

“HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT’S WORTH”

Expanded Outline (Incomplete)

Qualifications and presuppositions

Any discussion of biblical hermeneutics has to begin by describing what kind of book we have in the Bible. In this course, we will take the Bible as it presents itself – namely, as the self-attesting Word of God. It is inspired, and therefore infallible, inerrant, and authoritative in all it says.

We should also note that biblical hermeneutics does no good apart from immersion in the Scriptures themselves in the life of a church community. Far too many books on hermeneutics spend too much time on theory of interpretation, and not enough time on its actual practice.

Biblical hermeneutics

- The Bible is unique and ordinary because it is divine and human
 - ◆ Should the Bible be read like any other book? Yes and no
 - ◆ God and human language; the adequacy of human language and the doctrine of creation
- “Hermeneutics” from Greek god Hermes (Acts 14:12)

The term “hermeneutics” derives from Greek mythology. It means the art/science/method of interpreting a divine text. Basically, “hermeneutics” is everything that goes into getting at the meaning of the text.

- The importance of hermeneutics
- Naïve and mature reading
- Microscopic and macroscopic reading

The roles of the Spirit and the church in interpretation

- The need for the Heavenly Teacher as well as earthly teachers

God is the Ultimate Author of Scripture, and as 1 Cor. 2:6-16 teaches, only the Spirit knows the mind of God. Thus, if we are going to uncover the mind of God in the Scriptures, we must be illumined by the Spirit. We cannot simply rely on our own reason or interpretive methods and tools. The Spirit leads us into the truth through Scripture. At the same time, we must note that the Spirit is no substitute for hard work and rigorous study. Instead, the Spirit makes such study profitable.

We should also recognize that biblical interpretation is not an individualistic, private affair. It is a communal process. The church guides us in biblical interpretation through her creeds, confessions, and specially gifted teachers (Eph.

4:11ff). Interpretation should be done in dialogue with other Christians (living and dead).

We need the Spirit and the church to interpret Scripture aright. The Spirit works in and through the context of the church. Outside of the church, there is no reason to think the Bible is a “means of grace.”

- Pray, pray, pray
- Church tradition (our interpretive and creedal heritage); the Bible’s “homeland”
- The provisional nature of interpretation
- Ethics and hermeneutics (the spiritual condition of the interpreter matters; analogy with interpreting general revelation)

The hermeneutical spiral/dialogue

Obstacles to biblical interpretation

- Biblio-phobia

The biggest obstacle to proper interpretation of Scripture is biblio-phobia, a.k.a., sin. As sinners, we want to suppress the message of the Bible. We want to accommodate it to our own ideologies. We want to rename the world instead of describing it in biblical categories.

- Gaps: The strangeness of the Bible
 - ◆ The Bible was written *for* us, but not *to* us (Rom. 15:4)
 - ◆ Language, culture, and redemptive-history
 - ◆ The need for imagination
 - ◆ Can we read the Bible like a newspaper?

The Bible is a very odd for modern Americans. We have to work very hard to make ourselves at home in the Bible. We have gaps between us and the text which must be overcome.

Does the Bible have a single, overarching theme? A single, overarching structure?

Bible reading in 3-D (note these are *dimensions*, not *perspectives*)

- First dimension: Canonical
 - ◆ What is the “canon”?
 - ◇ Rule/standard
 - ◇ Canon and community

“Canon” assumes a community of readers who are “insiders” to the literature in question (e.g., the “canon” of Western classics).

- ◇ How many books?

- ◆ Canon and history (canonical reading considers the historico-cultural situation; canonical reading integrates history and text)
- ◆ Reading the Bible from within

Canonical reading means reading from within, reading it as a unified whole. It means reading the Bible as the people to whom it was given and the people of whom it is about.

- ◆ Canonical structure: One covenant or two? Two testaments or four? (the symphony of Scripture)

There are different ways of viewing the structure of the canon. The OT/NT distinction is most familiar, and yet it also obscures some important truths. On the one hand, the Bible is a fundamental unity – one story from beginning to end. The “NT” is simply the next (and climatic) chapter. On the other hand, our “NT” is not the first “NT” given in history. It was actually the fourth “NT.” God gave inscripturated revelation in 4 basic blocks. So the Bible is one book and four books at the same time.

- ◇ Stages in revelation: Priestly-Kingly-Prophetic-Fulfillment
- ◇ Different ways of “rightly dividing” the canon, each with its own strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ Mapping out the Bible’s deep narrative structure: the Bible as storybook
 - ◇ Stages in history: Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation

These are the 4 major turning points in the biblical story. We need to be aware of this “deep” narrative structure in the overarching biblical metanarrative.

