

Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 3, Inductive Methodology, Accurate, Informed, Author, Sensus Plenior, Context

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 3, Inductive Methodology, Accurate, Informed, Author, Sensus Plenior, Context, Analytic, and Synthetic.

We want to pick up here again with number five, which is accurate.

As I mentioned before the break to this segment, this really does pertain to, or assumes really that one can talk about accurate against inaccurate interpretation, which further assumes that one can adjudicate between a good versus a bad interpretation, a right versus a wrong interpretation. What, then, is interpretation? In our judgment, and again we throw this out for your consideration, in our judgment interpretation involves appeal to the intention of the author. The closer we get to what the author intended to communicate to his original readers, the better that interpretation is.

That correspondence between our interpretation and the intention of the author in terms of what he wanted to communicate to his original readers is the basis for talking about an accurate interpretation. Now, this notion of appeal to authorial intent is coming under a great deal of attack. Many are saying that the intention of the author is irrelevant to the meaning of texts, that really the meaning of a passage is determined by what it means to me rather than what it meant to the original author and the like.

But the fact of the matter is that the fundamental reality of the reading process is the sense of an author, the sense of being addressed. If one engages in a kind of hermeneutic, a kind of thinking about interpretation that denies, ignores, or bypasses the authorial voice, one is not interpreting the text according to the text's own nature. If a person wants to do that, that is up to the person, but at least such a person should be honest and say that that contradicts both the nature of the Bible as text as well as the reading experience.

As I say, it's quite obviously the case that the most fundamental reality of the reading experience is the sense of being addressed, that is to say, the sense of an author. It is actually the authorial voice we hear when we read the text. Now, we do have to be careful, though, at this point when we talk about the appeal to the author because we have to pursue this a bit further and probe exactly what author or the author in what capacity we are appealing to in interpretation.

Our contention is that when we appeal to the intention of the author in interpretation, we are actually appealing to the implied author over against the flesh-and-blood author who actually penned these words. This is simply a matter of being realistic because the fact of the matter is the only author we have, the only author we have access to, is the author who presents himself through what he has written. We do not have direct access to, let's say, Matthew or Mark, or Paul.

We do not have access to that flesh-and-blood author. The only author we have is the implied author, the author who presents himself to us through the text and can be inferred from the text, who is implied within the text itself. Now, you might ask yourself, well, what is, what's the payoff by making this distinction between the flesh-and-blood author and the implied author, that's to say, the author that we encounter within this text? Well, it's simply a matter of recognizing that the flesh-and-blood author is at one and the same time always larger than and smaller than the implied author.

The flesh-and-blood author is larger than the implied author in the sense that the flesh-and-blood author knows more and believes more, has a broader range of ideas, than the implied author of any passage. Take, for example, the Gospel of Mark. Mark had all sorts of knowledge of and thinking about and beliefs concerning Jesus that did not find their way into his Gospel.

His Christology, his doctrine of Christ was larger than the Christology or the portrait of Christ, the notion of Christ, the teaching regarding Christ that we have in Mark's Gospel. In that sense, the flesh-and-blood author is larger than the implied author. Now, and by the way, you have this explicitly in the Gospel of John.

You remember that John ends the body of his Gospel, really he ends the body of his Gospel, yes, in John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31 by saying, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written in order that you may believe that Jesus is a Christ, a Son of God, and believing you might have life in his name. And then at the very end of the Gospel itself in 21-25, but there are also many other things which Jesus did, were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. So that many, John was aware of many other things that Jesus did, and we can only think, we have to think that John's views with regard to Christ were larger, were more broad than what found their way into John's writing in these 21 chapters of his book.

So, we understand that. We also understand, though, that conversely, an implied author is always larger than a flesh and blood author because when an author writes a book and puts that book out there, that book takes on, in some sense, a life of its own, and has meaning that the flesh and blood author might not have consciously

intended to communicate. An author always, particularly this is true of extended writing, an author always says more than he consciously intends to say.

The meaning of passages are greater than the conscious intentionality of flesh and blood authors. One of the contemporary writers who have who have discussed this kind of thing is a man by the name of E.D. Hirsch. He asked us to imagine a class, which say a particular poem has been discussed, say a college class, which was discussing a poem by a contemporary poet, and they talk about the meaning of this poem.

