be prepared to conform our presuppositions and preferences to the teachings of Scripture and to act accordingly. We must come to Scripture willing to obey what it says.

Part of this humility is acknowledging our finiteness and need for instruction and correction. As Paul wrote in his final letter to Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Proper instruction and, if necessary, correction are therefore a function of Scripture itself, though God may choose to administer these through those who rightly interpret the Bible and teach it to others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2).

Note also that biblical interpretation is not an end in itself but interpretive competence equips the interpreter for “every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17; cf. Eph. 2:10). Rather than being exclusively, or even primarily, a scholarly pursuit, interpretation is required of every believer. While it is true that God has given to the church certain individuals who are to serve as teachers and pastors (Eph. 4:11), he expects *every* believer to progress toward spiritual maturity (Col. 1:28–29). For this reason, we all should assume responsibility for our spiritual growth and make every effort to grow in our ability to handle God’s Word accurately and with increasing skill (2 Pet. 3:17–18).

Another quality that is essential for the biblical interpreter is to *listen carefully* to the Word and to study it *perceptively*. In a time when listening is largely a lost art and many are approaching Scripture primarily for the purpose of validating their own predetermined conclusions, this is a much-needed reminder. In James’s words, and in keeping with Old Testament wisdom, interpreters should be “quick to listen” and “slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19). As the ancient preacher pointed out, “Guard your steps when you

go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools . . . Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few” (Eccl. 5:1–2). Deplorably, the opposite is far more common: people are often quick to air their opinions but slow to hear the actual Word of God. Listening to Scripture requires discipline, self-restraint, wisdom, and love for God.

One final set of desirable (in fact, essential) attributes for biblical interpreters: they should be *regenerate* (that is, have experienced spiritual rebirth) and be *Spirit-filled and led*. The role of the Spirit in biblical interpretation warrants extended treatment, but for a start read Paul’s concise treatment in 1 Corinthians 2:10b–16:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment . . .

While Paul wrote these words in order to address a specific issue in the Corinthian church, his remarks are also highly relevant for all of us who embark on our interpretive journey. If we do not have the Spirit—or if we have the Spirit but do not listen to him and depend on him for spiritual insight from God’s Word—our interpretations will invariably fall short. Only the interpreter who depends on the Holy Spirit in his interpretive quest will likely be successful in discerning God’s special, Spirit-appraised revelation.

While a given interpreter may indeed be devoid of faith and the Holy Spirit and still understand some of the words in Scripture, he will lack the spiritual framework, motivation, and understanding to grasp a given passage in its whole-Bible context. What is more, he will not be able to carry out what Scripture asks of him, because it is only regeneration and the Holy Spirit that enable him to do so. For this reason, anyone who has a sincere desire to understand the Bible will want to make sure that he or she is the kind of person who can receive God’s words of truth.

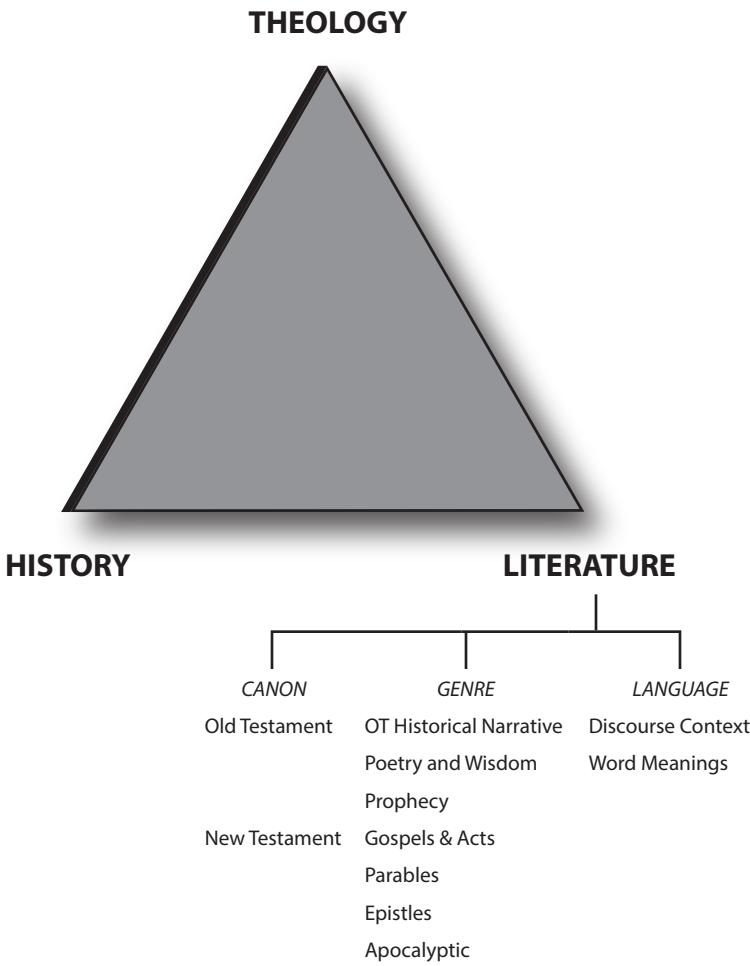
PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THIS BOOK

Foundational to the plan of this book is the conviction that those who want to succeed in the task of biblical interpretation need to proceed within a proper interpretive framework, that is, the hermeneutical triad, which consists of the three elements interpreters must address in studying any given biblical passage: a book's *historical setting*, its *literary dimension*, and its *theological message*.

