

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 11, Redaction Criticism Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 11, Redaction Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from a hermeneutics course **explains several critical approaches** to biblical interpretation. It **begins with form criticism**, focusing on identifying and analyzing literary forms within the Gospels, particularly Jesus' parables, and their settings. The lecture then **moves to redaction criticism**, which examines how biblical authors arranged and edited source materials to convey their theological intentions, using the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and Palm Sunday as examples. Finally, it **discusses authorial intent**, exploring its importance in interpretation while acknowledging criticisms of this approach.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 11 – 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 hermeneutics, focusing on form criticism, redaction criticism, and the concept of authorial intent:

Briefing Document: Hermeneutics - Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism, and Authorial Intent

Introduction This document summarizes a lecture on hermeneutics, covering form criticism, redaction criticism, and the debate surrounding authorial intent in biblical interpretation. The lecture builds upon previous discussions of form criticism and introduces redaction criticism as a further step in historical analysis. It culminates in a discussion of the importance of authorial intent and challenges to that approach.

I. Form Criticism

- **Definition & Core Aspects:** Form criticism, especially as applied to the Gospels, involves three main aspects:
 1. **Identifying & Labeling Forms:** Recognizing literary forms like pronouncement stories, sayings, or parables within the text.
 2. **Isolating the *Sitz im Leben*:** Analyzing the "setting in life" of the early church that might have given rise to a specific form (e.g., miracle stories as apologetics).
 3. **Examining Oral Transmission:** Studying how the form may have been transmitted orally before being included in the biblical text.
- **Parables as a Case Study:**
 - Parables are a fruitful area of form criticism, particularly in identifying and labeling them.
 - **Traditional View:** Previously, the dominant approach focused on identifying the single main point a parable was trying to teach, influenced by Adolf Jülicher. This was a reaction against allegorical interpretations where every detail was assigned a symbolic meaning.
 - **Modern View: Limited Allegory:** More recent perspectives suggest that parables may function as "limited allegories." This means the main characters or features get an allegorical meaning, while most details are present to make the story coherent.

- **Jesus' Interpretation:** The lecture argues that Jesus himself seems to have treated parables as limited allegories, citing the example of the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-23), where Jesus explains the meaning of main elements like the sower, the seed, and the ground.
- **Parable Classification:** Parables can be categorized into three types based on the number of main points:
 1. **Monadic:** One main point, often associated with one main character/feature. (e.g., mustard seed)
 2. **Dyadic:** Two main points, associated with two main characters/features. (e.g., woman and judge)
 3. **Triadic:** Three main points, associated with three main characters/features. (e.g., prodigal son)
- **Example: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15):** The father represents God, the prodigal son represents the repentant sinner, and the older son represents the Pharisees or anyone who is jealous when grace is given to the undeserving. Most of the other details in the story are merely for the story's sake and are not to be given a deeper allegorical meaning. The ending's open-ended nature might be intended to prompt readers to examine their own responses to grace.
- **Form Criticism Beyond the Gospels:** Form criticism can be applied to other New Testament texts as well, for example, in Pauline Epistles:
- **Vice and Virtue Lists:** In the hortatory sections of Paul's letters, lists of virtues and vices are often found. These lists may derive from a common Greco-Roman form.
- **Household Codes:** Passages in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter which deal with relationships between husbands/wives, parents/children, and masters/slaves may derive from a common Greco-Roman "household code", which established social norms of the time. Paul adapted these for Christian instruction, but he may have been using these forms to show that Christianity is not subversive to the social norms of the time.

II. Redaction Criticism

- **Definition:** Redaction criticism builds on source and form criticism. It assumes that authors used pre-existing sources and forms, but it then focuses on how these sources and forms were combined, arranged, and edited by the author. Its goal is to discern the author's theological intention in writing the text.

