

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 12, Text Centered

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We've been discussing the author's intention as one of the facets of a historical approach to interpreting scripture, that is looking at the author's intended meaning as the primary goal of interpretation. A couple of the historical persons, one in particular that you need to know related to the author's intent, we talked a little bit about Friedrich Schleiermacher as one of the important figures in the quest for the author's intention as the primary goal of interpretation. Outside of biblical studies completely, but interestingly an individual that has played an important role in biblical scholars' own exposition of their understanding of the author's intention is an named E.D. Hirsch.

E.D. Hirsch in an early book called *Validity in Interpretation* suggested that one needs to distinguish between meaning and significance. Hirsch said meaning was that which the author intended to communicate as inscribed in the text itself. That is the meaning that was placed there by the author, the meaning that the author intended to communicate by the language symbols, the structure of the text which revealed what the author was intending to communicate.

So the original meaning of the text was tied with the author's intention. As distinguished from Hirsch said, the significance of the text and that it was the relationship of that meaning to virtually anything else, which most biblical theologians and scholars would label applications. They'd say the meaning is what the author originally intended to communicate, the significance would be the application of that meaning to the modern-day context.

So Hirsch played an important role in establishing the importance of the author's intention, especially as revealed in the text and communicated through the text, the

author's intended meaning that the author willed to communicate in the text, as distinguished from the relationship of that meaning to anything else and other situations, which Hirsch labeled significance. And you'll often see that distinction between meaning and significance picked up, again, especially by biblical interpreters, to distinguish between the meaning of a text and its ongoing relevance and application to the modern-day reader. But we said that although there are many reasons that have been used to argue for the author's intent as a worthy and necessary goal in interpretation, on the other hand, some have rejected the author's intention for a variety of reasons as a valid or even a necessary or possible goal of interpretation.

Before we look at that, it's important to realize that most who would hold the author's intention do not necessarily think it is easy or automatic or straightforward or that one can capture the author's intention exhaustively or perfectly, although they still think it is possible and necessary. But there are some who reject the author's intention as a possible or a necessary goal of interpretation. So why have some rejected the author's intent as the goal of interpretation? Why are some convinced that it is not a valid or even possible objective of interpretation? And again, my list is not meant to be exhaustive, but simply to capture some of the possible objections.

First of all, some have rejected the author's intention because it is impossible to get in the mind of an author and determine what that author intends to communicate. Especially with authors that are no longer alive, it is impossible to consult with them to determine exactly what they meant. Some early responses to the author's intent formulated what is called as the intentional fallacy, that is trying to reproduce or recover the author's thought process or the author's mind, the author's intention, and that is the author's thinking is seen as inaccessible.

I remember one time I was talking to a well-known New Testament scholar over in England, and I was talking to him about his book, a book he had written, and I quoted a sentence, and after I quoted it, he said, did I really say that? I wonder what I meant by that. That got me to thinking if even living authors sometimes don't know or forget what they meant, how much more authors who are no longer alive, and especially a text written 2,000 years or more before the time of modern-day interpreters. So for those kinds of reasons, some say because it's impossible to get inside of the mind of the author, because it's impossible to understand what the author was thinking and intending, especially authors that are no longer alive to tell us that recovery of the author's intention is impossible.

Again, often known as the intentional fallacy. A second reason is that an author might fail to communicate adequately. That is, some authors might be incompetent.

Some authors may communicate poorly, may communicate something they didn't intend to say. They might not express clearly or adequately what they are trying to get across and what they want to say, and they may even mislead readers at times, even unintentionally. So therefore, the author's intent is unrecoverable or impossible or unnecessary.

Another objection is that at times authors might communicate better than they know. That is, an author might say something, and you might go to that author and say, did you mean this? And the author's response might be something like this, and you may have heard this, no, I did not intend that, but that certainly makes sense, and I would accept that as a valid reading or interpretation of what I said. A number of authors have written books, that one in particular I'm thinking of, that record examples of students reading their text and reading their work and coming up with interpretations that the author did what never intended to mean, but still considered a valid understanding and insight into that text.

And again, maybe you've experienced that where you've said something, someone has interpreted it and said, did you mean this? And you've responded, no, I did not intend that, but that is a valid understanding of what I said. I would accept that as a true understanding of what it was I said. So because sometimes authors communicate better than they know, and readers sometimes find things in text that the authors don't intend, but nevertheless would agree is a valid interpretation and meaning in the text, how much more with, again, with dead authors, authors that are not here to tell us whether they intended this meaning or not, or even if they did not, that this meaning is still valid.