They dissect it, they converse about it, they engage in the poem, and in the class, they come up with their understanding of the meaning of the poem. And he says, imagine that they invite the poet himself to come in, and they say to him, as we were studying this poem of yours, this is what we came up with in terms of its meaning. He said it's quite conceivable that that poet might say, yes, I see what you mean, and actually, that is what that passage means, although I did not fully, I did not consciously intend that.

That would be quite possible. Matter of fact, that kind of thing happens all the time. So that the implied author of that poem you see was larger than the flesh and blood author in terms of meaning and the like.

Now, I think having said that, and of course what we've done is differentiate between the flesh and blood author and the implied author. The fact of the matter is, in practice, you have to consider that there will be a real connection between the intention of the flesh and blood author and the implied author unless the flesh and blood author is entirely incompetent. And there is no reason to believe that any of our biblical writers were incompetent.

So, if you're talking about a competent flesh and blood author, then there will be real continuity between what the author intended to say and what he does say. But it does mean that there is a kind of richness, a kind of robustness in meaning, in passages that go beyond the conscious intentionality, or at least can go beyond the conscious intentionality of authors. Now, that's important for our purposes, practically speaking, in many ways.

I'll mention just two of them here. First, it explains, I think in large part, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament and the fact that quite often, the New Testament will talk about an Old Testament passage or cite an Old Testament passage coming to fulfillment in ways that the original prophet or the original Old Testament author could not have known or could not have thought about. The technical expression for this kind of thing is *sensus plenior*, really the full sense, the full or plentiful sense, the way of talking about it, the full or plentiful sense of a passage.

Now for the New Testament writers to do this, and let me just give you an example of this kind of thing. You have it in, for example, Matthew chapter 1, excuse me, Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, where we read that he arose, took the child and his mother by night, and fled to Egypt. This is the flight of Jesus, the holy family into Egypt, remember, and remained there till the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet out of Egypt have I called my son. Now that's a quotation from Hosea 11.1, and as many scholars have pointed out, of course, it's very obvious if you read that passage in its Hosea 11.1 context, you'll find that that's not a prophecy. It actually referred to the Exodus, to God bringing His people out of Egyptian bondage centuries before Hosea wrote, but now Matthew says that this comes to fulfillment in Jesus.

That is to say that there is a sense in which Hosea 11:1 refers to Jesus Christ so Hosea was actually saying more than he knew. Hosea 11:1 means more than Hosea consciously intended to communicate to his 8th century BC northern Israel audience. I mean, this is simply part of the conviction that New Testament writers have with regard to Old Testament passages.

Another point of significance of this differentiation between the implied author and the real author for our interpretation is that interpretation is not dependent upon being absolutely sure that the meaning of a passage was consciously intended by its original flesh and blood author. If that's the threshold, quite often, you cannot speak with much confidence regarding the meaning of passages. The only thing that's essential is that you can conclude on the basis of sound examination of evidence that this is a meaning of this passage, that this is a meaning of what the author is saying in this passage.

Whether Mark or Matthew consciously intended it, that is a reasonable interpretation of what they said. Now, of course, at this point, Christians especially might respond by saying, well, are we really primarily concerned with what the human author said? Are we primarily concerned with what God, the divine author, is saying here? And, of course, we Christians would answer, yes, we're primarily interested in what the divine voice is saying here. But at this point, we must, once again, go back to the very character of the text itself and recognize that according to the Bible itself, God's word, God reveals himself; God's revelation is made precisely through human authors, precisely through human authors.

There is no book of our Bibles that claims to be written by God. God is always referred to not as in the first person, but in the second person by the authors of the biblical books that we encounter. This obvious, rather familiar observation leads us to a profound recognition that revelation according to the structural revelation in the Scripture is never unmediated.

That is to say, God reveals himself through the mediation of human authors. Therefore, we can most reliably encounter and grasp the divine mind by working through the human mind, the mind of the human author who put these words down. In other words, we come to encounter God's word by taking seriously the human words and all their humanness.

Taking full account of the human authors and their intentions as communicated through these texts. This is set forth explicitly in one of the really few New Testament passages that speak specifically with regard to biblical revelation or the revelation of God in the Bible. And that, of course, is in 2 Peter, the end of 2 Peter chapter 1, the end of the first chapter of 2 Peter, where we read in 2 Peter 1, 20, and 21. First of all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but man moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Now, notice the grammatical structure of that sentence. Man, the subject and predicate is men spoke, and then the subordinate clause moved by the Holy Spirit. Now, that subordinate clause is very important.

