

How to Read the Bible, Part I

NCCT CityBuild

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Introduction

- The Reformers believed that people could and had the right to read Scripture for themselves. There was no need for the church to withhold the Bible from people as though it were too mysterious for mere laypeople.
- The position of the Reformers came out of their teaching that the Scripture is fundamentally clear. Everything necessary for salvation is there for people to read for themselves.
- However, and you know this already because otherwise you probably wouldn't be here today, the Reformers also believed that not all parts of Scripture are equally clear. Some parts of the Bible take a good deal more work to understand than others.
- We are putting on this two part series on how to read the Bible in order to help you to better access the truth for yourselves. When you can do that, then you can more confidently share what you've learned with others.
- In Part I I will introduce the Bible as a historical book. Then I will discuss the main principles of reading and interpretation. Along the way we will look at concrete examples in the Bible itself.
- In Part II in December's CityBuild, I plan to introduce you to a host of resources that you can go to for more information about the Bible. We will also read and interpret a passage together to review and strengthen the principles covered here today.
- I plan to leave some time for questions at the end of today's session.

Reading for Knowledge and Reading Devotionally

- A short note on why we read the Bible.
- There is more than one way to read the Bible. You may be reading to increase your knowledge, for example in a Bible study. You may be reading as a way to connect with God in prayer. You may be reading for some other reason.
- Today I am mostly focusing on reading for knowledge. I believe that gaining knowledge is highly practical. You never know how what you learn today will help you understand another passage tomorrow, or how it will help you defend the faith when

sharing the Gospel, or how it will help you strengthen your own faith when you are going through challenging times.

- However, it is not inevitable that reading for knowledge and reading devotionally has to be separate. Even as you study a new passage you can pray through what you are learning.
- I advise always starting your Bible study with a prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to shed light on the text and to make you capable of understanding it. 1 Corinthians 2 makes clear that the human mind cannot accept the wisdom of God without the working of the Spirit.
- Finally, I encourage you to always pray about how your reading can be applied to your own life. In some ways we read the Bible like any other book. But it isn't like any other book. The Bible contains the self revelation of the one true God. We want to understand the Bible, not for its own sake, but for how understanding the Bible changes the way that we think and act in this world.

Historical and Cultural Distance

“The Bible is written for you, but the Bible is not written to you.”

– Ian Provan

- The Bible was written a long time ago to people who had different scientific knowledge, different metanarratives, and different customs. The language, images, analogies, and concepts of the Bible reflect the different thought world of the ancient Near East and, later on, of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world.
- When you share the revelation of God's Gospel with people today, you have to communicate that truth to an audience that lives and breathes post-Enlightenment philosophy, whether they know it or not.
- In the same way:
 - The original prophets had to communicate the fact that the Israelite God is supreme to a world who's traditional stories involved the idea that the world was created out of the remnants of a great battle between the chief god and the sea monster. That explains why the poets of Israel sometimes refer to the crossing of the sea in the Exodus as God's triumph over the sea monsters.
 - Isa 51:9:¹ “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?”

1. Cf. Ps 74:12-15.

- The apostles had to explain to people that human bodies are good to an audience steeped in Greek and proto-gnostic notions that taught that the body is a kind of prison for the soul.
 - This might well explain why in 1 John 1, John insists that they saw Jesus, they touched Jesus. He was real. He had a body. Later, in chapter 4, John says this: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.” (1 John 4:1–3 ESV)
- Understanding the Bible properly involves bridging the distance between then and now by doing some homework. We have to learn such things as ancient history, about agricultural practices in ancient Israel, and about the competing religions of Israel’s neighbours.
- I will return to this idea of bridging the gap when we talk about interpretive method.