Since Christianity is a historical religion, and all texts are historically and culturally embedded, it is important that we ground our interpretation of Scripture in a careful study of the relevant historical setting. Since Scripture is a text of literature, the bulk of interpretive work entails coming to grips with the various literary and linguistic aspects of the biblical material. Finally, since Scripture is not merely a work of literature but inspired and authoritative revelation from God, the goal and end of interpretation is theology. Using the hermeneutical triad as a compass will ensure that Bible students stay on track in their interpretive journey.

As an interpreter sets out to explore a particular biblical text, he will first research its historical setting. After grounding his study in the real-life historical and cultural context of the biblical world, he will orient himself to the canonical landscape. This will place a given passage in its proper salvation-historical context. Next, he will consider the literary genre of a passage. He should imagine the different genres found in Scripture as topographical features such as valleys, mountain ranges, or plains, each of which exhibit characteristic features and call for appropriate navigational strategies. The historical and literary investigation will be followed by theological study. Finally, the interpreter will take a close look at the specific linguistic features of a text—the literary context and word meanings.

The hermeneutical triad, then, will serve as an overall method for studying any passage of Scripture. As a result, the interpretive apprentice will be well on the way to becoming a skilled worker who does not need to be ashamed, having developed the necessary skills for handling God's Word. The interpretation of Scripture, in turn, is not the end in itself but only a means to an end: the application of biblical truth to life. Using proper interpretive tools and resources and finding a path from text to sermon for each biblical genre are important. Thus sound interpretation becomes the solid foundation for the application and proclamation of biblical truth to life.



1.1. The Hermeneutical Triad in Detail

DEVELOPING INTERPRETIVE VIRTUES

As we have seen, following the proper method is vital for interpretation. But interpretation is more than simply adhering to a given method. What matters is not merely the final product (an accurate interpretation of a given passage) or even the procedure used to arrive at a given interpretation (one’s method), but the person of the interpreter himself. Interpretation

therefore also involves cultivating a set of interpretive virtues or competencies such as the following:

1. historical-cultural awareness;
2. canonical consciousness;
3. sensitivity to genre;
4. literary and linguistic competence;
5. a firm and growing grasp of biblical theology;
6. an ability to apply and proclaim passages from every biblical genre to life; and
7. wisdom for continuing the interpretive task.

Acquiring and polishing these skills will be well worth the effort. Doing so will bring glory to God and great blessing to the interpreter and through him or her to God's people. As you are growing in these virtues and competencies, and as you are following a proper method, you are more likely to arrive at the proper interpretation of a given passage.

God spoke the universe into being by his Word (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, etc.). In OT times, God spoke to the Israelites "at many times and in various ways" through the prophets (Heb. 1:2), but "in these last days he has spoken to us by a son" (Heb. 1:3)—Jesus, the preexistent, incarnate Word (1:1, 14). The OT "prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), and by extension, the NT authors did the same (cf. Eph. 2:20) in producing the "God-breathed" holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).

Our role as interpreters, in response, is not merely to be *recipients* of that Word but to be fitting *participants* in this penultimate stage of the drama of redemption as history moves inexorably toward the final consummation of God's plan of salvation. Toward that end, we must not only determine what Scripture is saying (meaning) but also what it means to us today (significance) and what convictions, affections, and actions it calls for on our part. So, let's get started on our journey!

GUIDELINES FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: OVERALL METHOD

1. Determine the historical setting of the passage and identify relevant cultural background issues.
2. Locate your passage in the larger canonical context of Scripture.
3. Determine your passage's literary genre and use appropriate interpretive principles for interpreting each genre, including those for figurative language.
4. Identify the major theological theme(s) in the passage and determine the passage's contribution to your understanding of the character and plan of God in dealing with his people.
5. Determine the structure of the entire book you are studying and discern how your passage fits within the overall structure.
6. Conduct a comprehensive word study of any significant term in your passage.
7. Apply the passage to your own life and communicate your insights to others.

KEY WORDS

Dual authorship, Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, Infallible, Inspiration, Proof-texting, Sufficiency of Scripture.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Give examples from Scripture and from your own personal experience that illustrate the benefits of proper biblical interpretation and/or the cost of failed biblical interpretation.

8. Discuss the importance of each of the three major aspects of the hermeneutical triad—history, literature, and theology—and show how neglect of any one of these aspects results in imbalanced interpretation.

KEY RESOURCES

Grudem, Wayne A., gen. ed. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

Plummer, Robert L. *40 Questions about Understanding the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009.