To say it's a subordinate clause does not mean it's of subordinate significance, but the point is that revelation has to do with man speaking, human beings speaking from God. So, although it's possible, of course, for God to speak to us directly from our encounter with Scripture without any consideration about what the human author meant to communicate by these very human words, the most reliable and certainly the most typical way for God to reveal His Word to us in Scripture is through our taking seriously the speech of the human author. Again, appeal to the author, the intention of the author as the basis for determining what is accurate over against an inaccurate interpretation.

Now, a further conviction is that an inductive approach must be informed. That is to say, informed by, first of all, by relevant knowledge. The first kind of knowledge that we talk about here is contextual, interpreting individual passages or themes in light of their function within the biblical book.

And here again, we're going to make a significant hermeneutical point, extremely significant. This is one of the most significant things that we will, what I'm about to say now is, in my judgment, one of the most significant things that I will say. The basic literary unit of the Bible is the biblical book.

The book is not so much, and the Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of books, as G. Campbell Morgan put it. The Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of books. This is actually this bookness, this book character.

Let's say you have 66 individual separate books, each of which has its own history and its own message to communicate. This bookness, this book character of the Bible, is actually suggested by the canonical process. By the process that the church, well, Israel first of all, the Jews, but then the Christian church for the New Testament engaged in, in terms of determining the extent of the biblical canon.

When the Jews, and then somewhat later, the Christian church made decision regarding what should be considered canonical scripture and what should not be considered canonical scripture, the community of faith in both instances, Jews and Christians, made that decision on the basis of books. It wasn't a matter of saying, for example, that gospels should be considered canonical, and that's the end of it. No, it was a matter of making decisions with regard to certain gospel books.

There were certain books, gospel books that were not included, and certain other gospel books that were. Nor did the church say, for example, well, we'll consider portions of Mark's gospel. Let's say what we would today know as Mark 2, Mark 12, and Mark 15.

As canonical, but the rest of Mark we'll consider as non-canonical. It was a matter of the whole book being considered canonical scripture or the whole book not being considered canonical scripture. The decision of canonical inclusion or exclusion was on the basis of books.

So, there is this fundamental bookness involved, both in terms of the nature of the Bible itself, it's manifestly the case that the Bible presents each book as being written by its own author in its own time and having its own distinct message. And also, as I say, this was recognized by the communities of faith, Jewish and Christian, in terms of canonical inclusion and exclusion. The Bible is not so much a book as it is a library of books.

Now, what this means then is that we must be careful in interpretation, not uncritically, simply to read one book into another book or to collapse the message of one book into the message of another book, but allow each book to present its own message to us in its own terms, on its own terms, without, as I say, uncritically or in the wrong way reading other biblical passages and other biblical books into ours or into the book that we are studying at any given time. Now, this has to do really with the whole business of context. When you say that the basic literary unit of the Bible is a biblical book, then you're really saying that context does not have to do simply with the passages or the verses that immediately precede or immediately follow the passage that you're working on or interpreting, but everything within that book functions as literary context.

The whole biblical book is the literary context for any passage within it. When a writer produces a book, a writer creates a world of the text. We call this a textual world, a world of the text.

In other words, a book actually involves a construction of a literary universe, as it were, and that means that every passage within a given book relates in some way, either directly or indirectly, with every other passage within that book. So when we say, well, we want to interpret this verse in context, we don't mean simply. We do mean this, of course, in terms of the verses that immediately precede and follow.

That's fine so far as it goes as a media context, but we mean we interpret it in light of its function within the entire book. So, that's what we mean here in terms of relevant contextual knowledge. But also, this suggests relevant structural knowledge.

That is to say, contextual knowledge suggests not only, I should say, relevant knowledge not only suggests contextual, but also structural. Let me, by the way, come back just for a moment, if I may, to this contextual knowledge. I emphasize, of course, very much the book as the literary context.

It's quite true, too, that there is such a thing as canonical context, that is to say, to interpret it in light of the whole canon of Scripture, as well as historical context, to interpret it in the context of its own historical production. I really should say a little bit more at this point, even before we go ahead and look at structural, to say more at this point with regard to context in terms not simply of literary book context but also of canonical context because it is, in fact, the case that the Bible is made up, insofar as we say that the Bible is made up of 66 individual books.

