

Rethinking Scripture

Bring the text into the context

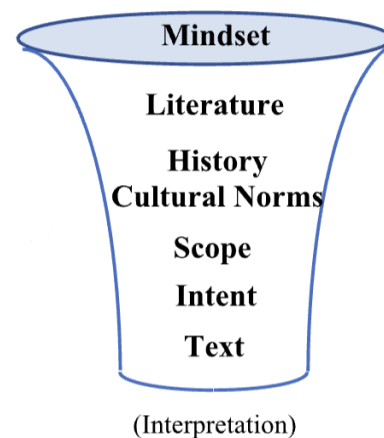
The Seven Hermeneutical Principles: A Christocentric Approach to Scripture

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE: Start with Jesus, Not Doctrine Every passage must be understood in light of Christ and the overarching story of God's relationship with humanity. Trust the Story – the meta-narrative of scripture.

The Hermeneutical Funnel: Think of interpretation as a funnel that moves from broad view to a more specific understanding:

1. View Scripture with an Eastern Mindset - We bring a contemporary, Western mindset filled with assumptions to the text that are often different than an ancient, Eastern mindset. One mindset is not right and the other wrong, but it is extremely important to understand the Eastern mindset as a start point because scripture was written from ancient, Eastern mindset.

Christocentric Application: Jesus lived, taught, and ministered within this Eastern mindset. Understanding His cultural context helps us see Him more clearly.



2. View Scripture in Light of its Judeo Roots - Scripture was written out of a rich Jewish heritage of traditions, forms, styles, values, and linguistics, and its own mindset. Incorporating these factors is critical to accurately understand the text and its authors.

Christocentric Connection: Jesus was Jewish, fulfilled Jewish prophecy, and worked within Jewish religious and cultural frameworks. The Law and Prophets all point forward to Him.

3. Choose "Literature" Over "Literal" - Determining the type of literature a book or passage was written in is important to an ancient understanding. How does this type of literature operate? What is it seeking to do? Are there keys to understanding this genre of literature?

4. The Text Wasn't Written in a Vacuum

5. Don't Put Answers on the Text That the Text Isn't Trying to Answer

6. Scripture Was Written FOR You, Not TO You

7. Words Matter

Choose "Literature" Over "Literal"

Why Literary Genre Matters

Exercise:

Think of these three types of literature and what your expectations are while reading them.

1. Your favorite novel _____
2. A birthday card _____
3. Owners manual for a/your car _____

Just like you wouldn't use a Tom Clancy novel to fix your car, or give someone a car owner's manual as a birthday gift, **different types of literature serve different purposes**. The biblical authors chose specific genres intentionally to accomplish specific purposes.

Scripture contains many different styles of literature. Paying attention to the genre shapes what we look for, the expectations, and the types of questions we ask in the interpretive process. If we don't account for the literary style, we miss what makes a particular book exquisite.

Examples of Biblical Genres:

- Historical Narrative
- Parable [Narrative]
- Epic Narrative [Poetry]
- Biographical Narrative
- Comedy
- Tragedy
- Poetry (creative, provocative, image laden)
- Apocalyptic [poetry] (passionate, invoking)
- Wisdom [poetry] (reflective)
- Gospel
- Letter
- Speeches
- Legislative

GOSPELS: The Art of Ancient "Good News"

Understanding Euangelion [eu.an'gel.i.on] (εὐαγγέλιον)

Definition: Greek word meaning "good news" - but this wasn't invented by Christians. It was a well-established literary form used for centuries before Christ.

Purpose of Ancient Gospels: Gospels were written to **announce a king or ruler and describe the kingdom they were bringing**. They served as both announcement and invitation.¹

Jesus' Gospel: Pushes against all other gospels - His is the Kingdom of Peace through love

The Four Gospels: Different Kings for Different Audiences

Gospel Structure: Two Essential Questions

For any gospel, always ask:

1. **Who is this written to?**
2. **How does it portray Jesus?**
3. **What does it mean to be in this kingdom?**

Matthew: The Gospel for Religious Outcasts (85-95 AD)²

Audience: Outcast Jews - tax collectors, prostitutes, those kept at arm's length by religious establishment **Author's Background:** Matthew himself was a tax collector

Key Features:

- Very Jewish, includes genealogy with women of questionable pasts
- Stories of religious outsiders becoming insiders
- Emphasis on acceptance for those looked down upon

Mark: The Gospel for Roman/Gentile Audiences (70 AD)³

Audience: Romans and Gentiles unfamiliar with Jewish traditions **Why Written First:** Gentiles were the last to hear about Jesus and needed the most help understanding Jewish context