Brief History of the Bible

- The oldest writings of the Bible date back to Moses in approximately the 15th century BC. This does not exclude the possibility that Moses had received some of what he wrote by oral transmission.
- The OT records the words of many people, including prophets, historians, and poets. Sometimes the people who received God’s revelation wrote themselves, like Ezekiel probably did. Sometimes the words spoken publicly by prophets were recorded by other people. And sometimes books went through a process of collection and editing. You can think especially of Proverbs which mentions the collection work of Hezekiah’s men¹ and of the books of Kings which mention their source material in the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and of the Kings of Judah.² Often there is no way of knowing exactly who wrote an OT book because there is no signature.
- Much of the NT is signed, especially the letters. In the case of a few books like Matthew, Mark, and Hebrews we have only the tradition of the early church regarding who wrote them.
- Many people have been involved in writing and transmitting the Bible, but we believe that God has overseen the entire process. It is by God’s providence that God’s inspired and authoritative words have reached us after so many years.

1. Prov 25:1.

2. E.g. 1 Kgs 14:19, 29.

- The latest books of the NT are probably those of John, written sometime around the 90s A.D.
- So even the newest writings in the Bible are now over 1900 years old.
- Furthermore, the writings of the Bible span something like 1500 years.
- We can't assume that our modern way of thinking will necessarily give us instant access to a world so distant in time.

Language

- The Christian Bible has two parts called testaments. 'Testament' is from the Latin word *testamentum* which translates the word we call 'covenant' in English. Therefore our Bible is divided into 'Old Covenant' and 'New Covenant.'
- The OT is written mostly in Hebrew, which is the language of the ancient Israelites. A portion of Ezra and Daniel, together with some few words in Genesis and Jeremiah, are written in Aramaic.¹ Aramaic is a Semitic language somewhat related to Hebrew which was spread around the ancient Near East as a common language thanks to the successive Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires. At the time of Jesus many Jews would have spoken Aramaic or Greek, but not Hebrew.
- The NT is written in Greek. This was the common language spread around the eastern Mediterranean by Alexander the Great's conquests and his successors. From the beginning the writers of the NT had a missional intention for their writings and therefore chose to write in Greek so that both Jews and Gentiles could be reached.



Translations

The Adequacy and Limitations of Translations

- The point of the introduction is to get you to realize to what extent we are separated from the Bible's original writers and audience by time and language.
- Most of us don't read ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. That means that we have to rely on translations into modern languages.
- I want you to know and be comforted by the fact that several very good translations exist. I can assure you that your NIV, ESV, NASB, KJV, and NRSV are good enough to transmit to you the essentials of the Bible's message.
- However, I also want you to know that any translation you read has limitations.
 - Some things simply cannot be translated between languages, period. For example, Biblical Hebrew has a kind of verb form used for linguistic Focus of the action which English cannot replicate.
 - There is also a problem of historical and cultural distance. Some very rare words in the Bible are near impossible to translate accurately because no one living knows what they mean.
 - There are even common words that get conventionalized in certain ways through the history of interpretation that may not accurately reflect the original meaning.
- So, although you can be assured that reading the Bible on your own can be fruitful, there is also need for humility on all our parts. We need to rely on experts who dedicate their entire lives to untangling the mysteries of ancient language. You can access their wisdom through new translation work, but also through commentaries and dictionaries. (We will talk more about resources for Bible study in Part II.)

A Few Words on Modern English Translations

- Every translation begins with important choices:
 - Which text to translate (e.g. an eclectic NT or the so-called received text)
 - What philosophy of translation to use (e.g. functional or formal)
 - Most Bibles make all this information available in the preamble or foreword.
- Examples:
 - The King James Version (1611) is a highly literary and formal translation done from the original language manuscripts that were available at the time.
 - The NASB is at the formal end of the spectrum, prioritizing precision at the word for word level. It, like many modern translations, prefers to use an eclectic NT text based on careful study of all the oldest available manuscripts. The NASB also requires a higher reading level than some other translations.
 - The ESV is between NIV and NASB, but still toward the formal end of the spectrum. The ESV has become very popular because its translation committee is broadly

evangelical and because it has been made available for free as much as possible.