So because authors often communicate, even today we communicate sometimes better than we know, some have suggested therefore author's intention is impossible to recover or at least unnecessary. Another reason, and again, not all of these are related, some of them are, but another reason that primarily owes its origin to more literary studies of that is texts are seen as free-floating, that have a life of their own. Once the author writes a text, it now is cut off from the life of the author, and it has a life of its own.

That is, the author no longer has a say in determining its exact meaning. The text now has a life of its own, and readers then perhaps are then allowed to make sense of the text and to find different meanings. So again, because texts are autonomous, they're free-floating entities with a life of their own, the author's intention then is unrecoverable, or at least it's not valid to restrict ourselves to the author's intention.

Some that would think that the author's intention is still a valid goal might still suggest, but we can't limit it only to the author's intention. A fifth objection could be that interpreters often come up with different meanings and different interpretations of the same text. If the author's intention was truly the primary goal,

and truly a valid goal, and a recoverable goal, then why is it that interpreters come up with different interpretations of text? So why does someone read Genesis 1 and 2, and they're convinced in a seven literal, 24-hour day creation period, why do others read the same text and see it as referring to something that takes place over a much longer period of time? Why do some readers read Revelation 20 and the Millennial passage and are convinced it's teaching pre-millennialism, while other readers reading the same text going after the author's intention are convinced of amillennialism? Or why do some readers read Hebrews chapter 6, the well-known warning in Hebrews chapter 6, and convinced that it fits an Arminian perspective, and others read the same text and are convinced that it supports Calvinism? Or some read the well-known gender passages in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2, and some are convinced that it permits women to participate in any form of ministry, including ordination and functioning as senior pastors, while others read the same text, going after the author's intention, and see it as limiting the roles that women should play in ministry.

So because interpreters come up with different meanings and interpretations of a text, some would suggest that those readers who are seeking the author's intention, treating the Bible as the Word of God, that they come up with different interpretations, who has found the author's intent, some would conclude that the author's intention is unrecoverable. A final one, again there could be others, there could be other examples that we could point to, but New Testament authors themselves often seem to find new meanings in Old Testament texts. For example, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, 1 through 5, 1 Corinthians chapter 10, 1 through 5, where Paul addresses one of the many problems he addresses in the Corinthian church, compares his readers to the Old Testament generation of God's people as they came out of Exodus and went through the wilderness, and here's what Paul says, for I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud, and that they all passed through the sea.

They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate of the same spiritual food. Remember when God feeds the Israelites with manna, and when God would cause water to come out of the rock? Now listen to this, and they drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

I would challenge you to go back and read through the original narrative and find a clear reference to Jesus Christ as the Israelites wandered through the wilderness. So some would say because of examples like that, or Matthew 1 23, where Matthew quotes a text from Isaiah, chapter 7, the promise of a virgin who will conceive and give birth to a son, Matthew quotes that as being fulfilled in Jesus, the person of Jesus Christ. Yet if you go back to the original context in Isaiah, at least at first glance, it doesn't seem to be a Christological text or a prediction of a coming Messiah.

And so some would look at examples like that and others and say even New Testament authors did not seem interested in recovering the author's intended meaning from the Old Testament. So the conclusion is from this that some would often say that the author's intention is unnecessary or impossible to recover or invalid or at the very least we can't restrict interpretation and meaning only to the author's intention. So given these two perspectives, what should we say or what should we do with author's intention? What should we say about it? Is author's intention still a valid and a necessary goal? Let me make just several observations about author's intention that would suggest I think that the author's intention still is a worthy and necessary and valid goal.

First of all, even if we don't do it or pursue it in the same way that Schleiermacher did or that in a way that it has sometimes been treated or pursued in the past, but first of all, the first observation I would make is it seems to me that if the Bible is

indeed God's inspired word, if the text that we have is nothing less than although a human product, a divine product product as well, that suggests to me that author's intention is still a valid and a necessary goal. If God stands behind his word, there must be some stable meaning that one can get at. That is, there must be a meaning that God has placed there that he intends to communicate to his people and that he must have created us so that we can understand it.

