

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 2, Culture, Language, and Genre Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 2, Culture, Language, and Genre, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture discusses the nature of biblical inspiration and its implications for hermeneutics. He explores different perspectives on inspiration, ranging from **dictation** to **human experience**, ultimately advocating for an **evangelical view** that balances the **divine and human elements** in scripture. The lecture examines **biblical texts** themselves, highlighting various **literary phenomena** and **authorial approaches**, illustrating the complexities involved in understanding how the Bible became what it is. He also considers the **practical implications** of viewing the Bible as inspired, emphasizing its **authoritative claim** on believers' lives. Finally, the lecture briefly previews **textual criticism** as a crucial aspect of ensuring the integrity of the scriptures we use today.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.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 excerpts on "Culture, Language, Genre" in relation to biblical hermeneutics:

Briefing Document: Mathewson Lecture 2 - Culture, Language, Genre & Biblical Interpretation

Introduction:

This document summarizes the main points from Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on how the character of the Bible as inspired literature impacts its interpretation. The lecture moves beyond simply "reading" the text and addresses the need to understand the distance between the text and the modern reader and how that distance is the reason for hermeneutics. It focuses on how the concept of "inspiration" affects our understanding of the Bible and, therefore, our interpretive approach. It highlights the dual nature of the Bible as both a human document and the Word of God and explores the implications of this duality for interpreting the text.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Need for Hermeneutics:

- Many approach the Bible with a desire to simply read it, but this reveals assumptions about how hermeneutics should be done. However, there is distance between the text and the reader, whether historical, cultural or language based.
- Hermeneutics is necessary to bridge the gaps that can lead to misunderstanding. As Mathewson says: "hermeneutics allows us to overcome that distance."
- The goal of the lecture is to examine the character of the literature of the Bible and how that should influence its interpretation.

1. The Concept of Inspiration:

- The word "inspiration" signifies a connection between the Bible and God. "Basically, when we say that the Bible is inspired, that word itself can generate a variety of understandings. What they all have in common is inspiration simply means the Bible has some connection with religious literature, with God himself. There's a connection between God and the Bible."

- The key is understanding the nature of this connection: how is the Bible both a fully human document *and* the word of God? Mathewson posits that a lot could be said about this, but this lecture will focus on how this affects the way that we interpret it.
- The lecture examines the dual nature of the Bible: "how do we understand the Bible as a fully human document that demonstrates its full human dimension and the fact that it is produced by human beings, but yet at the same time it claims to be nothing less than the very word of God?"

1. **Biblical Claims of Inspiration:**

- Two key New Testament passages provide "meta-statements" about the Bible's nature:
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17:** "All scripture is God-breathed" (θεόπνευστος) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Paul seems to include the entirety of the Old Testament in this declaration. It emphasizes the product (Scripture) being from God and not the process of its production.
- **2 Peter 1:20-21:** Prophecy does not come from human interpretation or the will of man, but from people "carried along by the Holy Spirit." Peter is referring specifically to the prophetic texts here, but is a meta-statement about these texts.
- These texts establish that scripture is seen as the product of God's speech and activity. The Bible itself claims that the Biblical texts are the product of "divine activity of God working and moving individuals to speak what is nothing less than the word of God."

1. **Phenomena of the Biblical Text:**

- **God Speaking Directly to Humans:** Often seen in prophetic literature, using formulas such as, "the word of the Lord came to..." or "thus says the Lord." Example used is the Decalogue.
- **Human Words Attributed to God:** Example: Jesus attributes the words of Genesis 2:24 ("a man will leave his father and mother...") to God in Matthew 19.
- **Humans Speaking to God:** The Psalms are examples of expressions of praise, lamentation, and other emotions poured out to God.