- ◇ The master narrative underlying all other biblical narratives
- ◆ Historical development vs. the finished product (diachronic vs. synchronic reading -- the Bible as work in progress vs. the Bible as completed work)
 - ◇ Reading the Old Testament as a pre-Christian book and as a Christian book

See Dabney Lecture #1, Fall 2003 for diachronic vs. synchronic reading.

- ◆ Context and cotext
 - ◇ Context = historical situation
 - ◇ Cotext = surrounding text
- ◆ Scripture is its own interpreter (the “analogy of faith”)
- ◆ Intertextuality (inner-biblical exegesis)

See Dabney Lectures #7-8, Spring 2004 for this section on intertextuality.

- ◇ The interplay and interfacing of texts: how do biblical writers use other biblical texts?
- ◇ Intertextuality and literary tradition

- ◇ Read organically, listening for echoes and allusions
 - * Micro- and macro-allusions
 - * Volume of the echo
 - * New Testament as echo chamber
 - * How stories shape stories
 - * Intertextuality as an application of the analogy of faith
- ◇ Intertextuality and interconceptuality
- ◇ Read the Bible “in stereo” listening to “both speakers”
- ◆ *Tota Scriptura* (all 49 books!)
- Second dimension: Literary

The Bible is a literary masterpiece and we must learn to read it as such. Its major organizing features are literary.

What is “literature”? It is written communication marked by exalted style and depth of meaning. The Bible, like all great literature, has to be received, not used.

The Bible is also *ancient* literature, so we must become accustomed to its conventions and techniques, rather than reading it according to our own standards.

- ◆ The ultimate work of literature
- ◆ Deep reading
 - ◇ C. S. Lewis’ *An Experiment in Criticism*
 - ◇ Features of ancient literature (grid of literary conventions)
- ◆ A Christian aesthetic: the beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty; beauty and functionality
- ◆ The aesthetics of Scripture: the beauty of the Word

Is the Bible a beautiful book? At one time, the consensus, even among Christians was “No.” That’s because the Bible was being judged against the grid of Greco-Roman literature.

But read on its own terms, the Bible has a deep and abiding literary beauty. As the church learned more and more how to do this, the Bible became the literary standard, and even created its own literary culture.

See the attached paper, “The Ugly Bible?”

The Bible’s literary features are not “tacked on.” The form is part and parcel of the message.

- ◇ The beauty of the incarnate Word is refracted through the inscripturated Word
- ◇ Form and content, medium and message: Literary features integral to meaning; the shape of the text

- ◆ The rhetoric of Scripture: the persuasiveness of Scripture

Scripture uses a variety of rhetorical techniques, aimed at moving and transforming the reading community. It is especially important for teachers and preachers to be aware of these features of the biblical text.

- ◇ We don't read the Bible simply to acquire information but to be transformed (the *effect* of Scripture on the believing community; contemplation vs. action)
- ◇ The Spirit and rhetoric (see especially 1 Cor. 2)
- ◇ Rhetorical analysis
- ◆ Literary form and historicity
- ◆ A literary approach and apologetics (literary criticism vs. historical criticism)
- ◆ Literature and levels of meaning
- Third dimension: Christocentric/Kingdom-centric

See Dabney Lectures #5-6, Spring 2004 for this section on Christocentric reading.

- ◆ A Christocentric view of God and his Word (Christocentric theology and hermeneutics)
 - ◇ Christian vs. theist
 - ◇ The focus of Scripture
 - ◇ The Scriptures are the "cradle" in which Christ is laid, the "swaddling cloths" in which he is wrapped
 - ◇ Avoiding moralism/legalism and doctrinalism
 - ◇ Christocentrism vs. Christomonism
 - ◇ Theocentric vs. Christocentric reading
 - ◇ "All theology is Christology"
 - ◇ The center of the center: Christ's death and resurrection
 - ◇ What is the "gospel"?
 - ◇ Is there any "non-messianic" Scripture?
- ◆ The unity of Scripture and the covenantal kingdom: Christ and his people (union with Christ/*Totus Christus*); Augustine's first rule of biblical interpretation; Christocentric hermeneutics means ecclesiocentric hermeneutics
- ◆ The climax of the covenant: Jesus as the new Adam and new Israel -- Behold, all things have become new!
- ◆ Promise-fulfillment model

Integrated reading: uniting history, literature, and theology into a holistic approach (newspaper vs. novel vs. textbook)

- Historical literature, historical theology
- Literary theology, literary history
- Theological literature, theological history

Inventory of tools available to the reader

The languages of the Bible

- Language history; language theory
- Hebrew
- Aramaic
- *Koine* Greek
- Etymology: use and abuse

Reading without rules

We must learn to read the Bible on its own terms.