Key Features:

- Helps them understand Judaism and who Jesus is
- Perspective of Jesus' practical deeds over his words
- Fast-paced, action-oriented narrative

¹Extra information, context, and questions are on Page 8 & 9

² BEMA Discipleship podcast episode of Matthew on page 11

³ BEMA Discipleship podcast episode of Mark on page 11

Luke: The Gospel for Hellenized Jewish Christians (85-95 AD)⁴

Audience: Jewish Christians who were still very Jewish but lived in Greek-influenced areas **Unique**

Feature: Claims to write an "orderly" (sequenced) account

The Synagogue Reading Theory (M.D. Goulder): Luke likely structured his gospel to match the synagogue reading cycle:

- **Torah cycle:** Complete reading every year
- **Tanakh cycle:** Complete reading every three years
- **Luke's innovation:** A gospel that could be read alongside traditional synagogue readings

Evidence for this theory:

- Luke often spells Jerusalem in its Hebrew form using Greek letters instead of the Greek name
- Includes genealogy and more of Jesus' childhood
- Shows both positive and negative aspects of Jewish leaders
- "Orderly" in Greek *kathexēs* [*kaθe 'xis*] often meant "sequential" in synagogue contexts

Why This Matters: Early Jewish Christians still attended synagogue - this was their life and community. Luke provides a gospel that enhances their existing scripture reading patterns.

John: The Gospel for Greek Philosophical Minds (90-100 AD)⁵

Audience: Greeks and Gentiles, especially those influenced by Greek philosophy **Why We**

Recommend John to New Believers: It translates Jesus into concepts non-Jewish audiences can grasp

The Logos Strategy: Brilliant Philosophical Bridge

Greek Understanding of Logos by the First Century:

Heraclitus (6th century BC) - Born in Ephesus:

- Taught the unity of opposites
- "No man ever steps into the same river twice"
- Used logos to describe the universal, rational principle governing all things
- *"Of the logos being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it... most people fail to grasp how deep it is even after they encounter it"*
- *"Listening not to me but to the logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one"*

Marcus Aurelius (Roman Emperor 161-180 AD): *"Logos is the truth that governs all things"*

⁴ BEMA Discipleship podcast episode of Luke on page 11

⁵ BEMA Discipleship podcast episode of John on page 11

Plato: *"Logos is bigger than the gods. It is the truth and rational order of the universe that connects all things"*

The Greek Philosophical Problem: Greeks were proud of their intellectual heritage but couldn't find ultimate truth in their gods (who were flawed and limited). Philosophers turned to "Logos" as the supreme, eternal, rational principle behind everything.

John's Brilliant Opening Strategy: "In the beginning was the **Logos**..."

Greek Response: "Well, of course! We've been talking about the Logos for centuries!"

"...and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God..."

Greek Response: "Profound! This aligns with our best philosophical thinking!"

Then John's Shocking Revelation (verse 14): "And the **Logos** became flesh and dwelt among us..."

The Revelation: The supreme philosophical principle they'd been seeking for 600 years? That's Jesus Christ.

Christocentric Significance: John is showing that **Jesus is the answer to humanity's deepest philosophical and spiritual questions**. The Greeks had been searching for ultimate truth and meaning - John reveals that this truth has a name: Jesus. This isn't just clever rhetoric; it's showing that Christ is the fulfillment of all human searching for God.

Letters: Personal Communication with Purpose

Key Principle: Read letters as coherent flows of thought, not fragmented verses.

For any letters ask:

1. Who was it written to?
2. What is the overall flow and sense of the letter?
3. What is the tone?

Letter Examples and Their Tones:

1 Corinthians – Corrective Tone:

- Addressing massive ego problems and infighting
- Need for unity and community
- Paul as stern but loving parent

Philippians and Peter – Encouraging Tone:

- Written to believers struggling through difficulties
- Paul as coach giving encouragement
- Focus on perseverance through struggle

Galatians – Frustrated Tone:

- "Who has bewitched you?"
- Paul's anger at blending works and faith
- Frustration at returning to legalism

Romans – Systematic Guidance:

- Most organized and thorough approach
- Written to help navigate leadership challenges between Jews and Romans
- Addressing specific tensions in the Roman church

Historical Narrative

Critical Understanding: Every history book has an agenda - this isn't dishonesty, it's purpose.