And furthermore, when you read through the text of scripture, God clearly expects his people to obey and to respond to his word so that it complete skepticism about meaning and author's intention or agnosticism about recovering meaning seems to be incompatible with the inspiration of scripture as God's word. As we're going to see, that doesn't mean that it's easy, that there's never disagreement. It doesn't mean that meaning can be exhaustively or perfectly recovered, but certainly it still stands as a valid goal since given the nature of God's word as scripture, which God intends his people to obey, suggests that God, there must be a meaning he has placed within it that he wants people to understand.

Second, I think when we understand author's intention, we need to understand that the goal is not to recover the author's psychological thought process. More recent explanations and expositions of author's intention have been careful to avoid that. The goal is not to uncover the author's thought process or psychological state or the intention of the mind, but the only access we have to the author is the product, the text that the author has written and that he or she has produced.

So that when we think of author's intention, I think we need to be a little bit more nuanced. It's the meaning that the author has encoded in the text. The text is the only evidence that we have of what an author was trying to do and what an author was trying to communicate.

Again, the assumption is the author was attempting to communicate something at a certain place and at a certain time, and the text is a record of a historical communicative act on the part of an author to a reader. So we can uncover that act. We can explore and explain and study and uncover what it was the author was trying to do by considering the text that the author has produced.

We can uncover what the author most likely intended to mean by as revealed in the grammar of the text, as revealed in the structure of the text. In other words, like other historical documents or like other historical events, the text is an account of an author's intention to do something, to communicate something, an account of an author's intentional communicative act. And so the goal is to understand that act as much as possible.

So not to get in the mind of the author necessarily, or to put ourselves somehow in, to empathize with the author, but to understand what the text reveals about the author's intention to communicate something. A third observation regarding author's intention is the goal is not to be exhaustive or perfect in our understanding. That is, the goal of author's intention is not to suggest that somehow we can exhaustively or perfectly understand the author's intended meaning, but that we can do so substantially and adequately in our interpretation.

So we need to be aware of confusing being exhaustive with an exhaustive explanation of the author's meaning with being able to do so substantially. Just because we can't perfectly and exhaustively uncover the author's meaning does not mean we can't do so to some degree. So once again, we need to be more nuanced in our understanding of author's intention.

Number four, hermeneutics of suspicion must be replaced, I think, by a hermeneutics of respect. That is, instead of approaching the text with the suspicion that we can

find the author's intention or outright rejecting it, that needs to be replaced by a hermeneutics of respect. Respect for the ancient author, respect for the ancient text, respect for the ancient context requires that we do give it some priority in our interpretation.

So there is merit, I think, to the meaning-significant distinction that we talked about in relationship to Hirsch. That the meaning is letting the text speak, realizing that this text was produced by an author in a certain historical context for a certain purpose, and that somehow we can substantially, if not inadequately, if not perfectly and exhaustively, recover that. And that can be distinguished between significance, how that has an ongoing relationship to different contexts and different readers and different situations.

Again, what evangelicals often call application. So a hermeneutics of suspicion should be replaced by a hermeneutics of respect. Respect for the text, the author that produced it, the historical circumstances and context which brought the text, in which the text was produced.

Five, there is probably some merit to the argument that any arguments that the author's intention is invalid is logically self-defeating. Since again, most people who communicate thoughts such as those do argue in a way that they expect to be understood, and they argue in a way to communicate. That is, we write to be understood, and reading a biblical text and interpreting a biblical text should at least allow the author to attempt to speak and understand what the author was attempting to do with this text.

A final one, even when disagreement does take place, whether it's over the issue of the millennium, or over the issue of women in ministry, or over the issue of whether charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy and miracles are still valid

today or not, even those that argue, disagree over those, still attempt to ground their interpretation in the text and what they think the author was intending, as opposed to simply seeing the text as seeing interpretation as a free-for-all and an anything-goes. So the author's intention as the goal of interpretation, one hermeneutics text explained like this, I think a helpful way to explain what is the goal of interpretation, how do we understand the author's intention, is one text put it like this, the author's intention, the goal of interpretation then is to arrive at the meaning of the text. The meaning of the text is that which the words and the grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of the author-editor and the probable understanding of that text by its intended readers.

I'll read that again, the meaning of the text is that which the words and the grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of the author-editor and the probable understanding of that text by the intended readers. Let me just make a couple comments on this definition or description. First of all, notice that it is grounded in the text itself.

Notice the goal is not to recover the author's intention as far as the thought process or what was in the mind of the author. The goal here is to determine what the text discloses about the author's intention. That is the wording of the text, the grammatical construction of the text, and I would also add what we can know about the historical circumstances surrounding the text.