This is difficult in our cultural milieu, even inside the church, because we simply aren't accustomed to reading literature from a foreign culture. For all talk about diversity, we really do not know how to appreciate a culture that is genuinely different. This comes to the forefront when we go to read Scripture, which comes out of a significantly different cultural matrix from our own. As already noted, our culture's literature is rather shallow and flat, with a "tell it like it is" style. The Bible's communication patterns tend to be more subtle, complex, and nuanced. It will take some skill and effort for us to master them. We struggle to recognize the Bible's literary art for what it is.

For example, most "Study Bible" outline books of the Bible as though they were term papers than literary works of art. We too easily divorce the medium from the message because the medium is not familiar to us. We want to arrive at an "understanding" of the text too quickly; if it requires a paradigm shift or careful reflection, forget about it. If it involves mystery and ambiguity, we get uncomfortable. When was the last time you were *overawed* by something you encountered in the Scripture?

- Is interpretation a science or an art? (analytic mind vs. poetic mind; skills vs. rules)

Presbyterian and Reformed folks are epically vulnerable here because we tend to be more "analytic" than "poetic." The Reformed tradition (Kuyper notwithstanding) has all too often been hostile to the arts, literature, music, and ritual. After all, these things accentuate the mysterious side of life. Traces of this attitude can be found in Calvin, the Puritans, Dabney, Kuyper, and so on, up to the present day.

All of this affects hermeneutics, of course. We tend to drain the symbolism and mystery out of the biblical text, as part of our quest for "clear and distinct ideas." We need to become self-conscious about how vulnerable we are to modes of thought that blind us to the artistic and literary depths of Scripture. For us, "real

truth" is all too often that which can be boiled down to the scientific and the logical, swept free of symbolism and metaphor. Thus, we tend to "totalize" science, turning *every* legitimate field into a "science" and using something analogous to the "scientific method" as our model.

This includes hermeneutics. The trend has been to turn hermeneutics into a science. Of course, this makes interpretation a matter of "rules." Of course, some of these rules are helpful, but the problem is that we equate the "rules" with task of interpretation, leaving no remainder. The rules exhaust the whole process. Other rules are simply false and prevent us reading the biblical text in an apostolic fashion. (Augustine is helpful here because, while he gives rules for reading, he also acknowledges their limitations.)

So: rules may be handy as "rules of thumb." But ultimately rules cannot teach you how to read the Bible. You can master the rules of baseball and still never be able to hit a curveball. Similarly, you can master the "rules" of interpretation and still have no idea what to actually *do* with the biblical text on the page in front of you. Only the Bible (through the Spirit) can teach us how to read the Bible (Eco).

- The modern obsession with "method" (over content)

If Bible reading is not a science, what is it? It is much more of an art, a craft, a skill. It's something you develop a knack for.

The modern scientific approach has produced an obsession with "method." What's interesting is that this obsession with "method" has not led to unity among Bible interpreters. If anything, it's led to the proliferation of competing methodologies. Let's look at the various methods that have dominated biblical scholarship since the Reformation.

- ◆ The "historical-critical method"

This method is generally regarded as "liberal," as it subjects the Bible to external tests of veracity. It grew out of the Enlightenment ideal of neutral rationality. "Historical criticism" actually covers several types of critical methodology, most of which are concerned with the text's pre-history in some way.

- ◆ The "grammatico-historical method"

This is the "conservative" counterpart to the "historical-critical method." It takes the text seriously, focusing on the grammar (the meaning of the words especially) and the historical context. Certainly grammar and historical context are essential. But this view, in efforts to avoid a "superstitious" treatment of the text (overbelief), falls into a "substitious" treatment of the text (underbelief). There is more to the biblical text than merely grammar and history. In particular, there is theology – or, more accurately, christology (Lk. 24). This minimalistic method fails to read the

OT as the apostles did. Grammatico-historical interpretation needs to be supplemented with something more.

◆ The “law-gospel method”

This method is very much in vogue in some Reformed circles today and has always been popular among the Lutherans (though Luther himself had a much richer hermeneutic). This is an admittedly theological method of interpretation, self-consciously bringing certain presuppositions and questions to each text of Scripture. “Law” and “Gospel” are sharply delineated, antithetical categories.

There are several problems here, with the way both “Law” and “Gospel” are defined. Briefly, in Scripture “Law” is not a “covenant of works” or “hypothetical plan of self-salvation.” Specifically, it refers to the package of fatherly instruction that God handed down to Israel at Sinai through Moses. It belonged to the church’s immature phase of history. It may have been twisted into a Pelagian program by men, but God never intended it as such.

The “Gospel” is not merely an individualistic soteriological scheme. Specifically, it is the announcement that the kingdom has come through the crucified and risen Son of God, Jesus Christ. The gospel declares that Jesus is Lord, and therefore offers men salvation, provided they trust and obey him.