And incidentally, one could say that some books are more dynamic in terms. For example, you think of the book of Psalms or the Psalter, where you have 150 Psalms. And there is a sense in which each of those Psalms functions as its own book, as it were. And yet, we know that, more recently, scholars who are engaged in Psalm studies are emphasizing the unity of the Psalter, the book of Psalms as a whole, and how the individual Psalms relate to the Psalms.

So even there, you have, of course, in some sense, individual Psalms functioning as their own literary unit, almost their own little book. But also, at another level, they are arranged in a certain way within the book of Psalms to suggest that they are to be read in light of the relationship to other Psalms within the book, particularly the Psalms that immediately precede and follow each Psalm. What I'm saying here, though, is that when you talk about the Bible being made up of 66 books, it's true that you must be prepared to grant the importance of the distinctive message of every individual book and not uncritically to read the message of other books into that book.

But having said that, you have to consider too that it's not a matter of the Bible being made up of 66 books that are simply there in isolation from each other. You have a canonical assemblage. The Bible, in other words, involves a canon of the 66 books being put there together, and the invitation is found within the very form of the Bible itself for us to read these books in light of other books within the canonical assemblage.

So, really, there are two things that we have to keep in mind. On the one hand, to be aware of and embrace the distinct message of each individual book and of passages within their book context, being careful not uncritically to read other books or other biblical passages into our book or our passage. On the other hand, to recognize that after having done that, after having identified the meaning of this passage in its book context, to go ahead and explore how this passage and its meaning within its book context relates to the rest of the biblical canon.

How the rest of the biblical canon actually completes or fills in, fulfills, brings to a broader sort of sense the meaning of what is being spoken of in our passage, or even how other passages in the Bible may qualify or nuance what is being said in our passage. So, it's not an either-or sort of proposition. It's both giving attention to the distinctive message of individual passages in their individual book context, but then also, having done that, relating the meaning of those individual passages within their individual books or relating the message of a whole book to the message of the canon as a whole.

Both, as I say, involve really both literary book context and also canonical context. But getting back though to interpreting passages in light of their book context, paying attention to the distinctive communication, the distinctive message of individual books, including, as I say, recognizing that every passage within a book relates directly or indirectly to every other passage within it, we must be aware of structure. The structure is extremely important in terms of ascertaining meaning.

The structure has to do with exploring how passages or elements within passages relate to elements in their surrounding context, their surrounding literary context. Books are composite. Writers join together words to form sentences and bring together sentences to form paragraphs and bring together paragraphs to form segments and bring together segments to form sections and combine sections to form divisions and combine divisions to form the whole book.

W. W. White put it this way, things hook an eye together. So it's in terms of how individual elements are related to each other that writers communicate sense. They communicate meaning.

Meaning is not communicated by an individual word off by itself. Words have meaning only in relation to other words. Sentences have no meaning in isolation.

A sentence has meaning only in relation to other sentences. Paragraphs have no meaning in isolation. A paragraph has meaning only in relation to the paragraphs that surround it.

Segments in books have no meaning in themselves. Their meaning is derived by how they relate to other segments. And the whole issue of relationship has to do with structure.

Structure is how things are related to each other. It involves exploring how things are related to each other, and it is through understanding structure or how things are related to each other that we come to understand the meaning of these things in themselves. Now, there is really no such thing as pure content.

All content comes to us through form, through relationship, through structure. I sometimes use the image of a house. A house is not a; a house is made up, of course, of lumber and of shingles and of nails and of bricks.

But a house is not just a pile of lumber and bricks and shingles and the rest. A pile of these things does not constitute a house. No one would, no one would mistake a pile of shingles and lumber and bricks for a house.

A house involves content, lumber, bricks, shingles, nails, all the rest, involves that content being arranged in a certain way, being structured in a certain way. Only if you have, have content structured in a certain way do you have a house. In the same way, you do not have a biblical book made up simply of content.

A book is made up of content arranged in a certain way, structured in a certain way. And so, for any communication to happen, it must have both content, stuff, and form, structure. You cannot get to content, you cannot understand content unless you attend to structure.

