

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 19, Epistle Literary Genre Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 19, Epistle Literary Genre, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture discusses interpreting the Old and New Testaments, focusing on genre. He explains how Old Testament prophecy involves both predicting the future ("foretelling") and addressing contemporary issues ("forth-telling"), with fulfillment occurring in various ways, sometimes straightforwardly, other times typologically. The lecture then explores New Testament genres, specifically the Gospels (presented as theological biographies) and epistles (characterized by their occasional nature and response to specific situations). Finally, the lecture emphasizes understanding the historical context and authorial intent when interpreting these texts.

2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 19 – 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).



**Mathewson_Herme
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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:

Briefing Document: Literary Genres in the Bible

Introduction

This document summarizes key concepts from a lecture focusing on the interpretation of various literary genres within the Old and New Testaments. The lecture emphasizes that understanding genre is crucial for proper biblical interpretation and highlights the diversity of literary forms present, rather than treating the Bible as a monolithic text. It addresses how prophecy works in both testaments and gives in-depth focus to understanding the Gospels and Epistles in the New Testament.

I. Old Testament Prophecy

- **Forth-telling vs. Foretelling:** Prophecy is primarily about *forth-telling*—proclaiming a message relevant to the present situation of the reader. This includes calling Israel back to covenant faithfulness, warning of consequences, and pronouncing judgments. While prophecy does include *foretelling*—predicting the future—it's not the primary focus.
- *Quote: "...prophets are primarily concerned not with just predicting the future...but they're primarily interested in proclaiming a message to the reader's present situation."*
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:**
- **Straightforward Fulfillment:** Some prophecies are fulfilled in a direct and literal manner (e.g., Micah's prophecy of a Bethlehem birth).
- **Typological/Analogical Fulfillment:** People or events in the Old Testament can function as "types" or patterns that are repeated and amplified in the New Testament, particularly in relation to Christ. The same God fulfills promises under both covenants.
- *Quote: "...the same God who is at work fulfilling his promises and bringing about his purposes under the old covenant is likewise in a similar but greater way at work again to fulfill his promises under the new covenant salvation..."*

- **Spiritual Fulfillment:** Sometimes, New Testament authors interpret Old Testament prophecies in a spiritual rather than literal or physical way (e.g., Amos' prophecy of David's monarchy being fulfilled in the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church).
- **Dual Fulfillment:** Some prophecies are fulfilled in two stages: first at Christ's first coming (inauguration) and then at his second coming (consummation). The single climactic event in the Old Testament is split into two in the New.
- **Unexpected Fulfillment:** Fulfillment of prophecy often occurs in unexpected ways. The rejection of Jesus by Jewish leaders, who had preconceived notions about prophecy, serves as a model for caution against over-speculation about future fulfillment.
- **Primary Purpose:** The primary purpose of prophetic texts is to encourage and warn people toward holy living, not just to predict the future. Interpretation must begin from this premise.
- *Quote: "The primary purpose of Old Testament prophetic text is not prediction of the future...But instead prophetic texts are primarily there to encourage God's people who are having a rough go or to warn those who are tempted to stray and to encourage and to warn God's people to pursue holy living."*

II. New Testament Literary Genres

- **Diversity of Genre:** The New Testament utilizes diverse literary genres (narrative, epistles, apocalyptic). It is not a homogenous document.
- *Quote: "...we are not simply reading a monolithic document that is simply homogenous from beginning to end but we're reading a document that although clearly demonstrating a unity within that there is a diversity of literary forms and literary types."*
- **Analogy vs. Identity:** While some New Testament genres have analogies to contemporary forms, we cannot read them identically to modern counterparts. (e.g., Ancient versus modern biography or letter.)

III. The Gospels (Narrative)

- **Genre & Historicity:** The genre of the Gospels is closely tied to the question of historicity. Categorizing them as "fictional" risks undermining their historical reliability.

- **Theological Biography:** The Gospels are best categorized as *theological biographies*. They aim to present a theological perspective on Jesus' life, not simply a historical chronicle.
- *Quote: "That perhaps a better classification would be that the Gospels are theological biography...[The authors] are trying to communicate a theological message and one needs to try to uncover that through things like redaction criticism."*
- **Key Principles for Interpretation:**
 - **Theological Intent:** Understand the theological intent of each Gospel writer by analyzing how they arrange and edit their material (redaction criticism).
 - **Paragraph-Level Interpretation:** Focus on the function and relationships of paragraphs and stories, rather than only individual sentences or clauses. Speeches may require a closer reading of arguments.
 - **Unique Contributions:** Recognize the unique perspective and contribution of each of the four Gospels rather than attempting to homogenize them before allowing them to speak for themselves.
 - **Selectivity:** Recognize that the Gospel writers are selective, not presenting exhaustive accounts but choosing material to communicate their message.
 - **Thematic Arrangement:** Gospels sometimes arrange material thematically or logically rather than strictly chronologically.
 - **Summaries of Speeches:** Speeches of Jesus are often summaries or accurate representations, not necessarily word-for-word transcriptions.
 - *Quote: "...sometimes what we find and I'd say often what we find is a summary of an accurate and adequate summary of what the person said rather than a word for word report of everything that the author actually said."*

IV. Epistles (Letters)

- **Common Form:** Letters were a common and versatile form of communication in the first century. They served as a substitute for the author's presence.
- **Occasional Nature:** Epistles are primarily occasional documents, written in response to specific situations and problems in first-century churches. They represent more "pastoral or practical theology" than "abstract theology."