◆ The “inductive method”

This method is particularly popular among evangelical Bible study teachers, campus ministries, and small group leaders. This view has much to commend to it. It moves from general observations of the text, to interpretive generalizations, concluding with applications. It is a self-consciously “scientific” model of interpretation. It’s attraction is the alleged promise of “certitude” and “objectivity” that modern people crave.

But it is also intensely individualistic, leading to a “me and my Bible” kind of piety. There is no need for the church or the guiderails of tradition; the solitary interpreter can investigate the “brute facts” of Scripture the same way a scientist can collect data in the loneliness of his laboratory.

Also, unless the inductive reader has been trained in literary technique and typology, he will never arrive at an adequate reading of Scripture. The tendency to “moralize” or “doctrinalize” becomes almost irresistible.

◆ The “good and necessary consequence method”

This is like the inductive method, but uses logic rather than science as the model. See WCF 1.6. The problem is that while logic is a necessary tool of interpretation, it does not constitute a complete method in itself. WCF 1.6 is not so much attempting to give a complete hermeneutic as it is arguing for the sufficiency of Scripture over against Roman Catholicism.

So we should use logic, but if logic is the only resource we have in our toolbox of interpretation, we will not read the Bible as God intended.

- Hermeneutical maximalism (*sensus plenior*) and layers of meaning (knowing by abstraction vs. knowing by addition; Greek vs. Hebraic models of interpretation; Ockham's razor vs. Bonaventure's beard); "thick exegesis"

The alternative to these modern methods is a "full sense" approach that takes into account grammar, history, observation, logic, etc., but also examines the literary forms of the text, the canonical placement of the text, the Christology, and so fourth. The premodern *Quadruga*, while subject to abuse, is certainly capable of integrating all these layers of meaning into a coherent exegesis.

Good interpretation is much like "interdisciplinary studies," which are now re-emerging at the university level. "Interdisciplinary studies" seek to integrate knowledge and approaches from a wide variety of fields in order to arrive at a holistic perspective. This is the academic counterpart to holistic, "full sense" hermeneutics.

Excursus: Does this rich, fuller method of interpretation comport with WCF 1.9, which says the "true and full sense of any Scripture" is "not manifold but one?"

*Note that this comes in the context of a more general principle/pattern of interpretation, namely that Scripture interprets Scripture. So what do we do if we find Scripture requiring a manifold sense, whereas the WCF only acknowledges a singular sense? The divines seem to want to protect the unity and integrity of the text. The text does not mean whatever we want it to mean, and it cannot be pushed and pulled and reshaped in various ways. The WCF is not ruling out a "layered" interpretation, provided the layers all cohere into **one** meaning. The Puritans did not altogether reject typology and symbolism within the text of Scripture. They were very open to christological interpretation, at least of some OT narratives and books (e.g., Song of Solomon).*

Our modern day temptation is to under-read, rather than over-read, the text. But we should look again at how the apostles read the OT, and take our "method" from them. Whatever we see them doing is what we should do. And while it's hard to pin down a set of "apostolic rules" for interpretation, we can certainly get an intuitive sense for what is involved in their craft.

- ◆ Interpretation by association (organic reading; looking for connections)

We need to learn to read visually and intertextually. We need to take note of allusions and associations. We need to note metaphors and symbols. We need to read by way of addition, not just subtraction. We need to read the Bible as an ongoing narrative, with a plot and resolution, and not just as isolated bits and pieces.

Test cases: What is the significance of the fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night? Is it a bare historical fact, or does it have a “deeper” meaning?

*Why did Jesus offer the woman at the well living **water**? What is the significance of water in Scripture? By the time to this place in the canon, what associations have accumulated around water? Around Jacob’s well?*

Why did Jesus tell the Laodicean church that if they opened the door, he would come in sup with them? What overtones are included in this reference to dining?

In Luke 24, Jesus says he explained the whole OT in terms of his death and resurrection. How do those two categories of death and resurrection sum up the message of the entire canon? How do they emerge as the theme of any particular book? For example, if Jesus’ “Bible study” traversed the entire OT, what do you think he said when he got to Leviticus? Kings? Hosea? Jonah?

In 1 Kings 17, why did Elijah raise the dead boy up by stretching himself out on the boy three times? Did this form the shape of a cross? Was it so God would look at the boy “through” the cruciform prophet? Why does it happen in the upper room? How does this story relate to 2 Kings 4?

Hebrews 11:35 says faithful women received their dead raised to life again. Look at various resurrections in the Bible (there are seven). Why do women virtually always receive the dead back rather than men? What about the resurrection of Jesus?

Etc.