Biblical Example: Kings vs. Chronicles

Same History, Different Agendas:

1 & 2 Kings:

- **Written:** Before and during exile
- **Focus:** Both Northern and Southern Kingdoms
- **Agenda:** "Their failure to trust God leads to disaster"
- **Tone:** Emphasizes sin, consequences, failure of leaders
- **Purpose:** Warning - "Trust God or face catastrophe"

1 & 2 Chronicles:

- **Written:** After exile
- **Focus:** Lineage of Judah and Davidic dynasty
- **Agenda:** "God is at work through the line of David to bring His kingdom and nothing can stop it"
- **Tone:** Much more positive about Judah and faithfulness to God
- **Purpose:** Hope - "Even in worst failure, God's plan continues"

Comedy

Purpose: Lower people's defenses through humor to help them see something about themselves they couldn't otherwise see.

Jonah as Comedy - NOT About Faith in Miracles

The Ironic Reversals:

Scene 1: The Storm (Jonah 1:5)

- **Expected:** Man of God prays first during crisis
- **Reality:** Pagan sailors pray while Jonah sleeps
- **Jonah 1:8-10:** "I am a Hebrew and worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land"
- **Captain's response:** "What kind of idiot runs from the God who made the ocean BY GETTING ON A BOAT?"

Scene 2: The Sacrifice

- **Expected:** Man of God would sacrifice for others
- **Reality:** "The sea got worse and worse, ship going to sink. They ask Jonah what to do? HE WOULD RATHER DIE THAN HELP SAVE THE NINEVITES."
- **Text:** "They rowed all the more" to avoid throwing him overboard
- **Jonah:** "I'd rather die than obey God"

Scene 3: The Fish

- **Point:** "Jonah can't do anything right. He's a buffoon. But in the spirit of comedy, you can't run from the God of the sea by jumping into it. He can't even get that right."

The Comedy's Purpose: As we laugh at Jonah's ridiculous obstinacy, we're meant to ask: **"Who am I refusing to love that God actually loves? What am I being obstinate about?"**

Christocentric Application: Jesus calls us to love our enemies and reach those we consider "unreachable." Jonah's comedy reveals our need for Christ's heart of compassion for all people, even those we think don't deserve God's love.

Prophetic/Prophetic Oracle

Voice and View:

Prophetic texts tend to be in first person messenger. “Thus says the LORD.”

The prophet is delivering a message. The view of the story is looking forward into the future. Often describing what current actions if not changed will cause in the future. It uses oracles or proclamations. The focus is on God’s interpretation of what’s happening, rather than simply telling what happened.

The critical distinction between forthtelling and foretelling revolutionizes prophetic reading. Research demonstrates that less than 2% of prophecy is directly Messianic, less than 5% concerns the New Covenant age, less than 1% addresses our distant future, while over 90% addressed the prophet’s contemporaries.⁶

Isaiah contains 82% poetry, while Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah approach 100% poetic composition. Hebrew parallelism creates rhythm of thought—synonymous lines reinforcing ideas, antithetical lines creating contrast, and synthetic lines advancing concepts. Vivid imagery proliferates: Israel as unfaithful wife, vineyard, or sheep; God as husband, shepherd, or warrior; cosmic language depicting political catastrophes as stars falling and mountains melting.

Reading major prophets well demands historical-grammatical method interpreting words in normal sense within historical context, recognizing diverse literary forms requiring appropriate interpretation, understanding covenant theology as the framework for all accusations and judgments, acknowledging near/far fulfillment where prophecies telescope between immediate and eschatological meaning, recognizing conditional nature of judgements containing implicit calls to repentance, maintaining Christ-centered reading seeing prophetic trajectories fulfilled in Jesus, comparing Scripture with Scripture, distinguishing forthtelling from foretelling, recognizing cosmic language as political upheaval imagery rather than always literal, and attending to New Testament application.

Common misunderstandings plague prophetic reading. Many assume prophecy primarily predicts distant future when 90% addressed contemporaries. Readers expect all prophecies fulfilled literally without recognizing conditional elements and pattern fulfillment. Cosmic language gets mistaken for literal world-ending when ancient convention used such imagery for political catastrophes—Isaiah 13’s darkened sun and moon described Babylon’s historical fall in 539 BC, not the final judgment. Atomistic reading yanks verses from context to apply randomly to current events. Missing the gospel reduces prophets to mere ethical teachers rather than Christ-heralds.

⁶ Fee and Stuart’s book *How to read the bible for all its worth 4th Edition*

Features:

- Urgent, emotional, confrontational. Woe oracles pronounce “Ah” or “Woe” against specific offenses before detailing doom.
 - Example: Isaiah 5 ‘six woes’.
- Intense symbolism is used more to motivate people than simply provide clarity.
 - Example: Jeremiah buried a ruined loincloth to depict Judah’s coming destruction, wore a yoke to symbolize Babylonian captivity, and brought a field during a siege to promise future restoration.
- The prophets’ cares & concerns are strongly connected to the specific covenants with the people they are addressing.