- The NIV is further along the spectrum of functional translations, meaning that it prioritizes concepts at the sentence level somewhat more than individual words. It also uses simpler vocabulary than, say, the NASB.
- Some of you may know Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. *The Message* is not a translation at all. It is a paraphrase. Its intention is to communicate the general gist of the Bible at the conceptual level. It has its uses, but it is not a Bible. It is more like an artistic commentary on the Bible.
- Advice:
 - Make sure what you have is a translation and not a paraphrase
 - Choose a translation that is based on the best biblical manuscripts
 - It is good to choose a translation that suits your reading level. Only, be aware that easier to read translations may sacrifice important detail for ease of reading.
- Questions?

Interpretive Method

Historical-Grammatical Method

- We believe that God has spoken to humanity through the Bible. And we believe that God has communicated in a way that human beings can understand. That is, the Scripture uses language in normal human ways.
- We therefore apply normal human methods to understanding what the Bible says.
 - Counterexample: Inspiration doesn't mean the Bible contains secret codes that have to be worked out – e.g. every third letter, then read backwards – to reveal mysteries about disasters and when Jesus will come back.
- We assume that every text of the Bible was meant to communicate sensibly to the original audience.
- Our first job is to determine what the original intention of the biblical author was and to understand what that original audience would have understood.
 - That job requires understanding historical, literary, and theological background to the passage.
 - Every book of the Bible that precedes the one we are studying may be necessary for determining that background.
 - Words, sentence structure, paragraphs, and literary devices are all relevant in determining what a passage means.

- Our second job, often especially for OT texts, is to take that original meaning and to derive from its particulars an enduring message that still speaks to us thousands of years later. This involves:
 - contextualizing the individual passage in light of the whole Bible (esp. in light of Jesus); later books may show the significance of an image by developing it.
 - determining what is universally true: that is, what is true for all people at all times
 - finding a way to live according to what the passage teaches to be universally true

Hermeneutic Circle

'Hermeneutics': from a Greek word meaning 'interpretation,' the word 'hermeneutics' refers to the process and method of interpreting a text.

"The **hermeneutic circle**... describes the process of understanding a text hermeneutically. It refers to the idea that one's understanding of the text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts and one's understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to one another, and hence, it is a circle. However, this circular character of interpretation does not make it impossible to interpret a text; rather, it stresses that the meaning of a text must be found within its cultural, historical, and literary context."¹

- The following image adapts this idea of the 'hermeneutic circle,' but displays it as a cycle or process. Whereas a circle always leads back to the same place, I wanted to show that the hermeneutic process leads forward.