- ◆ Controls (Are we hearing all God is saying or are we putting words into God’s mouth?); imagination and exegesis; combining artistic sensitivity with scientific rigor; the dangers of under-reading and over-reading; an iron fence around a garden

Where are the brakes on this method of interpretation? With “no rules,” how do we know when to quit. Parallel question: How does an artist know when his painting is done? When one more stroke of the brush would no longer enhance, but distort, the finished product?

There are several checks, including the church's tradition and the "rules" of faith (Irenaeus) and love (Augustine). He who is ruled by the ancient creeds and Christian charity can do no wrong (even if he is wrong!).

- Rule based reading vs. letting the Bible teach you how to read itself

Rule based reading is preoccupied with conformity to a method. When you let the Bible teach you how to read, you are preoccupied with the text itself.

- The genre issue

Many rule-based approaches to hermeneutics focus on genre analysis as the "key" interpretation. Once we have pigeon-holed a piece of biblical text as "history" or "poetry" or "apocalyptic," we can proceed to deal with it accordingly. Often, each genre will have its own set of rules.

- ◆ What is a genre?

We're all familiar with genre as a concept, e.g., various genres of radio stations, tv shows, bookstore and library organization, etc. Texts in a common genre share certain family resemblances or literary/speech patterns.

- ◆ What's the big deal? The good and bad of genre analysis

There is something entirely proper about genre analysis. The diversity of genres within a unified narrative in the canon is a revelation of God's triunity. This can be compared to natural revelation. It can be a helpful rule of thumb.

Unfortunately, sometimes genre-based approaches to hermeneutics yield a hermeneutical pluralism, with different interpretive strategies and methods for different parts of the Bible. The biblical message ends up getting compartmentalized and fragmented. The prophets and the history are not integrated into one another, the epistles and the gospel do not mutually inform one another, the historical books do not factually sufficiently into our reading of poetry, the wisdom literature and the narrative literature are juxtaposed as timeless truths vs. historical particulars, etc. Is Scripture a bunch of separate paintings, each with its own style and frame, or a gigantic mural, in which different scenes and styles all blend together into one beautiful picture?

- ◆ Rules of thumb

Genre analysis is true enough, as far as it goes, but it cannot be applied too rigidly.

- ◆ The pitfalls of "hermeneutical pluralism"

Genre recognition cannot be used to fragment the unity of God's word.

- ◆ Learn to cross genre lines; no pure genres in Scripture; the Bible transcends all human genres; do not impose genre categories upon the Bible

Genres are human categories. Thus, we must beware of imposing them on God's word, which in the nature of the case, transcends those categories. Scripture as a whole is unique; it is its own genre. Plus, we often find genres mixed in Scripture. There is very little "pure" genre. The gospels are a good test case. Are they biographies? Epics? Histories? Theological reflections? We find that, in the end, "gospel" is really its own genre. There's nothing else like it in the world. The same holds true for Acts. It's not pure biography, history, or theology, but a unique mix of all of these.

Test cases: How does the term "mystery" function in various NT genres? Is there some "deep" connection?

How does the history of Esther relate to the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah?

How is Paul's use of "righteousness" language shaped by the use of that terminology in the Psalter and prophets?

What kind of literature is Exodus 21-23? Law? Instruction? Sermon? What about Deuteronomy 25:4? Symbolism is not found in the law codes we're accustomed to; what's going on here?

What are Paul's writings? Systematic theology? Story theology? Pastoral letter?

What genre does the teaching of Jesus fall into? Didactic poetry? Didactic narrative? A mix?

The Jews referred to the historical books as "prophecy." It seems they were on to something. In what sense are these historical narratives also prophetic (typological)? How blurry is the line between history and prophecy?

What genre is Genesis 1? History? Theology/Christology? Symbolic poetry?

Reading within community

- Pastors and teachers interpret Scripture for the community
 - ◆ The Bible and the church (*Sola Scriptura*: Biblical authority vis-à-vis the church and her creeds; Reformed vs. Anabaptistic conceptions of *Sola Scriptura*)
 - ◆ The priesthood of all believers; individualistic distortions ("Read the Bible as though no one else has ever read it")
 - ◆ Belonging to an interpretive tradition (a home or a prison?); the importance of community; an ecumenical community?; knowing the history of interpretation; "All theology is ecclesiology"

- ◆ Church and academy: “The Babylonian captivity of the Bible”
- Hermeneutics and application are communal endeavors – an isolated individual can no more “perform” the text of Scripture than he can perform a symphony
- *Hearing* the Bible
 - ◆ The “means of grace”
 - ◆ The Bible as public truth
 - ◆ How the Bible shapes us
 - ◆ Does faith come by hearing or reading?
- Word and sacrament
 - ◆ Word and sacrament working together; the sweep of God’s saving action
 - ◆ Baptism and illumination
 - ◆ Does taking the Eucharist every week help me understand Scripture better?
- Hermeneutics and ritual

The metaphoric/poetic worldview of Scripture

Metaphor is at the heart of the biblical worldview. We may think of metaphor as something for poets and artists, but theologians cannot do their work without metaphor.