Keys:

Understand the specific covenants associated with the people the prophets are addressing.

View the covenants in connection with their role in the larger meta-narrative.

Prophecy is more about forth telling than foretelling. The primary role of prophecy is not about predicting or telling the future. It is about understanding current events with a forward thinking mind-set.

Extra context, information, and Questions

Historical Context: Gospel as Military and Political Literature

Alexander the Great's Gospel Strategy: Alexander the Great’s use of gospel literature raised the prominence of gospel being used in the ancient world.

Alexander's "Kingdom" Offer to Egypt:

- **Healthcare:** "I'll bring you healthcare like you've never had"
- **Entertainment:** "You'll be entertained like never before"
- **Sports:** "Until you've watched our Olympic games, you don't know what you're missing"
- **Education:** "We'll educate everyone, not just the elite"

The Result: Egyptian cities opened their gates without a single battle, recognizing Alexander as a deity because they wanted the kingdom he was offering.

Caesar Augustus' Gospel: The Priene Tablet (9 BC)

*"Citizens of Priene: Since Divine Providence has brought to life the most perfect good in Augustus, whom she filled with virtues for the benefit of all mankind, bestowing on us Augustus Caesar as **Savior of the World**, for he has put an end to war and brought perfect peace. By the epiphany of his birth, he brought **the gospel of peace** to all mankind. For that reason, the Greeks of Asia have declared that the New Year should begin from now on, on the 23rd of September, the day of the birth of this god. Never will another **gospel** surpass the **gospel** that was announced at his birth. He is not only Lord of the Empire, but **Lord of the Earth and of the calendar and of time itself.**"*

Key Observations:

- Uses the exact word "euangelion" found in our New Testament
- Claims Augustus as "Savior of the World"
- Describes him as bringing "gospel of peace"
- Calls him "Lord of earth and time"

Rome's Gospel: Pax Romana - "We keep the peace through force"

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Understanding Gospel Literature Through Christ

3. Four Gospel Audiences: Why do you think God inspired four different gospels instead of one comprehensive account? How do the different portraits of Jesus in each Gospel help us see Him more completely?

Your thoughts:

4. Modern Gospel Applications: If you were to write a "gospel" announcing Jesus to your specific community/culture, what aspects of His character and kingdom would you emphasize? How would you show He's the King they've been searching for?

Your thoughts:

Personal Application & Action Steps

This Week's Challenge

What will I do differently this week based on understanding these hermeneutical principles?

Genre Identification Exercise: Choose three biblical books you've never considered the genre of. Research and identify their literary type and original audience. How does this change your approach?

Books: _____, _____, _____ Insights:

Book Recommendation - From Glenn

Asking Better Questions of the Bible by Marty Solomon

BEMA Discipleship Podcast Episode Recommendation:

Episode 18: "The Tail of Two Kingdoms" - Contrasting this world's kingdom (Empire) and God's.

Episode 35: "Crossroads of the Earth" - Where geographically was Israel...and why?

Episode 52: "Jonah – Potential" - Jonah, the story and the genre of the story.

Episode 47-71: A look at the strong character during the reign of the North and South Kingdom.

Episode 74-81, 83: The people, the political climate, the text, and the Messiah. What was Jesus coming into when He came from Heaven to Earth?

Episode 84-87: The Gospels and who they were written to and for.

Episode 90: "A Gospel of Two Kingdoms" - The birth of Christ and juxtaposition of two kingdoms.

Key Language Terms

Greek Terms

Euangelion (εὐαγγέλιον): "Good news" - ancient literary form used to announce a king and describe their kingdom. Used by Alexander the Great, Augustus Caesar, and later by Christian authors to announce Jesus as King.

Logos (λόγος): Spoken words, not written text. Greek philosophical concept representing the rational principle governing the universe. John uses this to describe Jesus as the ultimate truth that Greeks had been seeking for centuries.

Grphe (γραφή): "Something written" - refers to written scripture. We get "graphic" from this root.

Lego (λέγω): "To speak" - root word of logos. When the Bible talks about "the word," it often means spoken communication, not written text.

Biblios (βιβλίος): Book - The Bible is actually 66 books, a library, not a single book.

Kathexēs (καθεξῆς): Orderly - In order, successively, consecutively, one after another.

Hebrew Terms

Torah: The first five books of the Bible (Law). Read completely through each year in synagogue cycle.

Tanakh: The entire Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Read completely through every three years in synagogue cycle.