- **Key Question:** Redaction criticism asks, how did the author arrange and edit their source material, and what does this reveal about the author's theological intention in writing the text?
- 1. **Core Assumptions: Author:** Redaction criticism assumes that an author produced the final text.
- 2. **Sources:** It assumes the existence of underlying sources and forms that the author incorporated into their work.
- **Method:** Redaction criticism primarily involves:
 1. **Comparison of texts:** Comparing the way different authors treat the same topic, or use the same sources.
 2. **Identifying editorial changes:** Identifying the ways in which an author has edited or altered a source or a common narrative.
 3. **Analyzing the implications of these changes:** Then, determining the significance and potential reasons for any editing or variations.
- **Old Testament Example:** Comparison of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17. The author of 1 Chronicles omits the phrase "When he does wrong, I will punish him," likely to portray the Davidic monarchy in the most positive light.
- **New Testament Examples: The Gospels: Palm Sunday Narrative:** A comparison of Matthew, Mark, and Luke shows how Matthew includes both a donkey and a colt, and quotes Zechariah 9:9, which is not present in Mark or Luke. This highlights Matthew's emphasis on Old Testament fulfillment.
- **Christmas Narratives:** Matthew emphasizes Jesus's royal status through the visit of the Magi, while Luke focuses on Jesus's humble beginnings with the shepherds. These differences reflect their theological concerns: Matthew's focus on Jesus's Messiahship and the Gentile reception of the Gospel, and Luke's focus on Jesus's care for outcasts.

III. Authorial Intent

- **Introduction:** Redaction criticism's focus on the author leads to the question of the author's intention.
- **Author-Centered Approaches:** Historical criticism includes the study of the author's intention.

- **Friedrich Schleiermacher:** He emphasized empathy with the author as a way of uncovering authorial intention. He thought the process was primarily psychological.
 - **Modern View:** While distancing themselves from Schleiermacher's "psychologizing" approach, many interpreters still see authorial intent as a crucial step in interpretation. Most textbook authors contend that the goal of interpretation is to recover the meaning that the author intended.
1. **Why is Authorial Intent Deemed Necessary? Texts are Created by Authors:** Authors create texts to communicate, so understanding what the author meant is a valid goal.
 2. **Arbitrates Between Conflicting Interpretations:** Authorial intent helps us decide between differing interpretations of a text.
 3. **Grounds Meaning:** It prevents interpretations from becoming purely subjective and "anything goes".
 4. **Foundation for Good Theology:** Good theology depends on good exegesis based on the author's intended meaning.
 5. **Inspired Scripture:** The fact that Scripture is inspired means that there is an intended meaning that we must try to uncover from both the human and divine authors. The human author's meaning is our best means to get at the divine meaning.
 6. **Self-Defeating Argument to the Contrary:** Those who say we can't know an author's intention still intend for their own articles to be understood, suggesting that the concept of authorial intent is valid.
- **Summary:** The goal of interpretation is to recover the author's intended meaning via methods such as analyzing the historical background, context, and meaning of words in their historical setting.

Conclusion (To be discussed in the next session):

The lecture concludes by previewing a discussion of objections to the concept of authorial intent, and the validity of the concept as a goal in interpretation. This part of the lecture will consider, in addition, if the author's intention is a still-valid goal of interpretation and how we should understand it.

Key Takeaways:

- Form criticism analyzes the literary forms, historical setting, and transmission of biblical texts.
- Redaction criticism examines how authors shaped their material to communicate their theological intentions.
- Authorial intent is a highly emphasized, but also a highly debated topic, in modern hermeneutics.

This briefing document aims to capture the core concepts and arguments presented in the provided lecture excerpts, providing a solid foundation for further discussion and study.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 11, Redaction Criticism

Biblical Interpretation Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the three facets of form criticism as it applies to gospel studies?
2. According to traditional interpretations, what is the primary goal when interpreting parables?
3. How do "limited allegories" differ from the traditional interpretation of parables?
4. What are the three main types of parables that Mathewson outlines, and how are they classified?
5. In the parable of the prodigal son, who do the three main characters represent, according to Mathewson?
6. What is a "vice and virtue list," and how does it appear in the New Testament?
7. What is a "household code," and how might Paul use it in his letters?
8. What is the main goal of redaction criticism, and what two things does it assume?
9. How does Matthew's account of the Palm Sunday narrative differ from Mark and Luke, and what does this reveal about Matthew's theological intentions?
10. How do the narratives of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke differ, and what might be the reasons for those differences?

