

Threaded: An Introduction to Interpreting the Bible

Mark DeYmaz • September 10, 2023

1. In our recent *Challenging Assumptions* series, we asked and addressed good questions.
 - a. How can Jesus be the only way to God? (Mark DeYmaz)
 - b. Why should I allow the Bible to inform my life? (Lawrence Hicks)
 - c. Why should we believe what the Bible says? (Mark DeYmaz)
 - d. Why should we trust Christianity when the Church is so full of hypocrisy? (Harry Li)
 - e. Why would a good God allow bad things to happen? (Lawrence Hicks)
 - b. Listen to all of these messages on our podcast
2. In that series, addressing the question *Why should we believe what the Bible says?* I shared that supposed contradictions in the Bible are usually cases where someone misunderstands the genre or context of the writing.
 - a. As we concluded, the Bible does not contradict itself on any doctrinal issue.
 - b. That said, the erroneous claim often comes from people quoting or sourcing the Bible literally when rather it should be interpreted literarily
 - c. The fact is, there are a variety of literary genres in the Bible (which itself is a collection of literary works)
 - d. Therefore, to rightly understand and interpret the Bible we must recognize the various genres within it.
3. Another thing to keep in mind is that Jesus is the center of it all.
 - a. He's why words were written, where they point, and why the Bible exists
 - b. From cover to cover, Jesus is present, anticipated, revealed, and expected.
4. So... To better equip us for interpretation of the Bible as well as to recognize Jesus as the center of it all we're beginning a new series today called *Threaded*. Here's why...
 - a. It's long been recognized that a thread of redemption (i.e., salvation) via faith in Jesus runs throughout the Bible from cover to cover
 - i. (Genesis 3:15) And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.
 - ii. (Revelation 22:20, 21) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.
 - b. This biblical thread, pointing over and over again to Jesus, is referred to by some as the Scarlet (Red) Thread of Redemption, a description lifted from the account of Rahab's interaction with Israeli spies in Jericho (Joshua 2)
 - i. Rahab was a prostitute living in Jericho at a time prior to Jewish conquest of the region who will later become an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5)

- ii. After 40 years in the wilderness, Joshua sends two spies into the Promised Land to gather intelligence ahead of conquest, especially to learn more about the city of Jericho
- iii. It's there that they encounter Rahab
- iv. Though not a Jew herself, Rahab declares her faith in the God of the Jews, seeking salvation for herself and family ahead of the impending invasion.
 - 1) First, she hides the spies from the King of Jericho who is looking for them and lies about their whereabouts
 - 2) The account continues in vs. 8...
⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, Rahab went up on the roof ⁹and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land... ¹⁰We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt... When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. NOTE: *It's a statement of faith, looking to God for salvation.*
 - 3) She goes on to tell the spies: ¹² "...please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death."
 - 4) In gratitude for Rahab's protection the spies swear an oath to spare her and her family, saying,
 - "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down."
 - a. IOW, the spies agree to spare Rahab only if she tied together a red cord and hung it in her window as a sign of their agreement.
 - b. Now, readers of the Bible have long understood this as a type harkening back to the first Passover (Exodus 12) where the Jews were instructed to take an innocent lamb into their homes, kill and eat it, and then paint it's blood of over the doorposts of their homes as a sign of their faith and to be spared from the impending judgment of God affecting the firstborn son in every Egyptian home.
 - 5) Both of these instances point metaphorically to the eternal salvation that comes to those who similarly paint the blood of Jesus over the doorposts of their hearts... Who hang the red cord of redemption in the window of their soul signifying faith and looking to Him for salvation.

5. So, over the next seven weeks we're going to discuss seven (7) major genres in the Bible and see, among other things, where in each one of them Jesus is revealed. We'll consider biblical literature and classify writings of:
 - a. History
 - b. Jewish Law
 - c. Poetry & Parables
 - d. Wisdom Literature (i.e., Proverbs and Ecclesiastes)
 - e. Prophecy (including the Revelation of John)
 - f. Biographies (i.e., Gospels)
 - g. Letters (i.e., Epistles)

6. For the purpose of biblical interpretation, however, it's not enough merely to understand that varying genres of literature exist in the Bible or that Jesus is at the center of all that is written.

7. Rather, we must first commit ourselves to exegesis (not eisegesis)
 - a. Exegesis and eisegesis are two conflicting approaches in Bible study and interpretation.
 - b. Exegesis seeks to draw meaning out of the text as opposed to eisegesis which erroneously reads meaning into the text (commonly referred to as taking verse out of context)
 - c. Through exegesis, we draw conclusions about
 - i. what was written
 - ii. by and to whom it was written
 - iii. why it was written, and
 - iv. what it means for us to day
 based on careful, objective analysis of the text.

8. We should recognize as well that...
 - a. our analysis of any given biblical text
 - b. our interpretation of it
 - c. the conclusions we make and/or
 - d. the meaning we take from it
 ...is often governed by preformed thoughts or opinions we bring to it in a moment, whether we realize it or not.
 - e. Stated another way, we must be careful to not allow our interpretation and conclusions to be erroneously shaped
 - i. By what we may have heard or been taught in the past about God or a particular passage,
 - ii. By past experiences in the church or with Christians,
 - iii. By our own cultural contexts, personalities, and/or even by sin.
 - f. Otherwise, we will read meaning into the text (eisegesis) and not derive meaning from or out of the text (exegesis) as we should.

9. That is why, in addition to a commitment to exegesis, we must commit ourselves to a sound biblical hermeneutic (i.e., a philosophy or theory governing one's approach to exegesis and how conclusions are drawn from the biblical text)
 - a. Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation of literary texts by providing principles and methods from which understanding can be gained.
 - b. Where exegesis refers to the interpretation of a specific Biblical text, hermeneutics decides for us which principles we will use in order to interpret the text.
10. The fact is, not everyone interprets the Bible using the same hermeneutic. There are at least five to six methods to choose from:
 - a. Literal
What is the plain meaning of the text
 - b. Moral
What is the ethical point of text that should govern our behavior
 - c. Allegorical
Looks for the secondary level meaning of the text foreshadowing Jesus and the people or events of the New Testament
 - d. Anagogical
Looks for mystical, prophetic or Messianic meaning of the text in view of the life to come
 - e. Red Letters
The words of Jesus are preeminent... Everything else is secondary
 - f. At Mosaic, we adhere to a Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 - i. The Historical-Grammatical method (aligned to a degree with the literal approach) considers:
 - 1) **Historical and Cultural Context** (i.e., author, date, intended audience, purpose, geographic location, socio-political times, etc.)
 - 2) **Linguistic Construction** (i.e., literary form, language, grammar, outline or flow of the writing, syntax or construction of sentences, etc.) in order to discover the author's original meaning and intent.
 - 3) **Critical Assessment**
 - a. Scripture interprets Scripture
 - b. How have others interpreted the text throughout time
 - c. Interpret the unclear in light of the clear
 - 4) **Guided by and Dependent upon the Holy Spirit**
 - 5) **Once understood, we look for timeless truth** (i.e., truth not otherwise bound to one particular historical period or cultural) for application in modern times.
11. So, in this series, we will:
 - a. Seek to draw meaning out of the text through good exegesis
 - b. Apply a Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic
 - c. Learn from and about various literary genres in the Bible, and
 - d. Observe Jesus at the center of it all