What is metaphor? Metaphors are rooted in connections, or correspondences between things. Metaphor presupposes a Trinitarian view of creation.

The Bible is loaded with metaphor. It recognizes no sharp divide between the poetic and the prosaic. Metaphor is not merely a matter of human convention. Metaphors are built into reality, and even into God’s own being.

Doug Wilson’s example is very useful: Which communicates more truth, “God is immutable” or “God is like a mountain, unchanging”? What metaphor loses in precision, it gains in richness of meaning.

Some object to using metaphor, usually because of a rationalistic, precisionistic view of truth.

- “Metaphorical language just doesn’t measure up”
 - ◆ The myths of literalism

Non-metaphorical language is not as precise as we often think.

God's purpose in Scripture is not give us infinitely precise truth, but to communicate truth in a way that transforms us. Scripture's theological vocabulary bears this out.

- ◆ Modern and postmodern distrust of metaphor (metaphor and truth)

Modernists reject metaphor because it seems to lack the precision they crave. But actually metaphor is [a] inescapable anyway; and [b] a suitable vehicle for truth.

Postmodernists embrace metaphor, but only because they think metaphors lack truth content.

Unfortunately, the church has not always given an adequate account of metaphor (Augustine, Aquinas).

- ◆ The wonders of metaphor
- "Metaphor is the key to Scripture"
 - ◆ Metaphor, Trinity, creation, Scripture, and application

Examples:

Gen. 1 shows that metaphor is bound up in the creation itself.

The 3 persons of the Trinity are metaphorically related.

Man is a metaphor of God.

In applying Scripture, we draw analogies, or craft metaphors, to bring the biblical text into our situation (or vice versa). See Richard Hays.

Etc.

- Creation as the *poesis* of God
 - ◆ A Christian-theistic account of metaphor

Once we begin to see that creation is an interlocking web of metaphors, we can begin to grasp the way biblical symbolism works.

Examples: man and plants; man and animals; Spirit, man, and water; light

- ◆ The inadequacies of the medieval defense of metaphor
- ◆ Metaphor as a theological master concept
- ◆ Metaphor in text and world
 - ◆ Using words to signify; using things to signify
 - ◆ "Going with the grain of creation"

Metaphors are discovered, not invented.

- Cosmic symbolism (the world as text)
 - ◆ The world reveals God, but *how*?

- ◆ Basic categories of creation symbolism
 - ◆ Anthropomorphic/theomorphic language
 - ◆ Learning the “language” of biblical symbolism
- Narrative symbolism (symbol in history)
- The reservoir of images
- Learning to read visually
- Biblical symbolism as a language
- Symbolism in Torah (stories, rituals, tabernacle, etc.)
- Symbolism and metaphor in poetry, history, and prophecy
 - ◆ Creation and new creation, protology and eschatology
 - ◆ Types and symbols
 - ◆ Special features of prophecy
- Symbolism in New Testament
 - ◆ Symbolic frameworks in Gospels, Acts, and epistles
 - ◆ Revelation: The symbolic climax of Scripture

The literary architecture of the Bible

- Poetics and hermeneutics (*how* a text means vs. *what* a text means)

Hermeneutics has to do with the content of the text. Poetics has to do with how the text works to communicate its meaning. The two are inseparable.

- ◆ A philosophy of biblical literature

Pay attention to the structure of biblical stories.

- ◆ Structure and meaning
- ◆ Tragedy and comedy (fall and redemption stories; Bible as master story)
- ◆ Basic story shapes/patterns:
 - ◇ Creation-fall-redemption-consummation
 - ◇ Creation-exile-exodus-victory house building
 - ◇ Creation-death-resurrection
 - ◇ Word-response-evaluation
 - ◇ Two Adam stories and laws (e.g. Levirate)
 - ◇ Husband/bride stories and laws
- ◆ Dynamic vs. static readings of biblical stories and characters
- Pay attention to detail (there are no brute facts in the Bible – interpret *everything!*)
- Chiasm/palindrome

The Bible is pervasively chiasmic. Responsible biblical interpretation requires paying attention to this literary form.

- Parallelism (poetic and narrative)

There are various types of poetic parallelism in the Psalms, Proverbs and elsewhere. Sometimes biblical narratives are created in parallel fashion.

- Numbered patterns

Numbered sets obviously presuppose some kind of theologically numerology; e.g. 3 = God, 4 = creation, 5 = military strength, 6 = fallenness, 7 = perfection/fullness, 12 = Israel/church, etc.