- *Quote: "That is, the epistles are written in response to very specific situations and very specific occasions...That is, the letters are not just abstract theology couched in letter format."*
- **Reconstructing the Situation:** Interpreting epistles requires reconstructing the situation that gave rise to them. This often involves "mirror reading"—inferring the problems based on the author's responses.
- **Analogies:** The difficulty of interpretation is analogized to reading someone else's mail/email or listening to one end of a phone conversation. We only have one side of the dialogue, and must reconstruct the other to understand what is being said.
- **Amanuenses:** Letters were often dictated to an amanuensis or scribe, highlighting the human element in scripture's production.
- **Epistolary Structure:** Typical first-century letters have a structure:
 1. Introduction/Salutation
 2. Thanksgiving
 3. Body
 4. Paranaesis (exhortation)
 5. Closing/Farewell
- **Impact of Structure on Interpretation:**
- **Expanded Elements:** Pay attention to when authors expand on typical epistolary elements, as this may indicate a significant emphasis.
- **Missing Elements:** Note when typical elements are missing, like the absence of a thanksgiving in Galatians, as this can also be significant.

Conclusion This lecture emphasizes that recognizing and understanding the various literary genres within the Bible is necessary for proper interpretation. By paying attention to genre-specific nuances, the reader can gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning and purpose.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 19, Epistle Literary Genre

Biblical Genre Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. How do scholars typically differentiate between "forth-telling" and "fore-telling" in relation to Old Testament prophecy?
2. What is "typological" or "analogical" fulfillment, as it relates to Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament? Provide an example.
3. How do New Testament authors sometimes apply prophecies of the restoration of national Israel and the Davidic monarchy?
4. What does it mean to say that some prophetic texts find fulfillment in both the first and second coming of Christ?
5. According to the lecture, what is the primary function and purpose of prophetic texts?
6. What are the three main literary genres that comprise the New Testament?
7. What does it mean to consider the Gospels as "theological biography?"
8. What does the lecture suggest about the way that the Gospels are arranged chronologically?
9. What is an "amanuensis," and how does the lecture suggest that they were used in the writing of the New Testament letters?
10. What does it mean to say that New Testament letters are "occasional" in nature, and how does this affect interpretation?

Answer Key

1. Scholars differentiate between forth-telling and fore-telling by emphasizing that forth-telling is the prophets' primary concern. They are primarily interested in proclaiming a message to the reader's present situation, rather than merely predicting the future, which is fore-telling.

2. Typological or analogical fulfillment occurs when an Old Testament person, event, or pattern is repeated in a greater way in God's dealings with his people, especially in light of fulfillment in Christ. It is a repetition of a pattern, not necessarily a direct prediction. An example is the restoration of the Davidic monarchy.
3. New Testament authors often apply these prophecies to the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, rather than a strictly literal, political restoration. They find fulfillment in the first coming of Christ and his people, the church.
4. Some prophetic texts are seen as having a two-stage fulfillment: the first coming of Christ inaugurates the fulfillment, and the second coming of Christ completes or consummates it. This understanding is tied to New Testament eschatology.
5. The primary purpose of prophetic texts is not the prediction of the future, but rather encouragement and warning or exhortation to holy living. The goal is to encourage God's people and call them back to faithfulness, regardless of the cost.
6. The three main literary genres of the New Testament are narrative (which includes the Gospels and Acts), epistles (letters), and apocalyptic (specifically the Book of Revelation).
7. The Gospels can be considered "theological biography" because, while they are grounded in historical events, they are also written with a specific theological motive to communicate the author's understanding of the person and life of Jesus Christ. This means authors are not just recording historical facts but also interpreting their theological implications.
8. The Gospels are not always arranged strictly chronologically. Sometimes the authors organize the material thematically or logically, collecting related stories or teachings together, rather than presenting events in a precise timeline.
9. An amanuensis was a scribe or secretary who would write down what an author dictated. First-century writers often used amanuenses rather than writing letters by themselves, revealing the human element involved in the production of scripture.
10. New Testament letters are "occasional" because they are written in response to specific problems or situations in the first-century church. This means interpretation requires reconstructing the historical circumstances and issues that prompted the letter.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer these questions in a well-organized, multi-paragraph essay.

