

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 6, Early Interpretation Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 6, Early Interpretation, Biblicalearning.org, BeL

This lecture traces the history of biblical interpretation, starting with how New Testament authors viewed and utilized the Old Testament. **It highlights two primary early interpretive methods:** typological (seeing Old Testament events as prefiguring New Testament events) and allegorical (finding deeper symbolic meanings). The lecture then contrasts these approaches with the Reformation's emphasis on **a literal, historical-grammatical interpretation**, championed by figures like Luther and Calvin, who prioritized the text itself over church tradition. Finally, it notes that modern hermeneutics considers influences beyond strictly biblical ones.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).



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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript, including relevant quotes.

Briefing Document: History of Biblical Interpretation

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson provides a historical overview of biblical interpretation, emphasizing that no one interprets scripture in a vacuum. We are all part of a long tradition, influenced by those who came before us, stretching all the way back to the Old Testament. The lecture traces the development of interpretive methods from the Old and New Testaments, through the Apostolic Fathers and early church, to the Reformation, focusing on key figures and their approaches. The central theme is that how we understand and approach the Bible is profoundly shaped by this history, whether consciously or not.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Tradition and Influence:

- **Main Idea:** No one is the first interpreter of the Bible. Every interpretation is built upon a long history of engagement with the text.
- **Quote:** "...no one picks up the biblical text and interprets for the first time. We all stand as part of a long tradition..."
- **Implication:** Our understanding of scripture is not purely objective but influenced by the interpretations of the past.

1. New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament:

- **Main Idea:** New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ, seeing him as the fulfillment of its prophecies and promises.
- **Quote:** "...New Testament writers operated with the assumption that the Old Testament was to be understood as pointing to Christ and to be interpreted through the lenses of fulfillment in Jesus Christ."
- **Examples: Literal Fulfillment:** Matthew 2:5-6, where the prophecy of Micah 5:2 about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem is seen as directly fulfilled in Jesus' birth.

- **Quote:** “But you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”
 - **Literal Fulfillment:** Luke 4:18-21, Jesus reading Isaiah 61 and seeing himself as fulfilling the prophecy about the Spirit of the Lord being on him.
 - **Quote:** “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news of the poor.”
 - **Typological/Analogical Fulfillment:** Matthew 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1 (“Out of Egypt I have called my son”), seeing it as a typological parallel where God delivers Israel from Egypt in the Old Testament, just as God delivers Jesus from Egypt in the New.
 - **Quote:** “And so was fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet out of Egypt, I have called my son.”
 - **Distinction:** The New Testament employs a spectrum of interpretive approaches, from literal fulfillment to typological connections.
 - **Quote:** “We also said that the New Testament reveals a number of ways of demonstrating that from what we might call more literal, more straightforward prediction and fulfillment, all the way to more kind of analogical or typological type fulfillments.”
1. **Typological Interpretation:**
- **Main Idea:** An event or person in the Old Testament serves as a model or “type” of something in the New Testament.
 - **Explanation:** This is not necessarily a direct prophecy, but a recurring pattern or correspondence in God’s redemptive work.
 - **Quote:** “That is, an event or person in the past in the Old Testament provides a model or type of something that now takes place, a person or event in the New Testament.”
1. **Methods of Rabbinical Interpretation:**
- **Main Idea:** New Testament authors sometimes used methods similar to those used by rabbis, such as:

- **Lesser to Greater:** Arguing from a less important point to a more important point, as Jesus did in Matthew 6:26 with the birds.
- **Quote:** “look at the birds of the air they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are?”
- **Connecting texts:** Bringing together texts based on similar vocabulary or themes. Hebrews 1:5 combining Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7 because of the father/son language.
- **Quote:** "You are my son; today I have become your father. ... I will be his father, and he will be my son."