So, understanding the structure and the use of structure interpretation is absolutely essential. Also, it involves history, this business of relevant knowledge having to do with relevant contextual knowledge, relevant structural knowledge, and relevant historical knowledge. The understanding of historical background and use of this background interpretation, this really picks up on, really develops what I said earlier under contextual in terms of historical context.

By the way, some scholars wish to distinguish or even drive a wedge between the literary and historical study of the Bible. This, I think, is a false dichotomy. As soon as you say literature or literary, you're implying or assuming history.

Because every book, every literary product, has a historical origin, a historical context. And so, we're not able really to take context seriously into account unless we attend to the historical background and make use of this background in its interpretation. Here we're laying the groundwork really for what we'll be talking about a little bit later on in terms of exactly what to do in terms of process in the study of the Bible.

Also, theological, of course, is important as well. It involves theological reflection and penetration. This stems from the observation that we made a while ago, and that is that these documents are above everything else theological.

Now, they do include other things. You do have reference, actually, even you have some concern even for what we now would call the natural sciences in the Bible. You certainly have concern for politics within the Bible.

All this kind of thing is all this is very true. But yet, it is quite arguably the case that every book of the Bible is primarily concerned with presenting God and talking about God as its primary purpose. And so, this involves serious theological reflection and penetration.

Also, a knowledge of the recognition of various interpretive or applicatory possibilities along with the arguments for and against each. It is important to recognize that passages, that there may be different possible interpretations to passages, to be aware of what the different possible interpretations are, and to be able to provide arguments for our interpretation, our understanding of the meaning of a passage or book over against other possibilities that are out there. It ought also, we believe, to be not only, as we say, inductive and methodical, serious and intentional, holistic and sequential, accurate and informed, but also analytical.

There is an emphasis on breaking down into components and identifying individual components. Now, this really is quite important when it comes to process. It has to do with breaking, let's say, individual passages or individual books down into their constitutive parts and constituent parts and noting the meaning of those parts in relation, of course, to other parts.

That's a matter of analysis, but we don't stop there at the analytical or at analysis. It's also important to give attention to synthesis or to the synthetic. This involves an emphasis on discerning relatedness and connections between individual parts.

So, recognizing the importance of individual parts, but also, then synthesizing the meaning of these various parts, let's say, various words of a sentence or various paragraphs of a segment, bringing the meaning of all of them together in terms of the synthesis of the whole. This involves, among other things, that's what *inter alia* means, always asking how this passage or this truth relates to and contributes to the

whole of the Bible or the theology of the Bible as a whole. So, in other words, we're interested in what individual sentences mean, what individual paragraphs mean, and what individual books mean, but we're also interested in how all of that is related to what you have in the rest of the Bible with a view, then, towards coming up with a theology, a biblical theology as a whole.

Let me just say a word here with regard to preaching. I do think it's appropriate, as it, of course, reflects a practice that goes back many centuries in preaching, actually to read a text or maybe two texts. I, in preaching, like to read both an Old Testament and a New Testament text.

But anyway, to begin by reading the text and then preaching on the passage or the text that has been chosen and actually communicate in my sermon the message of that passage, the specific meaning or the specific message of that passage. But it's important in preaching, I think, in some way, and there are a couple of ways in which you can do it, but in some way to indicate that the theme or the topic that is being discussed in the passage that I am preaching on in any given sermon is not the whole of what the Bible has to say with regard to it. Now, there is both a direct and an indirect way in which you can communicate that.

One can communicate it directly as preaching a sermon on a particular passage, actually just to remind the congregation that there are other biblical treatments of this theme, of this topic. This is only one of them. We need to really, in our thinking, we need to keep all of them in mind.

That's the direct way. An indirect way actually happens through regular pastoral preaching or pastoral teaching, so that as you preach through the whole of the scriptures, over time, the congregation experiences or encounters really the various truths from various biblical angles, so that the congregation itself develops a kind of synthesis as one preaches through the scriptures month after month and year after year. Incidentally, this is one advantage of particularly younger preachers perhaps making use of something like a lectionary where you're forced to preach from passages from various parts of the canon over time, over against a tendency which otherwise might take hold, and that is only to preach on favored books or favored parts of the canon and not the whole of the scriptures, hence really making it impossible for your people to gain a synthetic sense of the teaching of the scriptures as a whole.

We want to take a break here, and we've gone for about an hour, and when we come back we'll round this out and then begin to look at a specific process, a hypothetical process that we'll present for your consideration.

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