1. Cited from Wikipedia on Oct. 30, 2017: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutic_circle.

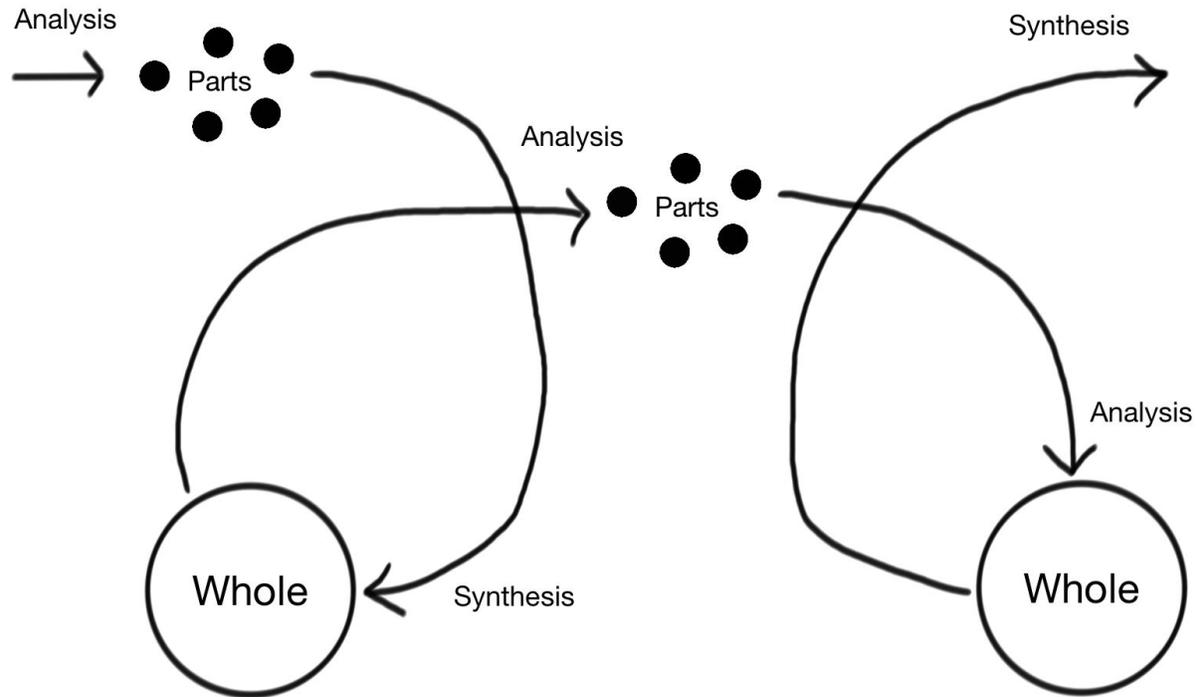


Figure: Hermeneutic Cycle

Key Concepts for Interpretation

- Historical context: events past and present (with respect to the text’s time of writing) that influence the situation of the passage. Usually one begins by establishing who the author is, when the book was written, and who the intended audience was.
- Geographical context: where events took place, what kind of food and drink was available in that place at that time in history, where were the borders of neighbouring territories, etc.
- Cultural context: beliefs, technologies, and customs that shape the worldview of the author and the audience.
- Literary context: the build up and flow of the whole book within which a particular passage is found. For example, what Matthew 12 communicates may be better understood in light of what chapters 11 and 13 say. Literary context includes the text, but also the structure and literary devices (e.g. word play, imagery, irony).
- Canonical context: the position of the book (and its ideas, images, promises, etc.) within the Bible and within the history of the Bible’s composition. For example, Ezekiel’s vision of the river flowing from the south side of the altar in Ezek 47 is reworked in Revelation 22 where the river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

- Genre: the specific type of literature of a particular book or passage (e.g. The book of Matthew is a historical narrative, but Matthew also contains short teaching narratives called parables). Different genres use human language to communicate in different ways (e.g. 1-2 Samuel is a historical narrative and makes use of character and plot development, but Paul's letters don't need to do that).
- Passage boundaries: it is important to interpret the words of the Bible as parts of logical levels of discourse. Each level has boundaries, including a beginning and an end. The relevant levels are: Canon > Book > Pericope > Paragraph > Sentence > Clause > Phrase > Word. Know the boundaries of the unit you are reading and the relationship of that unit to the other levels. In ancient literature the beginning and ending of a work (e.g. a whole book) was often key to interpreting the message of the whole.

Concrete Examples

Genre and Immediate Literary Context: 2 Samuel 1:1-16

What do we make of this passage? Can we take for granted that everything we read in the Bible is true?

See 1 Sam 31:1-6

- Samuel is historical narrative with plot, character development, and irony. Some characters are liars, and you will only know that by reading the entire narrative closely.
- Hebrew narrative is written in such a way that the audience is led a certain distance by the details of speech and action, but they must draw conclusions for themselves. The narrator often does not comment on what people do, whether good or bad.
- In our Bibles, 1st and 2nd Samuel are two 'books,' but they are actually a single literary work. The historical reason for their division is that Samuel was too long to fit on a single scroll and was therefore split into two parts.
- Notice how the pericope boundaries extend beyond the boundaries of the 'book' in this case.
- Sometimes chapter numbers will be similarly misleading. For example, Genesis chapter 2 would probably be better placed at our 2:4 rather than where it is.
- Chapter numbers are relatively recent. Medieval Christian scribes copying the Latin Vulgate invented the chapter numbers and these have become standard ever since. Use them to the extent that they are helpful, but be aware that they are really only a secondary layer on the ancient text, a kind of embedded structural commentary.