Answer Key

1. Form criticism in gospel studies focuses on identifying and labeling the form (like a pronouncement story), analyzing the Sitz im Leben (setting in life) that gave rise to the form, and examining the oral transmission of the form before its inclusion in the text.
2. Traditionally, the goal of interpreting parables was to find the single main point that Jesus was trying to communicate, viewing parables as similes or metaphors meant to convey one primary message.

3. "Limited allegories" are parables where only the main characters or features have a second, allegorical level of meaning, while most of the details simply serve to make the story work, unlike traditional interpretations that seek to allegorize everything.
4. The three main types of parables are monadic (one main character/point), dyadic (two main characters/points), and triadic (three main characters/points), classified by the number of main features that have an allegorical meaning.
5. In the prodigal son parable, the father represents God, the younger son represents the repentant sinner, and the older son represents the Pharisees (or anyone who is jealous of God's grace to others).
6. A "vice and virtue list" is a catalog of negative behaviors (vices) to avoid and positive behaviors (virtues) to embrace, and they are used in the New Testament letters, often by Paul, to exhort believers.
7. A "household code" is a form found in Greco-Roman literature that stipulated proper relationships between husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters; Paul likely uses this form to instruct Christians, but with a unique Christian basis.
8. Redaction criticism examines an author's theological intention by studying how they arranged and edited their sources and material into the final text, and it assumes the existence of an author as well as sources/forms that the author utilized.
9. Matthew's account mentions both a donkey and a colt and quotes Zechariah 9:9, while Mark and Luke only mention a colt; these differences indicate Matthew's intention to emphasize the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the royal status of Jesus.
10. Matthew focuses on the Magi, highlighting the royal reception of Jesus by Gentiles, while Luke focuses on the shepherds, emphasizing Jesus' humble birth and his mission to the outcasts; these differences align with each gospel's broader theological themes.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a well-organized essay format. Do not include an introductory or concluding sentence to your essay, i.e., go right into the content.

1. Discuss the development of parable interpretation, including the influence of Adolf Jülicher and the more recent approach of classifying parables as "limited allegories." How does this evolution impact our understanding of the meaning and purpose of parables in the Gospels?
2. Explain how form criticism can be used to analyze the vice and virtue lists and household codes in the New Testament epistles. How does this approach illuminate the function and purpose of these forms within their historical context?
3. Compare and contrast source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. What specific kinds of questions does each critical method seek to answer, and how do they build upon each other?
4. How does redaction criticism help us understand the unique theological perspectives of the Gospel authors? Use the examples of the Palm Sunday and the Christmas narratives to illustrate your points.
5. Discuss the reasons why authorial intent has been deemed important in biblical interpretation. Consider potential limitations and objections to this approach as well.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that seeks to identify and classify different literary forms within the biblical text, and to analyze their historical and social settings (Sitz im Leben).
- **Sitz im Leben:** A German phrase meaning "setting in life;" it refers to the social or historical context in which a particular literary form or text arose.
- **Parable:** A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, often with a surprising or unusual twist.

- **Limited Allegory:** A type of parable where the main features or characters receive a secondary, allegorical level of meaning, while most of the details are simply there for narrative purposes.
- **Monadic Parable:** A type of parable with only one main point or character that gets a secondary, allegorical level of meaning.
- **Dyadic Parable:** A type of parable with two main points or characters that receive a secondary, allegorical level of meaning.
- **Triadic Parable:** A type of parable with three main points or characters that receive a secondary, allegorical level of meaning.
- **Vice and Virtue List:** A common literary form found in the ancient world, that catalogs behaviors to be avoided (vices) and behaviors to be embraced (virtues).
- **Household Code:** A literary form found in the ancient world, specifying the proper relationships between members of a household (husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters).
- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that seeks to understand an author's theological intention by examining how they have arranged, edited, and shaped their sources and materials in the final text.
- **Composition Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that examines the overall structure and composition of a literary work, often focusing on the way the author has intentionally structured the narrative to communicate a particular point.
- **Authorial Intent:** The meaning or purpose the author of a text intended to convey to their original audience; this is a common focus in literary and biblical interpretation.
- **Historical Criticism:** A broad approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to understand the historical and cultural context of the biblical text, and what that implies for the text's meaning.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation of a text, especially a religious text, to determine its true meaning.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 11, Redaction Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Form and Redaction Criticism