1. Discuss the different types of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament, providing examples and explaining the significance of each for biblical interpretation.
2. How does understanding the Gospels as a form of "theological biography" impact the way we interpret them? Consider issues of historicity and the theological intent of the Gospel writers.
3. Analyze the implications of the "occasional nature" of New Testament epistles for understanding their theological content. Discuss the significance of reconstructing historical circumstances for interpretation.
4. Using the example of Paul's letter to the Galatians, explore how the structure and components of first-century letters contribute to our understanding of the text. Include the ways in which typical elements are expanded, or when they are missing.
5. How do the three literary genres of the New Testament – narrative, epistle, and apocalyptic – each contribute to our understanding of the message of the Bible, and why is it important to recognize each one's unique qualities?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Forth-telling:** Proclaiming a message to the reader's present situation; emphasizing the immediate application of the prophet's words.
- **Fore-telling:** Predicting the future or some course of events that will transpire in the future; focusing on events to come.
- **Eschatology:** The part of theology concerned with the final events of history, or the ultimate destiny of humanity; things related to God's intention for the end.
- **Typological Fulfillment:** A fulfillment of prophecy in which an Old Testament person, event, or institution serves as a pattern or type that is repeated or fulfilled in a greater way in the New Testament, often in relation to Christ.
- **Analogical Fulfillment:** A form of fulfillment in which the Old Testament event is analogous or similar to a New Testament event, but not a direct prediction.

- **Theological Biography:** A biography written with the primary intent to communicate a specific theological message or perspective.
- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical study that seeks to understand the theological purpose of the biblical authors by analyzing how they edited and arranged their source material.
- **Amanuensis:** A scribe or secretary who would write down what someone else dictated; used in the production of letters in the first century.
- **Epistle:** A formal letter, often used in the New Testament as a means of conveying theological teaching and pastoral guidance.
- **Occasional:** Written in response to a specific situation or need; describes the nature of New Testament letters written to address issues in the first-century church.
- **Mirror Reading:** An approach to interpreting biblical letters that attempts to reconstruct the original situation of the audience from clues within the letter itself.
- **Paranaesis:** The section of exhortation or ethical instruction in a letter; often found in the Pauline epistles, giving commands or imperatives based on the body of the letter.
- **Epistolary Structure:** The standard format or structure of a letter, typically including a salutation, thanksgiving, body, paranaesis, and closing.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 19, Epistle Literary Genre, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Biblical Interpretation

- **What is the primary focus of Old Testament prophecy?**
- While Old Testament prophets sometimes predicted future events (fore-telling), their primary concern was addressing the present situation of their audience (forth-telling). They called Israel back to covenant faithfulness, warned of the consequences of disobedience, and proclaimed judgment for their sins and the sins of other nations. Their message was not just about future events, but about encouraging holy living in the present.
- **How is prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament?**
- Prophecies can be fulfilled in various ways. Sometimes fulfillment is straightforward, like the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as predicted in Micah. Other times it's typological, where a person or event in the Old Testament serves as a pattern or type that is repeated and expanded in the New Testament, often in relation to Christ. Prophecies may also be fulfilled in a more spiritual way in the New Testament that is not a direct physical fulfillment of Old Testament descriptions. Some prophecies are fulfilled in both the first and second comings of Christ, inaugurated at his first coming, and consummated at his second coming. Finally, some prophecies are fulfilled only in the eschatological consummation of all things.
- **How should we approach interpreting the Gospels?**
- The Gospels are a unique literary genre often described as theological biographies. This means they are accounts of Jesus' life that are rooted in history but also intentionally shaped to communicate a particular theological perspective. We should consider the historical context, but also pay attention to how each Gospel writer arranges and edits their material. The goal is not simply to reconstruct a historical timeline, but to understand the theological intent of each author and what they uniquely contribute to our understanding of Jesus.

- **Are the Gospels strictly chronological?**
- While the Gospels follow a general chronological framework of Jesus' life and ministry, the authors often arrange material thematically or logically rather than strictly chronologically. They might group similar stories or teachings together to emphasize certain points. Thus, it's important to recognize that not every sequence of events is necessarily a chronological one, and that the selection and arrangement of events has a theological purpose.
- **How should we view the speeches in the Gospels?**
- Speeches in the Gospels, including those of Jesus, are often summaries of what was said rather than verbatim transcripts. The Gospel writers captured the essence of the messages, not necessarily the precise wording. This was a common practice in first-century biographies, where accuracy of meaning was the primary goal, not exact word-for-word recording.
- **What is the "occasional nature" of New Testament epistles?**
- New Testament epistles are "occasional" writings, meaning they were written in response to specific situations and problems faced by the early churches. These are not abstract theological treatises, but rather practical theology applied to particular circumstances. To understand an epistle fully, one must reconstruct, to the best of our ability, the historical situation, the issues and challenges that motivated the author to write the letter.
- **How does understanding the structure of an epistle help in interpretation?**
- Epistles generally follow a typical structure: introduction/salutation, thanksgiving, body, exhortation (paranesis), and closing farewell. However, New Testament authors often expand or omit certain elements. These deviations, like expansions or omissions, such as a missing thanksgiving, are often very meaningful. Paying attention to how these typical structures are modified by the author can provide clues to the author's emphases and key themes.

- **What is "mirror reading" and why is it important?**
- "Mirror reading" is the practice of using the content of a letter to reconstruct the situation that prompted its writing. Since the letters provide our main access to these historical situations, we have to "read off" the letter itself what problems or issues may have prompted the author to write. This helps us better understand what the author is responding to. It acknowledges that what we have is a response to a situation, not the situation itself.