All of that discloses something about the intention of the author. But furthermore, notice the language of probability. This definition avoids the language of exhaustiveness or somehow that perfectly or with absolute certainty or that somehow we uncover the author's intention and we're done, we can be certain that we've arrived at it.

But I like the language of probability. The goal is to uncover the probable intention of the author or editor. Again, sometimes texts may have been brought together by an editor, but understanding the probable intention, but that is tied to the text itself by looking at the structure, grammatical structure of the text, the wording, and again the historical circumstances.

Even what the original readers whom the author was writing for, what they probably would have understood in light of what the author was within the horizons of the reader was trying to communicate, one can arrive at the probable intention of the author. Again, that would suggest that absolute certainty escapes us without having the author here to tell us exactly what he meant. And as the example I gave with my conversation with a well-known New Testament scholar just a bit ago, the example I gave reveals that sometimes even living authors aren't quite sure what they meant or exactly what they intended.

So that this avoids the language of absolute certainty and realizing that because we don't have the, because we're separated two millennia or more from the text, because of some of the distances between us and the original context, because the author is no longer here, all we have is the text itself and therefore by considering the text we can arrive at a high degree of probability that our interpretation corresponds to what the author was intending. How I like to put it, I would say interpretation, any interpretation is valid if it answers the question what can be justified from the text itself and what we can know about the original author, his context, and his readers. And again by text itself that would include the structure of the text, the grammar, but placing it in his context, everything we can know about the author, the historical situation in context, the readers, the grammar, the structure of the text, the context, what can be justified based on that data.

So it's a call to give respect to, give priority to the original act of communication in its original context. Whatever else we might do with the text, however we might apply it, however else we might use it, it seems to me that it is a valid and a necessary goal to begin by asking what most likely was the author intending to communicate through the text. This could also even account though I think for again the saying that we looked at or the possible response where an author might say when confronted with an interpretation, although again we don't have the biblical authors to consult, but certainly the case could be the same with biblical authors, but the instances where an author might say I did not intend that, but now that I see it, it does make sense of the text, and I would accept that as a valid interpretation of my reading.

But even then a reading would still have to be consistent with the text, the grammar, the wording, the structure of the text, what we can know about the author, what we can know about the readers, and the historical circumstances in which it was produced. Let me then make just a handful of concluding observations about author's intention as it relates to hermeneutics or as it relates to biblical interpretation. So first of all, as far as additional reflections, author's intention then means that not just anything goes when it comes to interpretation, but even where there is disagreement, one still is seeking to uncover as much as possible the probable intention of the author.

So for example, to interpret Jesus' parable of the unjust steward in Luke chapter 16 as about elephants or giraffes or something like that is clearly outside of bounds, the bounds of what could have been intended by the author, given the background of the text, and that's a very extreme and silly example, but just to show there are boundaries, and even some that would say the author's intention is not necessary or valid would still want to find boundaries, that Luke's parable is not about elephants and giraffes or something like that, but is to be understood more consistently with

what one finds in the text. Number two, it's important to realize that author's intention is not to revert to the idea, going back to the romantic ideal of the blank text or the enlightened ideal of pure induction and the ability to arrive at meaning based on simply a rational inductive method. That is not the goal of author's intent, but it's also to realize along, starting with Kant and others, that we do approach texts with presuppositions and predispositions.

None of us comes to the biblical text with a blank mind, none of us comes with a blank slate simply waiting to be inscribed upon, none of us are dry sponges simply waiting to objectively soak up data so that our interpretation corresponds in a one-to-one and perfect manner with the meaning of the text itself. Most, I think, would realize that that goal is probably unachievable and probably illegitimate. However, that does not mean that we are therefore relegated to a free interpretive free-for-all or anything goes.

But instead, our presuppositions, our theological beliefs, our faith, our cultural background can all be subject to the text and challenged by the text, which again makes it impossible maybe exhaustively or perfectly to recover the meaning of the text, but we can still do so, we can still uncover the author's intention substantially and adequately. Number three, the person that says, I just sit down and read the text objectively is probably in the worst position to understand the text and is probably in more danger of distorting the text, because by saying something like that, they come unaware of how their prior beliefs and experiences and predispositions might influence the text. The person that begins with and brings their presuppositions and their baggage and all they are to the text is probably in a better position to deal with them, as opposed to the person that thinks that somehow they can come to the text with complete objectivity, therefore unaware of how their presuppositions and beliefs are influencing the way they read and interpret the text.