Genre and Overall Literary Context

a) Job 11:13-20

- What do we make of this statement? Is Zophar correct?
- See Job 42:7
- Job is its own genre, though it employs prose for intro and conclusion, and poetry for everything in between. The bulk of Job is a cycle of poetic disputations where Job and his friends argue about why Job has suffered such disaster.
- It is impossible to know exactly where the author of Job is leading us until we read God's own response from the whirlwind. We can then go back and better appreciate the arguments that were made in light of the official statement made by God.
- A principle: If God says it, then it has to be true. If a person says it, then it may or may not be true. It is necessary to test statements and actions against what you know about what the Bible has to say about God and God's character.

b) Judges 3 (Ehud): Illustrating the Hermeneutical Circle

- Ehud is one of Israel's judges and deliverers. But what do we make of his method? Does the end justify the means?
- Judges is a paradigm example of a book where the structure of the book communicates as much as the actual content of the text does.
- The book of Judges presents a destructive cycle in Israel that moves from bad to worse. It is a downward spiral in which the leaders of Israel become less and less ideal and more and more morally corrupt.
- The book ends in total disaster. The complete moral corruption of a city in Benjamin leads to civil war and the near destruction of the tribe of Benjamin by the other tribes.
- Three times near the end of the book we read these words: "In those days there was no king in Israel."¹ The book begins to prepare us for the finale, suggesting that things are less than ideal. Ultimately the book ends with this final verse (Judg 21:25): "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as was right in his own eyes."
- The entire downward spiral of the book is meant to communicate a message in favour of kingship in Israel. It points to the importance of strong leadership for the moral and religious purity of Israel and it underscores the heavy responsibility that comes with such leadership.

1. Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1.

- So, now we can return to Ehud. What can we say about him? Certainly Ehud 'gets the job done' and rescues Israel, but he is a sneaky liar and an assassin. Would you like to have Ehud as an elder?
- This is a prime example of how OT narratives operate. Unlike much modern literature, the narrator does not tell you what to think. You have to use your own judgment to figure things out. And yet, there is a subtle message that helps you along. The pieces are there, but you have to put them together.
- My personal view is that the authors of OT narrative prized the development of wisdom and critical thinking skills and crafted their compositions to build up those skills in the next generation.

Historical and Cultural Context: 1 Kings 18:17-24

Why does Elijah propose this?

- Literary context:
 - King Ahab married Jezebel, a princess from Sidon (16:31)
 - Jezebel has been introducing Sidonian religion to Israel, especially the worship of the god Baal.
 - Elijah has prophesied that there would be no rain until he says so (17:1)
- Historical context: Israel is very close to Sidon, an old Canaanite city. Moreover, before the Israelites entered the land under Joshua, Canaanites were already there worshiping variations of the deity Baal. There was a long history of Baal worship in the land and the Israelites had been tempted to join in since the time of Joshua.
- Cultural context: Baal is a storm god. He is supposed to bring rain and make things grow. In theory, Baal has power over clouds and lightning. Therefore, Elijah is proposing a standoff. The god who can actually control the lightning is the true God. This challenge should put to rest for good any question of Baal being a god at all.

Canonical Context: Isaiah 66:15-17

What is going to happen to those of us who eat pig's meat now?

- Why does Isaiah speak so strongly against pig eaters?
- Leviticus 11:7 and Deuteronomy 14:8 state that pig is not to be eaten because it is one of the unclean animals. A clean animal is one that has a parted hoof and eats grasses (Lev 11:3). Pigs, however, have a parted hoof, yet do not eat grasses.

- How do we know Christians can safely eat pork? See Mark 7:1-23; Acts 10:1-48; 15:1-29.
- As far as we can tell, this law and others were about establishing Israel as a nation set apart in religion and practice from the rest of the nations. It was meant as a way of teaching new generations that the God of Israel is not like the other gods and therefore God's people have to act differently from the other peoples. As the letter to the Hebrews would put it, the law forbidding pork and other foods was merely a shadow of much more important realities. It had its purpose, but when Jesus came that purpose was fulfilled and God's people were able to set it aside.

