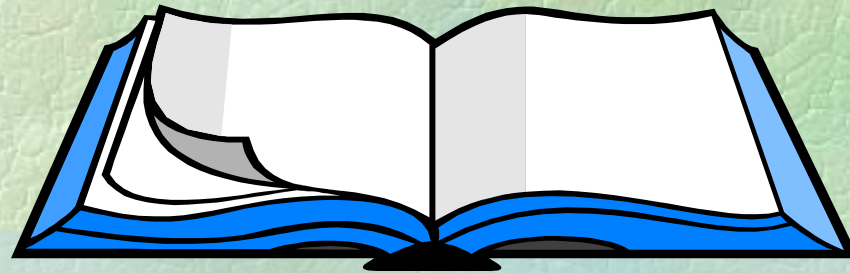


# How To Read The Bible



For All Its Worth!



# Goals For This Class

- To give a basic approach to understanding the biblical text
- To examine historical methods of interpretation
- To consider other methods of interpretation
- To promote unity of shared understanding
- To relate elders' views on interpretation



# Not Goals For This Class

- To ensure everybody believes what I do
- To ensure everybody believes the same thing
- To debate controversial passages of scripture
- To negate or endorse any particular interpretative approach
- To confuse, frustrate, or agitate truthseekers



# The Gospels:



The Greatest Story Ever Told



# Types of Material Found in Gospels

- Sayings - teachings of Jesus
- Narratives - teachings about Jesus



# The Nature of the Gospels

- Not written by Jesus himself
- Written in Greek, not Aramaic as Jesus spoke
- Same sayings occur frequently with different wording in different Gospels
- There are four of them
- Three of them are very similar (Synoptic)



# Why Four Gospels?

- Different Christian communities had differing needs for a book about Jesus
- Each book written for different reasons
- Each discusses the “historical” Jesus
- Each retells the story for urban, pagan communities
- Function as “memoirs” of the apostles
- Each are of equal value



# Historical Context of the Gospels

- Historical context of Jesus
  - 1st century culture
  - 1st century religion
  - Palestinian Judaism
  - Sayings or parables
- Historical context of the authors



# General Historical Context of Jesus

- Requires external background information about 1st Century times
- Must understand the form of Jesus' teaching
- Must understand Jesus' use of proverbs, similes, metaphors, poetry, questions, and irony.



# Particular Historical Context of Jesus

- Early oral transmission of stories - pericopes (Mark 12:13-17)
- Pericopes without context (I Cor 7:10; 9:14; and Acts 20:35)
- Pericopes with varying contexts (Matt 5:31-32; Matt 10:1-19)
- Authors provide context which explains variance in passages
- Must seek to identify intended audience



# Historical Context of the Authors

- Why was a particular gospel written?
- Can determine by selection, shaping, and arrangement of materials
- Example: Mark is interested in explaining the nature of Jesus' messiahship
- Jesus repeatedly keeps his messiahship hidden
- He explains to disciples, but they don't understand
- Mark's concern is the suffering-servant nature of Jesus' messiahship



# Interpreting the Literary Context

- Strive to understand a narrative or saying in its present context in the Gospel
- Strive to understand the nature of the composition of the Gospel as a whole
- The Gospels are not isolated facts about the life of Jesus
- Avoid the “Mashed Potatoes Gospel”



# Horizontal Interpretation of Pericopes

- Be aware of parallel passages in other Gospels
- Don't read in isolation, but don't conflate
- Parallels show distinctiveness of Gospels
- Parallels show us different kinds of contexts
- Avoid presuppositions such as independent authorship



## Evidence for Interdependence in Authorship

- Stories first told in Aramaic, but written in Greek language
- Greek word order is free yet similarities extend to precise word order
- Highly unlikely that three different people in three different parts of the Roman Empire would tell the same story with exactly the same words.



# Example of Interdependence: Feeding of the 5000

- Number of words used to tell the story
  - Matthew      157
  - Mark          194
  - Luke          153
  - John          199
  
- Number of common words in *all* of the first three Gospels: 53



# Example of Interdependence: Feeding of the 5000

- Number of words John has in common with all the others: 8
- Percentages of agreement:
  - Matthew with Mark 59%
  - Matthew with Luke 44%
  - Luke with Mark 40%
  - John with Matthew 8.5%
  - John with Mark 8.5%
  - John with Luke 6.5%



# Vertical Interpretation of Pericopes

- Be aware of historical context of Jesus
- Be aware of historical context of author
- The Gospels are the Word of God
- Our reconstructions of Jesus' life are not!
- Good interpretation involves appreciating both original historical context and the author's context in a given passage



# Example: Matthew 20:1-16

- What does this mean in Matthew's context?
- Matthew follows Mark, but inserts this parable and says "First will be last."
- Parable itself tells of God's grace to the undeserving
- Here Matthew uses it in a context of discipleship
- Those who give up all to follow Jesus become first (not Jewish leaders!)



# Interpreting the Gospels as Wholes

- Three principles in Gospel composition
  - Authors selected material to suit their purposes (see John 21:25)
  - Author's churches to whom they wrote had interests that caused them to arrange and adapt what was selected
  - Different adaptations explain perceived discrepancies between Gospels (Ex. Fig tree)



# Hermeneutics of Teachings

- Approached as with Epistles
- Must deal with cultural relativity
- Example: “Going the extra mile”
- Normative authority of imperatives
- Normative not to become a Christian, but because we are Christians



# Hermeneutics of Narratives

- Narratives function in multiple ways
- Miracles illustrate the power of the kingdom
- They may also illustrate faith, fear, or failure
- Some narratives illustrate a teaching
- Example: Rich Young Ruler



# Eschatology in the Gospels

- This age - Satan's time
- God's Age To Come
- Characterized by:
  - sin
  - sickness
  - demon possession
  - triumph of evil
- Characterized by:
  - the Holy Spirit
  - righteousness
  - health
  - peace



# The Age To Come

- Cross & Resurrection
- The Second Coming
- Already:
  - righteousness
  - peace
  - health
  - Spirit
- Not yet:
  - complete righteousness
  - full peace
  - no sickness or death
  - complete fullness



# Questions or Comments?





**Next Week:**

**The Point of the Parables**