- **Human Processes of Composition:** The author of 2 Kings cites the "book of the annals of the king of Judah" as a source. Similarly, Luke (Luke 1:1-4) describes how he researched and compiled his Gospel, drawing on eyewitness accounts and previous narratives.
- Luke's use of common narrative language, his awareness of other accounts, and his reliance on eyewitnesses all point to a very human process of interpretation. "Luke seems to reveal a very human process of interpretation."
- **Paul Distinguishing His Words From the Lord's:** In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says, "to the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)," but when addressing another issue, he says, "I say this, not the Lord." He is not making a claim about levels of authority here but pointing out that for some commands he can refer directly to the words and teachings of Jesus.
- **Variations in Gospel Accounts:** The wording and presentation of Jesus' teachings can differ between the Gospels. Example: Matthew 5:3 (poor in *spirit*) and Luke 6:20 (*poor*). Mathewson stresses that this suggests the gospel writers were not as concerned with preserving the exact wording of Jesus but were more focused on providing accurate summaries.
- **Salvation History Arrangement:** The Bible appears to be arranged in a way where the New Testament fulfills, and sometimes seems to eclipse, the Old Testament.

1. Four Historical Views of Inspiration:

- **Fundamentalist View:** God dictated the words of Scripture. This view extends the prophetic model to the entire Bible, suggesting human authors were passive secretaries.
- **Liberal View:** The Bible is not equated with the Word of God, but rather a record of human religious experience, and no more authoritative than other religious texts.
- **Neo-Orthodox View (Karl Barth):** The Bible is a "witness to revelation" and can *become* the Word of God when God chooses to reveal Himself through it. Barth views the bible as an errant and fallible human document.

- **Evangelical View:** The Bible is the Word of God communicated through human authors and diverse methods. It affirms the divine nature of scripture, but does not diminish the human element. This view is compared to the Incarnation, where Jesus is both fully God and fully human. This view emphasizes the divine production of scripture, without diminishing the human aspect.

1. **Implications for Biblical Interpretation:**

- **Human Dimension:** The Bible's human element validates the use of various methods of criticism and interpretation.
- **Divine Dimension:** As the Word of God, the Bible has a claim on our lives and demands obedience.
- **Locus of Interpretation:** The text itself is the primary focus of interpretation, not reconstructed historical backgrounds or hypothetical sources.

1. **Canonical Text:**

- The lecture assumes that the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament are considered as the inspired word of God. This is based on the testimony of Jesus, other ancient Jewish authorities, and the evidence of the early church.

Concluding Thoughts:

- Mathewson poses the question, "How do we know that what we hold in our hands is, in fact, the inspired word of God?" and the next step is to examine text criticism.
- The lecture provides a nuanced understanding of biblical inspiration and its relevance for interpreting scripture, moving beyond a simple view to one that incorporates both the divine and the human dimensions.
- The lecture shows us that a variety of interpretations can arise from the way one views inspiration and what that means in the process of communicating the word of God.
- The lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Bible and applying interpretive methods to the text.

This briefing doc provides a detailed overview of the main points from the lecture extracts, using direct quotes and emphasizing key concepts to give a thorough picture of the content.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 2, Culture, Language, and Genre

Hermeneutics: Culture, Language, and Genre

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to the lecture, what is the primary purpose of hermeneutics?
2. What does it mean when we say the Bible is "inspired," according to the lecture?
3. What are the two main sources of evidence used to understand biblical inspiration?
4. What is the significance of 2 Timothy 3:16 in the discussion of inspiration?
5. According to the lecture, what is the significance of 2 Peter 1:20-21 in the discussion of inspiration?
6. How are prophetic texts understood to reflect God's communication with humans?
7. What does the example of Genesis 2:24 and its interpretation by Jesus in Matthew 19 illustrate about the Bible's authorship?
8. How does the lecture describe Luke's process of writing his Gospel?
9. How does Paul distinguish between his own words and the words of the Lord in 1 Corinthians 7?
10. What does the comparison between Matthew and Luke's versions of the Sermon on the Mount reveal about how the Gospels record Jesus' teachings?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The primary purpose of hermeneutics is to overcome the distances or gaps that exist between the text and the reader which can lead to misunderstanding. It helps bridge the cultural, historical, and linguistic gaps that exist between the original context of the text and the modern reader, allowing for proper interpretation.