1. **The Apostolic Fathers (100-150 AD):**

- **Main Idea:** The early church fathers gave us a glimpse of biblical interpretation immediately after the New Testament.
- **Context:** They were often defining and defending the Christian faith against heresies.
- **Quote:** “Often what they're doing is they're frequently defining and defending the Christian faith especially against false teaching that has arisen...”
- **Characteristic Interpretation Methods:**
- **Extreme Typological:** Finding symbolic connections between details in the Old Testament and Jesus, such as Moses’ outstretched arms as a type of the crucifixion (Epistle of Barnabas) or Rahab's scarlet thread as a type of the blood of Christ (1 Clement).
- **Quote:** "the Epistle of Barnabas sees that as a type of the death of Christ where he literally had his arms stretched out and nailed to the cross."
- **Allegorical Interpretation:** Giving a deeper, spiritual meaning to Old Testament figures, events, and objects that was often seen as its true meaning.
- **Quote:** “a person or something in the Old Testament a person an event an object an institution was given a deeper level of meaning a deeper spiritual meaning so usually a physical person object event was then given a spiritual a deeper spiritual meaning which was often seen as its true meaning.”

1. Allegorical Interpretation in Alexandria:

- **Main Idea:** The city of Alexandria (especially Philo and Origen) was influential in developing the allegorical method.
- **Quote:** “One dominant approach to biblical interpretation in the early centuries of the church during the first few centuries of Christianity's existence was associated with Alexandria of Egypt and that was the allegorical method.”
- **Origen’s Three-Fold Meaning of Scripture:** Scripture has literal (body), moral (soul), and theological (spirit) meanings, corresponding to the human body, soul, and spirit.
- **Quote:** “Scripture has a three fold meaning that corresponds to body soul and spirit that is scripture has a literal meaning a physical literal meaning that would correspond to body it also has a moral meaning that would correspond to soul and then it also has a theological meaning that would correspond to spirit.”
- **Allegory and Maturity:** Origen believed allegory showed spiritual and intellectual maturity.
- **Quote:** “intriguingly origin saw allegory as a sign of one's intellectual and spiritual maturity so one who was actually one who was spiritually mature but also intellectually astute was able to allegorize the text.”
- **Example from Origen:** The story of Lot and his daughters was allegorized, with Lot representing the human mind, Lot's wife representing the flesh, and Lot's daughters representing pride.
- **Example from Augustine:** The Parable of the Good Samaritan allegorized, with elements representing things such as: Adam’s fall (Man on road), Adam’s Mortality (Jericho), Satan (Robbers), Christ (Samaritan), Church (Inn).
- **Quote:** “So here it is basically when the parable says a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho on the road to Jericho where he gets beaten this man is Adam.”

1. Church Tradition and Hermeneutics:

- **Main Idea:** Church tradition began to play a key role in how the Bible was interpreted during this period.
- **Quote:** “It's also important to recall during this time church tradition began to play an important role in hermeneutics and would continue to do so...”

- **Implication:** Interpretations needed to be in line with what the church believed.
1. **The Reformation and its Influence on Interpretation:**
 - **Main Idea:** The Reformation brought a rejection of allegory and an emphasis on the literal, historical, and grammatical meaning of the text, along with a focus on the perspicuity of scripture.
 - **Context:** This was a reaction against both excessive reliance on church tradition and allegorical interpretation.
 - **Quote:** “In a sense the hermeneutics or the interpretive approach of the Reformation grew out of a dissatisfaction and with and reaction to both of these tendencies.”
 - **Key Figures: Martin Luther:** Advocated for a single literal meaning of the text and emphasized grammar and historical context.
 - **Quote:** “Also Luther advocated a single literal meaning or literal sense in the biblical text again and direct contrast to allegorical approaches that would find multiple meanings.”
 - **John Calvin:** Championed a grammatical-historical approach and emphasized that the Bible is its own best interpreter ("scripture interprets scripture").
 - **Quote:** “Calvin also understood and advocated that the Bible itself is its own best interpreter again perhaps in response to the preference for giving preference to early church tradition and to the authority of the church. Now Calvin says no the Bible is its own best interpreter or scripture interprets scripture.”
 - **Key Contributions of the Reformation to Hermeneutics:**
 - **Priority of Scripture:** The Bible, not church tradition, is the primary source of authority.
 - **Quote:** “the primary locus of meaning or the primary contribution to meaning is not the authority of the church or merely church tradition or that is our theological and ecclesiastical traditions are to be subservient to the meaning of the biblical text.”
 - **Grammatical-Historical Interpretation:** Emphasis on understanding the original languages, grammar, and historical context.