1. **What is form criticism in biblical studies, and what are its main goals?** Form criticism is a method of analyzing biblical texts by identifying and categorizing different literary forms or genres (e.g., parables, pronouncement stories, vice lists). Its primary aims include: (1) labeling the form; (2) understanding the "Sitz im Leben" (setting in life) of the form, which is the context in the early church or community that may have given rise to it; and (3) examining the oral transmission of the form before it became part of the written text. This process helps to understand how these texts were originally used and interpreted within their specific communities.
2. **How does form criticism approach parables, and has this approach changed over time?** Traditionally, parables were often interpreted allegorically, where every element had a symbolic meaning. However, Adolf Jülicher proposed that each parable conveys just one main point. More recently, many scholars have suggested that parables are actually "limited allegories." This means that while most details serve to make the story work, the main characters or features of a parable often have a second level of allegorical meaning, consistent with Jesus' teachings and the historical context. Parables can often be categorized as monadic (one main point), dyadic (two main points), or triadic (three main points), based on the number of main characters or features having a secondary meaning.
3. **Could you provide an example of how form criticism is used to analyze the parables in the Gospels?** The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) is a classic example of a triadic parable. Form criticism might identify three main characters: the father, representing God's forgiveness; the younger son, representing the repentant sinner; and the older son, representing those who are jealous of God's grace (such as the Pharisees). The other details in the story, like the fattened calf or the son's squandering, are considered "color" that is not meant to be allegorized but serve to make the story work. This analysis emphasizes understanding the parable's original context (Jesus responding to criticism of his association with sinners).

4. **Besides parables, how else has form criticism been applied to the New Testament?** Form criticism has been applied to various sections of the New Testament beyond the Gospels. For example, in Paul's letters, scholars often find vice and virtue lists. These lists, where Paul catalogs vices to be avoided and virtues to embrace (like in Galatians 5), are likely based on a common form found in Greco-Roman literature. Additionally, household codes, found in Ephesians and Colossians, which outline proper relationships between husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters, are another example of a known form from Greco-Roman society that Paul used.
5. **What is redaction criticism, and how does it differ from form and source criticism?** Redaction criticism is an approach that builds on form and source criticism. While form and source criticism primarily aim to identify oral forms and written sources behind a text, redaction criticism focuses on how authors have combined and edited these sources and forms to create a final text. Redaction criticism examines the author's choices in arranging and modifying their material and how those choices reflect their theological intention or purpose. It looks at what changes authors made and the reasoning behind those changes.
6. **How does redaction criticism analyze the differences between the Gospels?** Redaction criticism often compares the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to understand each author's unique perspective and theological aims. For instance, in the account of Palm Sunday, Matthew includes a donkey *and* a colt, and he quotes Zechariah 9:9. Mark and Luke only mention the colt. Matthew includes these details to emphasize that Jesus' arrival was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and to highlight Jesus as the royal Messiah. Similarly, Luke's Christmas story emphasizes Jesus' humble origins and appeal to outcasts through the shepherds, while Matthew emphasizes Jesus' royal status and Gentile reception through the Magi.

7. **Why is author's intention considered important in biblical interpretation, and what are some reasons to think it is the main goal of interpretation?** Author's intention is seen as crucial in interpretation for several reasons. First, texts are created by authors to communicate meaning and should be understood as such. Second, the author's intended meaning is seen as a way to arbitrate between conflicting interpretations and keep interpretation grounded and from running wild. Third, many see it as a foundation for sound theology. Finally, the idea of inspiration leads to the question of the author's intention, since the biblical text is thought to communicate God's intention, and author's intention is seen as the best way to access that.
8. **Despite its emphasis on authorial intention, what objections are there to relying on the author's intention?** The document does not address objections to relying on an author's intention as a primary goal of interpretation, but it does suggest that those will be addressed in the next session of the lectures.