Moving from Then to Now

Consistency in God's Character

a) Practical Example: Exod 21:35-36

- Passages vary on to what extent they are directly applicable to us in the 21st century A.D. You may relate more to Paul's instruction not to get drunk with wine but to be filled with the Spirit instead (Eph 5:18) than to Moses' instructions on what to do if your ox gores and kills another ox (Exod 21:35-36).
- One way to consider the relevance of a passage for you today is to ponder what the passage says about the character of God. As Hebrews 13:8 says, Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever.
- A similar idea is to consider how the human response to God is consistent as well. Sin in the past can be realized by different actions than they are today, but the temptations are often the same. Human beings today still desire the same things people desired long ago.
- So what can we say about the goring ox? READ Exod 21:35-36. How would you apply that today?
- This passage is a reflection of God's justice and care for the rights of individuals. Today, like in ancient Israel, following God means taking responsibility for our actions and belongings. We have to treat others fairly, and sometimes this means making restitution if we have caused damages.

b) Illustration: Joel 1

In my recent sermon on Joel one I apply this principle in at least a couple ways:

- Summarize Joel 1. How can you apply the principle of God's consistent character to help interpret this passage?

- The context of the locust plague in Joel 1 was explained by the fact that God is true to His promises. A little historical and canonical digging revealed that God has promised famine as a consequence of breaking covenant.
- Understanding the disaster of the plague as an ultimately good and necessary thing also requires trusting in God's unchanging character. God promised Abraham that He would make Abraham's seed a blessing to the whole world. Covenant and locusts turn out to be a way to keep the chosen people on the path of blessing the world.
- Finally, when closing the sermon, I assume that God's priorities are constant. In Joel 1 the prophet calls the people to be aware of and to respect God's priorities. In Joel's day, God is concerned with His own reputation and its inextricable link to the temple in Jerusalem. I assume that God is still concerned with His reputation, only today the name of God is not linked to a building, but to Christians, since the NT teaches us that we become the temples of the Holy Spirit.
- To do this I had to work at all the levels of context and to synthesize the theological teaching of the Bible. The more you read the entire Bible and the more you practice, the more you will be able to draw compelling threads to connect major ideas in the Bible.
- I want to emphasize that I read through Joel from beginning to end several times (starting in the original Hebrew) before ever starting to write my sermon. The first time through I had certain ideas about what was important to the book's overall message. When reading through again I tested my hypothesis, but realized that what I first noticed was less important than some other things. I then repeated the process, refining my sense of the key words and ideas.
- That must sound like a lot of work. It is. But, the work I put in has to be proportional to what I am doing. If I am preaching, then I have enormous responsibility to interpret well for your sake. If I am teaching Bible study, then I still have high responsibility, but not as much. I can get away with less work. If I am reading for my own devotions, then again, I can do even less work because the responsibility is lower.

Development of Ideas: Reading Old Books in Light of Newer Books

- Bible authors and prophets had the task of bringing God's message to God's people. However, it is not necessarily the case that even they understood completely what was going to happen.
- We teach the idea of progressive revelation. That is, God has revealed truth to His people little by little over time.
- Practically speaking, this means that individual passages (e.g. in the OT) may not contain the whole story. They may only be fully understood in retrospect thanks to something that was revealed later on.