- **Quote:** “Studying a text in light of its its grammatical context the Hebrew and Greek grammar and also studying a text by placing it in its historical context.”
- **Scripture Interprets Scripture:** The Bible provides the best framework for understanding its own meaning.
- **Quote:** “That is that our interpretation of scripture must have a consistency must have a coherency that we don't come up with an interpretation that contradicts what what scripture says elsewhere.”
- **Clarity of Scripture:** The Bible is understandable by ordinary people, not just religious authorities.
- **Quote:** “The fact that anyone can read it and understand it anyone can interpret it is again owes itself to the inter the legacy of the Reformation.”

1. **Relevance and Application:**

- **Main Idea:** All interpretation is aimed at demonstrating the relevance of God’s word, even allegory, albeit potentially in problematic ways.
- **Quote:** “interpretation has always been aimed at demonstrating the relevance of God's Word for for modern readers however much it may have been overdone by early interpreters of scripture.”

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson's lecture highlights the dynamic and complex history of biblical interpretation. The lecture underscores the importance of understanding this history to better approach the text. It shows that our own interpretations are not made in isolation but are part of an ongoing tradition. It demonstrates that different methods have been used throughout history, each with their strengths and weaknesses. The lecture also sets the stage for examining non-biblical influences on interpretation that will be covered in a later session. The key takeaway is that to approach scripture responsibly requires being aware of the historical context of our own interpretations and those of the past.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 6, Early Interpretation

Hermeneutics Study Guide: Early Interpretation

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to the lecture, why is it important to study the history of biblical interpretation?
2. How did New Testament authors view the Old Testament in relation to Jesus Christ?
3. Provide an example of a more literal fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy from the lecture.
4. What is the typological or analogical interpretation of the Old Testament, according to the lecture?
5. Explain how Matthew 2:15 connects to Hosea 11:1, using the concept of typological interpretation.
6. What was a common method of rabbinical interpretation? Give an example from the lecture.
7. What was the main purpose of the Apostolic Fathers' biblical interpretation?
8. What are the two characteristic features of the Apostolic Fathers' interpretation, as discussed in the lecture?
9. What was the allegorical method of interpretation, and how did it differ from typological interpretation?
10. What were the primary contributions of the Reformation to hermeneutics?

Answer Key

1. Studying the history of interpretation demonstrates that no one interprets Scripture in isolation; we are all part of a long tradition. It also reveals how our approach to Scripture is influenced by this history, whether positively or negatively.
2. New Testament authors viewed the Old Testament as pointing to Jesus Christ, seeing him as the fulfillment, climax, and true intention of the Old Testament

prophecies and promises. They interpreted the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