And then fourth, interpretation, especially in light of the author's intention, is not to be conceived of the interpreter as merely a passive observer of the text, but instead, the reader, the interpreter is active and creative in discovering meaning. The interpreter is active in skillfully applying methods of interpretation to the text. The reader does have to interpret the text and read it and make sense of it.

We are not just sponges waiting to soak up data, but instead we must read the text, we must apply methods of interpretation creatively and think about the text in order to arrive at the probable understanding of the author's intention. We enter into a dialogue with the text in allowing it to challenge us and change us and reveal its meaning to us. So what might this look like? Just quickly by way of summary, considering the author's intention means examining the text in its ancient context.

We talked about this in connection with the historical critical method. It means learning everything we can about the author and his circumstances and background. It means learning what we can about the readers and their circumstances and background.

It means learning about their environment, the historical, cultural, and political environment out of which the text grew. It means looking at the words in light of what they would have meant during the time of the writing of the text. It means looking at the grammar of the text.

It means looking at the way the text is structured and looking at all of this for an interpretation to be valid, it must fit these criteria. For an interpretation to be valid, it must make sense of what is known about the author. It must make sense of what is known about the readers.

It must make sense of the historical background and circumstances out of which the text was produced. It must make sense of the grammar of the text, the wording, the structure of the text, the way it is put together. Any interpretation that is to be plausible must fit these criteria.

So what can be justified from the text itself and what can be known about the author, readers, and their circumstances is a question that's necessary to ask in order to validate our interpretation. So given some of these qualifications and given this discussion, I will proceed with the assumption that it is valid to start with and to seek the author's intended meaning. Again, not that we're reading the author's mind or trying to uncover the author's thought process.

Not that we realize there are difficulties because of historical distances and because of possibilities of not communicating as clearly as one wants or the possibility of readers misunderstanding. Also recognizing that we don't have the original author to consult. But even given all that and realizing that we cannot recover the author's intention perfectly or exhaustively does not mean we cannot do so substantially and adequately.

Given those qualifications, author's intention is indeed a worthy and I think necessary goal in our interpretation. Now what I want to do is move on from to now make a larger jump in our journey through the the methods of interpretation and hermeneutics. We've been focusing on the last few sessions on historical oriented approaches, focusing on historical criticism and within historical criticism some of the other criticisms that developed source, form, and redaction criticism.

Looking at the author's intention, those are usually seen as attempts to locate meaning or to locate the activity of interpretation behind the text, looking at the historical production of the text. Now I want to focus our attention on looking at the

text itself as the focus of meaning or looking within the text. That is text-centered approaches to interpretation.

So we looked at historically oriented approaches or author-centered approaches. Now we'll look at text-centered approaches to interpretation and we'll in doing so we'll look at a variety of methods. One or two of them have not completely cut their ties with questions of author and history but in that they still focus mainly on the text as a finished product.

I will include those as well I want to examine a number of approaches that seem to be interested exclusively in looking at the text itself as the object of interpretation and the center of meaning. Now due to some of the shortcomings of author-oriented approaches or author's intention, some that we mentioned just a little bit ago in our discussion of author's intention, because of some of the shortcomings or objections to author-centered approaches to interpretation, again historically and logically you can see how hermeneutics has moved, although not always exclusively, but has generally moved from historical and author-oriented approaches to text-oriented approaches and then the next stage will be reader-oriented approaches. Historically and logically that's often how hermeneutics has moved, both in literary studies and in literary disciplines outside of biblical studies but also in biblical studies.

And as kind of another aside, one thing that you'll see is biblical studies tends to lag behind literary studies, so what is often done in developing literary studies or even reader approaches, biblical studies usually catches up sooner or later and starts to implement some of those approaches. So I want to look at some text-centered approaches to hermeneutics or biblical interpretation, that is approaches that find meaning centered in the text itself, and usually again based on some of the shortcomings of author-centered approaches, attention has now turned to the text itself. And this is again especially found in literary approaches or in literary criticism.

If you've ever taken a course in a university setting in literary criticism, those similar types of approaches have now been applied to biblical studies. Just a handful of observations related to literary approaches or text-centered approaches, and again my point isn't to spend a lot of time developing a literary approach and defining exactly what it is, but more to introduce you to some characteristics of literary approaches to the Old New Testament, to biblical literature. First of all, literary approaches, especially as text-centered approaches develop, literary approaches often rejected the author as the center of interpretation.