- For example, consider Joel and the ‘Day of the Lord.’ Prophets had been talking about the Day of the Lord for ages by the time of Joel, but Joel brings a new dimension to the idea.
 - Amos 5 (8th century) warns the people that although they think the Day of the Lord will be good for them and bad for their enemies, it may actually be devastating to them as well if they don’t get right with God.
 - Isaiah 2 (8-7th century) hints at both positive and negative aspects of the Day of the Lord.
 - Zephaniah 1 (7th century) warns again that the Day of the Lord will be bad for the people because they have gone astray.
 - Joel (approx. late 6th century), like Isaiah, sees the Day of the Lord as bringing danger and blessing, depending on whose side you are on. What is fascinating is how Joel gets to foreshadow the darkness and earthquake that occurred on the day Jesus was crucified and how he predicts the outpouring of the Spirit on God’s people at Pentecost.
 - But Joel didn’t see exactly how those things would happen. We have the advantage over him because we are on the other side of Jesus. We get to interpret Joel’s words on the Day of the Lord in light of the entire NT and to see how some of it foreshadowed events that have already passed and how some of it is still waiting to be fulfilled.
 - With hindsight we can see how Joel’s Day of the Lord is actually more than just one day. It is the plan of God for the world that includes both the first and second comings of Jesus.
 - The gospels, epistles, and books like Revelation help us to understand how to read Joel’s teaching about the Day of the Lord.

Background of Ideas: Reading New Books in Light of Older Books

- A more straightforward concept is the idea that late books are to be interpreted in light of early books.
- Images and concepts used in Ezekiel or Jeremiah can depend on ideas in Leviticus. Ideas in Matthew or Revelation can depend on Ezekiel.
- The canon of Scripture contains a developing tradition.
- A clear example from Joel is the one I developed in my sermon. The way to explain the locust plague was to go all the way back to Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The covenant codes of the early parts of Scripture contain the ground rules for the world of the prophets.
- Another example is Matthew and its literary structure. Scholars have noticed how Matthew’s structure is meant to present Jesus as a new Israel, repeating the

experience of Israel as outlined in the OT, and especially in the book of Exodus. To understand who Jesus is according to Matthew, you need to understand how Matthew is working with the OT tradition.

- For example, in Matthew 3 Jesus is baptized. That is, He goes through the water, which for Matthew is like Israel crossing the Red Sea.
- In Matthew 4, Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days, just like the 40 years that Israel spent in the wilderness. Unlike Israel, however, Jesus does not succumb to temptation.
- In Matthew 5, Jesus begins the long Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus recapitulates and reinterprets the Law of God that was given to Israel on Mount Sinai. Therefore, Jesus is both the ideal Israel in that He undergoes Israel's experience but without sin, and Jesus is also the lawgiver – not another Moses, who was only a messenger, but one who has authority to give divine law directly. Think of the “You heard that the ancients were told... but I say to you” (Matt 5:20-22).
- Again, a later book depends on an earlier one.
- Also, as we have seen before, the message of a biblical book can go beyond the written words and may be communicated by structure as well.
- Properly discerning and interpreting structure takes practice and wisdom.

Concluding Thoughts

- If you are reading through the Bible or a book or a passage and there are things you don't understand, then be comforted, because that is normal. The hermeneutical cycle I presented to you assumes that your understanding increases as you engage more and more.
- I therefore encourage you to read the whole Bible through from time to time. Only then will you have the background knowledge of the whole that you need to interpret the parts.
- Likewise, whenever possible, read entire books of the Bible and not just small sections. Once you've read the whole book you can come back to the sections and see them in a new light.
- The hermeneutical cycle applies specifically to the literary context.
- If you've done your reading and re-reading and you still don't understand, then you are very likely missing knowledge about the historical or cultural context. You won't be able to fill that knowledge gap by only reading the Bible. Those details were part of the common knowledge between the author and the audience that didn't need to be written down.

- To get that information you may need to consult secondary sources like commentaries and Bible dictionaries. You may also ask more knowledgeable people. That is what we are here for.
- Take note of the two recommended books. The one by Fee and Stuart contains helpful summaries on the genres of the Bible and how each one communicates its message. The one by Hendricks and Hendricks is a thorough and highly an accessible guide to reading the Bible.
- Reading the Bible well takes effort. But that effort is worth it. Learning to read the Bible well for yourself lets you take ownership of your own faith. It equips you to better share the Good News of Jesus with other people who need to hear.
- Make sure that your increasing Bible knowledge is feeding your faith and informing how you live. Knowledge by itself is nothing. Before and as you read, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to apply what you read to your own life.

Recommended Reading

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007).