3. Matthew 2:5-6, which quotes Micah 5:2, serves as an example of a literal fulfillment as it states that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The New Testament author uses the quote to show that this prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
4. Typological or analogical interpretation sees an event or person in the Old Testament as a model or type of something in the New Testament, not necessarily as a direct prophecy. It assumes that God's redemptive acts in the Old Covenant are repeated and escalated in the New Covenant through Christ.
5. Matthew applies Hosea 11:1 (a reference to the Exodus from Egypt) to the flight of the infant Jesus to Egypt. Rather than seeing the Hosea passage as a direct prophecy of Jesus, Matthew uses a typological approach, comparing the rescue of Israel from Egypt with the rescue of Jesus from Herod.
6. Rabbinical interpreters would often link texts together based on word associations and similar vocabulary. An example in the lecture is Hebrews 1:5, which links Psalms 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 due to shared themes of father and son.
7. The Apostolic Fathers mainly interpreted the biblical texts to define and defend the Christian faith, particularly against false teachings such as Gnosticism. They used the scriptures to support Christian beliefs, often in a polemical way.
8. The two main features are *typological interpretation*, where Old Testament details are seen to foreshadow New Testament realities, and *allegorical interpretation*, where deeper, spiritual meanings are ascribed to Old Testament persons, events, and objects.
9. The allegorical method involves finding a deeper, spiritual meaning behind the literal, physical meaning of the text. Typological interpretation, by contrast, draws a correlation between Old Testament persons and events with those of the New Testament, but does not typically obscure the literal meaning of the text.
10. The Reformation prioritized Scripture as the locus of meaning, promoted a grammatical-historical approach to interpretation, emphasized scripture interpreting scripture, and stressed the clarity of scripture for all believers, opposing allegorical methods and traditional interpretations.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following questions in a well-structured essay format.

1. Discuss the development of biblical interpretation from the Old Testament to the New Testament and how New Testament authors viewed and used Old Testament scriptures. Consider the different types of fulfillment found in the New Testament.
2. Explain the key differences between typological and allegorical interpretation, providing examples of each from the lecture, and analyze the role each method played in early church hermeneutics.
3. Evaluate the contributions and limitations of the allegorical method of interpretation as practiced by figures like Philo and Origen. How does their approach to interpretation influence their views on the nature of scripture and spiritual maturity?
4. Compare and contrast the hermeneutical approaches of Martin Luther and John Calvin, focusing on how their views challenged existing traditions of biblical interpretation. What were the key principles of biblical interpretation that they emphasized?
5. Analyze how the legacy of the Reformation continues to shape contemporary biblical interpretation. How did the core ideas of the Reformation impact the way people approach, understand, and apply scriptural texts?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpretation. In this context, it refers to the interpretation of the Bible.
- **Typological Interpretation:** An approach to biblical interpretation that sees people, events, and institutions in the Old Testament as patterns or foreshadowing (types) of corresponding people, events, and institutions in the New Testament.
- **Allegorical Interpretation:** An approach to biblical interpretation that seeks a deeper, spiritual or symbolic meaning beyond the literal meaning of the text.
- **Apostolic Fathers:** Early Christian leaders and writers of the late first and early second centuries whose writings provide insight into early Christian beliefs and practices.

- **Patristic Period:** The period in the history of Christianity from roughly the 1st to the 8th century, during which the Church Fathers lived and wrote.
- **Gnosticism:** A heretical religious movement in the early centuries of Christianity that emphasized secret knowledge and often rejected the material world.
- **Literal Interpretation:** The approach to interpretation that focuses on the plain, straightforward meaning of the text, as understood in its historical and grammatical context.
- **Rabbinical Interpretation:** Methods of biblical interpretation used by Jewish rabbis, often involving wordplay and connecting texts based on shared vocabulary or themes.
- **Perspicuity of Scripture:** The idea that the Bible is clear and understandable for the common person and does not require a specialized authority to be understood.
- **Grammatical-Historical Interpretation:** A method of interpreting the Bible that emphasizes understanding the text in its original historical context and according to its grammatical structure.
- **New Exodus:** A theological motif, often used in the New Testament, that parallels the biblical Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt with the redemptive work of Jesus.
- **Locus:** A place where something occurs or is situated. In this context, it refers to the primary source of meaning or authority.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 6, Early Interpretation, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the History of Biblical Interpretation