This is related to the second observation, in that the text alone then is the sole guide of meaning and the sole guide for understanding. It has been cut off from its author and now the text has a life of its own. So some interpreters are only interested in the structure of the text itself, irrespective of the author who produced it or the history that produced it.

They consider the text as it stands. So historical approaches more looked at the historical production of the text as the author and the historical circumstances that produced the text, where literary studies often see the authority in the text itself as the guide to understanding. So the text alone is the sole guide to meaning.

It has been cut off from the author. It's a free-floating entity, an autonomous text. A third characteristic of literary and text-centered approaches is that they pay attention to the formal features and structures of the text.

They often focus on the final form of the text. They're frequently uninterested in any sources or forms that precede the text, but again, usually they focus on the final product, on the final form of the text as it stands. They're not interested in isolating forms or uncovering sources behind the text.

A fourth characteristic, especially related to biblical studies, they tend to treat the Bible as literature. That is, they're asking, what I mean by that is they're asking the same questions that they would of any other literary text. The same kind of questions often asked in courses on literary criticism of text that one might take in a university setting, for example.

The fifth and final characteristic is that historical questions are often bracketed. Again, the text is seen as a self-contained unit, and the only world that is important is the world that is contained in the text. The world that is found in the text, it's not as concerned with the world outside of the text.

That is, literary texts are often seen as self-referential, the world created by the text itself, and not the world that it refers to outside of the text. So again, you often see literary studies uninterested in whether a certain character in a narrative was historical or not, or whether a certain event actually happened. They're not interested in that.

They're simply interested in the narrative structure itself, in the structure of the world itself within the text, not some world outside of the text that the text might refer to. So often then, the historical questions are bracketed, and the text is seen as a self-referring, self-contained unit. But within this are a wide variety of approaches.

I want to just give you an example of a handful of approaches that I'm going to place on very broadly under literary approaches, or more broadly under text-centered approaches. Usually, literary approaches to the Old New Testament are seen to emerge with what is known as formalism, or the new criticism that actually emerged in the 1920s. Again, as I've said, often biblical studies plays the role of catching up to what is done in other disciplines.

But formalism, or the new criticism, is often what most people think of when they think of literary criticism, whether it's of any other text or biblical text. And again, the characteristic features of formalism were that the text is sufficient for producing meaning. Again, the text is self-sufficient.

It's autonomous. It is disconnected from the author, so it does not ask questions about the author and why the author wrote and the historical circumstances that produced it. The text is sufficient for itself for producing meaning.

Second, historical matters are usually bracketed. Again, we mentioned this before, because again, the world of the text is self-referential. It's contained within the text.

They're not interested in the world outside of the text to which the text might refer. Formalism also gives attention to aesthetic interest and literary artistry. In other words, for biblical studies, that would mean treating the text in the same way that any other text would be treated.

So for example, one might treat a biblical narrative, a biblical text, such as the text of Job. One might read the book of Job and not be concerned about issues of authorship, as far as who wrote the book, or issues of date or the place of writing. One would not be interested in the question of whether Job was a real person or not, a historical person, or whether the events that the book records were events that actually occurred, or whether the friends that counsel him are real or not.

One would not be concerned whether they were real speakers, but rather one would only be concerned with the literary artistry and the literary structure of the text itself, and the effect that it has on the reader, and how the characters are portrayed within the text itself, and how they relate to each other. The plot of the story, the

main point of view, questions such as that. The same kind of questions that one would ask of any work of literature.

And for obvious reasons, this approach did catch on in narrative, and also in poetic text as well. In the Old Testament, particularly old poetic text, narrative text. In the New Testament, gospels and narrative forms such as parables were the logical place where this would catch on.

Perhaps one subset or one type of formalism or literary criticism is what is known as narrative criticism. We'll talk a little bit about that as well in relationship to the Old New Testament. But again, to give just a couple of examples very, very briefly, and again I'll maybe give a little more attention to the New Testament for reasons that I have stated before.