Job 1, Isaiah 11, etc.

- Inclusions
- Type scenes

These are conventional scenes used to make a point. See Robert Altar.

Example: Betrothal at a well; exodus; annunciation

- Repetition
- Recapitulation
- Reversals

Peripety in Esther, etc.

- Classical rhetorical models (the sixfold pattern)
- Acrostic

Obviously this form of literary device is almost impossible to capture in translation.

Lamentations – acrostic contains a theology of grief

Psalm 119

The literary techniques of Biblical authors

- Irony, satire, sarcasm, hyperbole

The Bible is shot through with irony. In fact, the Bible gives us a profound theology of irony.

See Jerry Camery-Hogatt, Paul Duke, etc.

- Rough language

The Bible uses rough, even gutter language, when the situation calls for it.

- Coded language/key words
- Characterization (flat vs. round; full-fledged vs. type vs. agent; personal description)
- Story telling (perspective/viewpoint/"camera angle," narrative speed, plot formation, rising and falling action, transition from wrath to grace, etc.)
- Parables, allegories, puzzles, and riddles
- Poetry and prophecy (special language)
- Songs and creeds (liturgical fragments)

Phil. 2, etc.

- Numerology
- Puns/word plays

Jacob/Jabbok, Ishmael/Isaac, Samuel/Saul, etc.

- Names

Biblical names communicate calling and character. They're like Indian names, and not just given for aesthetic purposes.

- Chronologies and genealogies
- Lists

Vice and virtue lists, etc.

- Aphorisms
- Chreia
- Rhetorical questions
- Synecdoche

The music of history

- The purpose of history
 - ◆ The Father creates a daughter to marry his Son and the Spirit acts as matchmaker
 - ◆ The developing human consciousness and historical "ages" (Galatians 3-4); the goal: the maturity of humanity (Eph. 4)
 - ◆ The ages of story, law, wisdom, and prophecy
 - ◆ Understanding history and culture in light of God's plan
- The biblical metanarrative: story, history, and eschatology
 - ◆ Narrative as Scripture's foundational genre
 - ◆ Narrative and worldview (how stories work)
 - ◆ Narrative, culture, and community (narrative and identity)
 - ◆ The narrative quality of experience; How did the story get there?; story and Storyteller
 - ◆ Scriptural narrative and application
 - ◇ Finding yourself in the story
 - ◇ "Be who you are"
 - ◇ What I do with the story vs. what the story does to me
 - ◇ The biblical metanarrative as unfinished story
- Story theology and a theology of story
- Analyzing the biblical narrative
 - ◆ The phases of history
 - ◆ Covenants as structuring bonds
 - ◆ Epochs and redemptive history (Scripture's eschatological substructure)
 - ◇ Multiple ways of "rightly dividing the word"
 - ◇ New covenants and new creations
 - ◇ Narrative substructure of Pauline theology; Was Paul a systematic theologian or a narrative theologian?
 - ◇ Peter's "worlds"

- Biblical prophecy
 - ◆ The Old Testament as pervasively “prophetic”
 - ◆ Prophetic history and prophetic prophecy
 - ◆ The anticipatory-definitive-progressive-final pattern
 - ◆ When fulfillment exceeds expectation
 - ◆ Multiple fulfillments, fluidity in fulfillment, and typological patterns
- Biblical typology
 - ◆ How the Spirit coordinates history: correspondence and escalation
 - ◆ Typology vs. allegory
 - ◆ Typology vs. prophecy
 - ◆ Meaning of *typos*
 - ◆ Categories of types
 - ◇ Events, rituals, persons
 - ◇ Explicit and implicit
 - ◇ Creation, redemption, and typology
 - ◇ The problems with “typological minimalism”
 - ◆ Features of typology
 - ◆ Typology within the Old Testament (the rhythms of history established)
 - ◆ Old Covenant as typological era, prefiguring the New Covenant
 - ◆ Typology as metaphor applied to history
 - ◆ Typology outside canonical history (the canonical rhythms continue to reverberate)
- Biblical narratives and historical maturation
 - ◆ Types as mere “static snapshots” and stories as mere “doctrinal illustrations”
 - ◆ Types as “prophetic sonograms” or “dynamic pictures”
 - ◆ Typology and the movement from glory to glory
- Key patterns/archetypes/motifs (especially exile/exodus and new creation themes)
- Patterns in history (exemplars and capstones)
- The rhythm of history: spiral theology
 - ◆ The *downward spiral* of the old covenant (old covenant as failure)
 - ◇ Three environments (sanctuary, home, world) and three falls (against Father, Son, and Spirit) in a threefold pattern (Gen. 1-9; Gen. 12-50; Exile-Restoration Era)
 - ◇ Jesus is expelled for us; all three environments and relationships restored
 - ◇ Note: one incomplete mini-spiral (Gen. 9-11), spiral two provides hope of restoration (Gen. 12-50)
 - ◆ The *upward spiral* of redemptive history as a whole (old covenant as preparation)