- 1. Why is it important to study the history of biblical interpretation?** Studying the history of biblical interpretation is crucial because it demonstrates that no one approaches the Bible as a blank slate. Our interpretations are always influenced by a long tradition of how others have read and understood the text. Understanding this history reveals how our current approaches, whether we realize it or not, are indebted to past methods, both positively and negatively. This historical awareness helps us understand the assumptions and biases we may bring to our own reading.
- 2. How did New Testament authors interpret the Old Testament?** New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament with the conviction that Jesus Christ was its fulfillment. They saw him as the climax of God's revelation, not negating but completing the promises and prophecies. They employed various methods, ranging from literal fulfillments of prophecies to more typological or analogical connections. For example, they saw events and persons in the Old Testament as types or models that prefigured Jesus and the New Covenant. Ultimately, they read the Old Testament through the lens of Christ, demonstrating how the narratives, laws, and prophecies pointed to Him.
- 3. What is the difference between a literal fulfillment and a typological fulfillment in the Bible?** A literal fulfillment occurs when a prophecy or prediction is fulfilled directly as it was stated or predicted in the Old Testament, such as the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as prophesied in Micah 5:2. A typological fulfillment, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily involve a direct prophecy. Instead, it involves an event, person, or institution in the Old Testament that serves as a pattern or model for a greater event or person in the New Testament. These are analogical connections where similarities are seen, and the Old Testament instance is seen as a foreshadowing of a greater fulfillment. For example, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is seen as a type of the deliverance from sin and death by Jesus.

4. **What are some examples of typological interpretation in the early church?** Early church fathers frequently employed typological interpretations, often finding correspondences between Old Testament events and the life of Christ. Examples include seeing Moses' outstretched arms in Exodus 17 as a type of Christ's crucifixion and Rahab's scarlet thread in Joshua 2 as a type of Christ's blood, symbolizing salvation. These interpretations often went beyond strict historical-grammatical connections, viewing Old Testament details as foreshadowing New Testament truths.
5. **What is the allegorical method of interpretation, and why did it become popular?** The allegorical method involves finding a deeper, spiritual meaning behind the literal, physical text. It interprets persons, events, objects, and institutions as having a second level of symbolic meaning, which is often considered the true meaning. This method became popular because it was used to make sense of difficult or seemingly mundane passages, providing a way to see the entire Bible as a unified story with a consistent message. Figures like Philo and Origen further developed the practice, associating it with inspiration, intellectual and spiritual maturity.
6. **How did the Reformers, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, challenge traditional methods of interpretation?** The Reformers, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, challenged the dominance of church tradition and the allegorical method by emphasizing the importance of studying the Bible in its original languages, and understanding the historical context of each text. Luther advocated for a single, literal sense of the text and emphasized grammar and historical context, while Calvin championed a grammatical-historical approach, insisting that the Bible is its own best interpreter. This focus on the text itself, and not allegorical interpretation or church tradition, was a key aspect of the Reformation's challenge to traditional methods.
7. **What are the main principles of the Reformation's approach to biblical interpretation?** The Reformation's hermeneutical principles include the priority of Scripture as the primary authority for meaning and interpretation. This means that the text is above all tradition. It emphasizes the grammatical and historical meaning of the text, advocating for understanding the original languages, author, and historical context. Furthermore, it promoted the clarity of Scripture, asserting that it can be understood by common people without mediation from the Church and that the best interpreter of scripture is scripture itself. The emphasis that the text itself is the locus of authority became essential to Protestant theology.

8. **Why is understanding the history of biblical interpretation essential for our hermeneutics today?** Understanding the history of biblical interpretation is crucial because it reminds us that our own interpretations are not made in a vacuum. We are part of a long line of readers and interpreters, and our approaches are inevitably influenced by those who have come before us. By recognizing the diverse methods of interpretation throughout history—from New Testament authors to the early church fathers, and the Reformation—we are better equipped to avoid the excesses and extremes of the past. Furthermore, this historical awareness helps us to appreciate the importance of considering historical, grammatical, and literary elements when interpreting biblical texts, as well as to recognize the role tradition can play when interpreted within scripture itself. This provides a more balanced and nuanced way to approach the Bible, ensuring we are not repeating mistakes made by previous interpreters.