But within the Old Testament, for example, Genesis 1 and 2, we said under the, and I'll use a couple examples, and that perhaps to compare with how they might, treatment of them under a literary approach might compare or contrast with how they might have been treated in more, under more historically oriented approaches, for example. So with the Old Testament, we talk briefly about Genesis chapters 1 and 2, and the juxtaposing of two accounts of the creation narrative. Because of differences in style and vocabulary and perspective, an older historically oriented approach would ask the question of what sources lie, the sources that lie behind those two creation stories, and may even go further and ask about the date of and the the setting of those two stories.

But the attempt would have been to reconstruct the sources that lie behind the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and assigning them to the right sources, the J source or the E source or whatever, that lies behind the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Instead, a narrative approach or a literary approach to this text would instead

point out the literary unity of the text and said, and interestingly sometimes, the same data that source critics would use to dissect the document might be used by literary critics to demonstrate the unity of it and the inner workings of the text. So a literary approach would emphasize the unity, the literary unity of the text. It might seize upon the themes of water and creator and land and seed and cursing and blessing and the role they play in Genesis 1 and 2, as well as in the rest of the book.

Instead of asking questions about what this text might say regarding the actual creation, did God create the world in seven literal days or was this longer a day age or a gap theory? What does this say ontologically about the actual process of creation? Historically, again, some might instead examine these themes and how they function and again examine the literary artistry of the text. Instead of asking questions about the author putting the other sources or whether this corresponds or how it corresponds to the actual creation of the universe. And so just looking at the text as a literary unity and looking at the structure and the inner workings of the text itself.

Or another example, to use a shorter example, the book of Ruth. Again, one might examine the book of Ruth by reading it simply as a story, not asking questions again of the historicity of the characters and asking questions about any sources that may have been utilized or asking questions historically how this text functioned. But instead they might ask questions about plot, the plot of the story, the development of the characters and read the story for its aesthetic effect on the reader.

Again, those are often the kinds of traditional questions found asked within the context of literary criticism. So again, I could multiply examples in the Old Testament of especially narrative texts but other texts that are examined through the eyes of literary criticism or formalism. Again, simply looking at the text as a piece of literature, asking questions about its structure, its development, looking at it as a

self-contained, the world in the text, not so much the world outside of the text, bracketing questions of history, etc.

Just looking at it as a piece of literature. In the New Testament, in the New Testament, literary criticism also caught on primarily in the Gospels, though literary criticism has ranged outside of the narrative literature and the Gospels. But I want to look a little bit at the Gospels later on when we talk about narrative criticism.

But let me mention one example of literary criticism in the New Testament, one that we've already referred to. That is the parables of Jesus. We suggested that the parables of Jesus could be seen as limited allegories, that is stories that have one, two, or three main meanings according to the main characters within the story.

Parables seem to have been a fruitful field of study for literary criticism because parables do seem to be fictional stories. That is, although they are realistic, Jesus never claims that he's telling stories that actually happened historically, but seems to be drawing on common stories to communicate truths about his teaching and his ministry and the kingdom of God. Literary criticism, though, pays careful attention to things like the structure and the aesthetics of the parables.

For example, we've already seen that the parables can be examined according to whether they are monadic, that is, with one main character, dyadic, with two main characters, or triadic, with three main characters. And even sometimes, even when you have three main characters, another question literary critics ask is whether the characters all play identical roles, whether you have a mediating figure with two other characters on the same level of authority, or whether the structure is more vertical, where you have an authority figure and other figures under that person, such as a master with servants. So they ask questions about the structure of the parable, how the characters function and how they're put together.

Some ask questions about the aesthetic nature of the parables. It's interesting that many of the parables include unrealistic elements in them. We've already seen that in the parable of the prodigal son, it's unrealistic that a father of the nature of the father in the parable in the first century would have run out to greet his son.

So sometimes the parables are seen to have a punchline and to have an aesthetic effect and appeal as the parable is read. Sometimes the parables are even labeled as to whether they're tragic or comic. That is, whether the plot of the parable rises and then falls, or that would be a tragic, where the figure meets a tragic end, or whether the parable dips down to have a seemingly sad element to it, but then it rises to have a positive ending for the hero of the story.

So parables are often categorized as to whether they're more comic or tragic. So literary criticism, at least with parables, can often help us see where the main points lie, to see how the story is structured and how it works, and even also create an effect on the readers as well. What I want to do in the next session is maybe look at another one more example in the New Testament of literary criticism, but then also move on to a more specific feature of literary criticism known as narrative criticism, and examine what that is and what that does, how it's been used, and how it can help in interpreting narrative literature in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well.