2. When we say the Bible is "inspired," it means that the Bible has some connection with God and religious literature. The lecture notes that in a full theological sense, the Bible owes its origin both to human beings and to God himself.
3. The two main sources of evidence for understanding biblical inspiration are statements about the Bible within the text itself (such as 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21) and the phenomena observed within the biblical text, such as human speech, divine speech, and compilation methods.
4. 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed," is significant because it is where the theological term "inspiration" originates. It is also a meta-statement about the entirety of the scripture available to Paul as the very product of God's breath.
5. 2 Peter 1:20-21 is significant because it emphasizes that prophecy did not originate from human will but from men speaking from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This shows that the prophetic texts are the product of God's spirit moving the persons along to speak God's very word to his people.
6. Prophetic texts are understood to reflect God's direct communication to human authors, as prophets often claim that "the word of the Lord came to them." This is a formula that indicates they are aware they are speaking or writing the direct words or messages of God.
7. The example of Genesis 2:24 and its later use by Jesus in Matthew 19 shows that words originally written as a human comment within the text are later attributed to God by Jesus himself. It suggests that human authors can convey God's message even when they are not consciously speaking as a mouthpiece of God.
8. Luke's gospel, as described in his prologue, is the result of his careful investigation, utilizing eyewitness accounts and other written narratives. He states that he researched and compiled an orderly account, indicating a human process of gathering information and arranging it.
9. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul distinguishes his own words from the Lord's by referencing Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, stating "not I, but the Lord" when quoting Jesus, and "I say this, not the Lord" when addressing situations not directly covered by Jesus' earthly teachings. This shows where his instruction comes from and the limits of Jesus' explicit statements on the subject.

10. The differing accounts of Jesus' sayings in the Gospels, such as the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20, show that the gospel writers were not always concerned with preserving the exact words of Jesus, but accurately capturing the essence of what he was communicating. This underscores the idea that biblical texts can be inspired without verbatim dictation.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the implications of understanding the Bible as both a fully human and fully divine document for the process of biblical interpretation. How does this dual nature impact the way readers approach the text and its various genres?
2. Compare and contrast the four views of inspiration (fundamentalist, liberal, neo-orthodox, and evangelical) presented in the lecture. Which view do you find most convincing and why?
3. Explore the significance of the lecture's discussion on the "phenomena" found within the biblical text (e.g., human speech, divine speech, compilation) in relation to the doctrine of inspiration. How do these phenomena challenge traditional understandings of inspiration?
4. Analyze the lecture's discussion of the literary distances between modern readers and the biblical text. What does the lecture suggest about the importance of considering the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts of the text?
5. How does the lecture's argument regarding the historical and cultural context affect the understanding of the inspired nature of the Bible, and what consequences does that have for how one approaches hermeneutics?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of biblical texts. It involves understanding the distances and barriers between the text and the reader.
- **Inspiration:** The theological concept that the Bible has a unique connection with God. It indicates that the Bible is the product of both human beings and divine involvement.

- **God-breathed:** A term derived from 2 Timothy 3:16, referring to the idea that Scripture has its origin in the very speech or breath of God. This idea is used in the lecture to explain inspiration.
- **Meta-statement:** A statement about a statement or about the nature of the text itself, providing an overarching commentary on the text's authority or origin, such as 2 Timothy 3:16.
- **Prophetic Literature:** Biblical texts that claim to communicate God's direct messages to his people through prophets, often using the formula "the word of the Lord came to [prophet]."
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are similar in content and structure, suggesting a literary relationship between them.
- **Fundamentalist View:** A perspective on inspiration that holds that God dictated the exact words of the Bible to human authors, who served as passive secretaries.
- **Liberal View:** A perspective on inspiration that the Bible is primarily a record of human religious experience and not necessarily equated with the word of God.
- **Neo-orthodoxy:** A perspective on inspiration associated with Karl Barth, which posits that the Bible is not the word of God but can become the word of God when God chooses to reveal himself through it.
- **Evangelical View:** A perspective on inspiration that affirms the Bible as the very word of God, communicated through human authors by human processes while still being fully divine.
- **Canonical:** Refers to the books of the Bible that are recognized as authoritative and inspired scripture by a particular faith community.
- **Text Criticism:** The process of analyzing and comparing biblical manuscripts to determine the most accurate original text. It considers variations in wording and helps to reconstruct the closest approximation to the original.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 2, Culture, Language, and Genre, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation

- What is hermeneutics, and why is it necessary when reading the Bible?**
 Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, and it is necessary because there are gaps and distances between the original context of the biblical text and the modern reader. These distances, including differences in culture, language, and genre, can lead to misunderstanding. Hermeneutics provides tools and methods to bridge these gaps, enabling a more accurate interpretation of the Bible. It is not simply a matter of reading the text but understanding the context in which it was written and how that might impact its interpretation.
- What does it mean to say that the Bible is "inspired," and what does this imply about its nature?** To say that the Bible is inspired means that it has a connection with God, its origin owed to both human beings and God. This implies that it is both a fully human document, reflecting the perspectives, styles, and limitations of its human authors, and also the very word of God, carrying divine authority. How this divine and human authorship interact is central to the doctrine of inspiration. The Bible is religious literature set apart. It claims to be the word of God, and this affects how we understand it.
- What are the key biblical passages that discuss the concept of inspiration, and what do they teach?** Two primary New Testament passages discuss inspiration. 2 Timothy 3:16 states that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (or inspired by God), emphasizing that the text itself is of divine origin and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. 2 Peter 1:20-21 explains that prophecy does not originate from the prophet's own interpretation, but through the Holy Spirit moving them to speak God's words. These passages highlight both divine and human involvement in the production of Scripture, but these texts are primarily about the Old Testament and prophetic literature, respectively.

- **How do the human elements of the Bible affect our understanding of its inspiration and interpretation?** The human elements of the Bible are evident in various ways. There are instances where God speaks directly to humans, human words are attributed to God, or where humans address God (such as in the Psalms). Also the human authors utilized previous sources, and often summarize events rather than using direct quotes. The diversity in style and expression among the authors is evidence of their human individuality. Recognizing the human dimension is crucial because it validates using historical and literary criticism to understand the texts. However, this does not negate its status as the word of God.
- **How does the Bible's use of summaries and variations in wording, especially in the Gospels, affect its claim to being the word of God?** The Gospels do not always record the precise, verbatim words of Jesus but often provide accurate summations of his teachings. Variations in wording between parallel passages in the Gospels (e.g., "Blessed are the poor in spirit" vs. "Blessed are the poor") indicate that the Gospel writers were more concerned with accurately conveying the meaning and intent of Jesus' message than preserving his exact words. This reflects a literary convention of the time, and should not diminish its status as the word of God.
- **How should we understand the Old Testament laws and commands that are no longer followed, in light of the Bible's inspiration?** The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is arranged salvation historically. The New Testament brings to fulfillment and sometimes eclipses certain aspects of the Old Testament revelation. Practices like animal sacrifice, and strict Sabbath regulations, which were commanded in the Old Testament, are no longer applicable for Christians because they are fulfilled in Christ. This doesn't diminish the status of those commands within their own historical context as the word of God, but it does highlight the developmental nature of God's revelation throughout Scripture.

- **What are some different views on inspiration, and which view best accounts for the evidence within the Bible?** Four main views on inspiration have historically been proposed: (1) a fundamentalist view, which posits that God dictated the words to passive human authors; (2) a liberal view, which sees the Bible primarily as a record of human religious experience; (3) neo-orthodoxy, which understands the Bible as a witness to revelation that can become the word of God when God chooses to reveal himself through it; and (4) an evangelical view, which affirms that the Bible is both the word of God, and communicated through human authors and diverse methods. The evangelical view best accounts for the biblical evidence because it recognizes both the divine and human dimensions of Scripture, acknowledging that God worked through human authors in their diverse contexts.
- **How does the understanding of biblical inspiration affect the approach to biblical interpretation?** The understanding of biblical inspiration shapes the interpretive approach by acknowledging the need for both human and divine perspectives. Because the Bible is a human document, it necessitates utilizing valid methods of historical and literary criticism. Because it's divine, it also has a claim on our lives that must evoke a response of obedience and that historical methods cannot take us all the way in the interpretation. The text itself, in its canonical form, must be the primary focus of interpretation. Ultimately the canonical scriptures are seen as the very word of God.