- ◇ The pre-fall Adamic covenant + six sub-covenants of the old covenant era + new covenant = eight covenant administrations/epochs
- ◇ The priestly-kingly-prophetic cycle x 2 + the new covenant (in which Christ is our priest, king, and prophet)
- ◆ Beyond 70 A. D.: Patterns in history
 - ◇ *Zeitgeist* and distinct historical periods
 - ◇ Applying the spiral to world history: Where are we in the spiral? What's next?
 - ◇ Integrating downward and upward spirals

Other special features

- Sacred time (God and the calendar; various ways of tracking time; recurrent time frames)
- Sacred space (theological geography)
- Ritual and sacrament
- Symbolic/prophetic actions
- Symbolic colors, metals, jewels, clothes, plants, animals, heavenly bodies, etc.
- Symbolic numbers

Spanning the horizons: Applying an ancient revelation to today's world

- The primacy of ethics, the power of the Spirit
- We have not understood the text until we have applied it and it has transformed us – understanding entails performance; the hermeneutical project is not complete until we embody the truth of the text in our lives individually and corporately
- The necessity and difficulty of applying Scripture
 - ◆ Scripture does not give us an abstract, timeless ethic; we cannot “just do what the Bible says”
 - ◆ The cultural embeddedness and the cultural transcendence of the Bible
 - ◇ To say “The whole Bible is culturally conditioned” is to make a statement about how it should be interpreted, not its authority
 - ◆ Epochal/trajectory adjustments
 - ◇ Living under the authority of the Old Covenant Scriptures in the New Covenant age: Conjugating the Old Testament into New Covenant forms
 - ◇ New Testament as trans-epochal (*krisis* ethic); How directly does the New Testament apply to us?
- Root metaphors/focal images: community, cross, new creation
- Application as metaphor-making (NT examples) and enactment
- Risky metaphors:
 - ◆ An unfinished drama/script: How is the story supposed to go?

- ◆ A score composed for others to sing: Are we in tune?
- ◆ Achievement and implementation: Are we being the body of Christ for the world? Are we living out Jesus' new way of being Israel?
- Application by way of imitation, rule/principle, fulfillment/transformation, contrast, and analogy/metaphor/paradigm
- The missing piece: wisdom

Putting it all in perspective: A short history of biblical hermeneutics

- Ancients: Early Jewish and Rabbinical exegesis
- Apostles: A story completed, a promise fulfilled, a law transformed
- Patristics: The Spirit and the Letter
 - ◆ Alexandrians vs. Antiochenes (allegory vs. typology)
 - ◆ The rule of faith (and love)
 - ◆ Creation-fall-redemption pattern (Athanasius)
- Medievals: The four-fold method (*Quadrigena*)
 - ◆ The literal sense
 - ◆ The spiritual sense(s)
 - ◇ Allegorical
 - ◇ Anagogical
 - ◇ Moral
- Reformation: The *sensus plenior* debate; rejection of allegory; correcting Medieval abuses
- Modern and Postmodern: Philosophy and interpretation
 - ◆ The linguistic, literary, and narrative "turns"
 - ◆ Modern: Is presupposition-less interpretation possible?
 - ◇ Grammatico-historical exegesis (minimalism; rationalism)
 - ◇ Kant, the Enlightenment, and the rise of the historical-critical method; "scientific exegesis"
 - ◇ Presuppositions and interpretation (the Bible as God's interpretation of history; we offer an interpretation of an interpretation)
 - ◆ Postmodern: Is "objective" interpretation possible?
 - ◇ What is the "public" task of the interpreter?
 - ◇ Is there a meaning in this text?
 - ◇ Multi-referentiality
 - ◇ Do we read the text or does the text read us?
 - ◆ Getting a foothold
 - ◇ A Trinitarian approach to the location of meaning
 - * Author, text, and audience
 - ◇ Identifying text with interpretation (Is all interpretation provisional?)
 - ◇ Living as a Scripture shaped community

- What's next?
 - ◆ Critical realism; symbolic realism
 - ◆ Towards a Reformed *Quadrige*
 - ◇ Literary-historical
 - ◇ Theological/christological/ecclesiological
 - * Symbolic/metaphorical
 - * Typological/eschatological
 - * Ethical/applicational

Special problems in biblical interpretation

- Alleged internal contradictions
- Alleged contradictions with the "assured results of scholarship"
- The role of general revelation in reading special revelation

Common exegetical mistakes