

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 23, Literary Approaches Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 23, Literary Approaches, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from a hermeneutics course focuses on the importance of literary context in biblical interpretation. **The instructor emphasizes understanding a passage's role within the broader narrative flow, demonstrating how individual sections contribute to the overall argument and would be incomplete without their specific context.** Several examples from both the Old and New Testaments are provided, including analyses of passages from Exodus, Psalms, Matthew, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and Revelation. **The examples illustrate how neglecting the surrounding text can lead to misinterpretations.** Finally, the lecture introduces the topic of how New Testament authors utilize Old Testament texts, highlighting the complex relationship between the two testaments.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 23 – 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 main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpts:

Briefing Document: Literary Context & Old Testament Use in the New Testament

I. Main Theme: Importance of Literary Context in Biblical Interpretation

The central argument of this lecture excerpt is the crucial role of literary context in the accurate interpretation of both Old and New Testament texts. Dr. Mathewson emphasizes that understanding a passage's contribution to the flow of thought, its relationship to preceding and following sections, and its function within the broader narrative or argument is paramount. He cautions against superficial or isolated readings, highlighting that a text's meaning is inextricably tied to its context. Furthermore, he stresses the importance of specifying what *in* the context leads to a particular interpretation, and not just broadly citing "the context."

II. Key Ideas and Facts

- **Contextual Analysis is Essential:** Interpretation is incomplete until the role of the passage in the overall context is accounted for. As Dr. Mathewson states, "Things you can do, you are not ready to move on in the process of interpretation until you can account for what your passage is doing in its context, how it grows out of what comes before and relates to what comes before and how it prepares for what comes after it."
- **Exodus 17-18 Example:** The lecture uses Exodus 17-18 to illustrate the importance of context.
- **Moses' Weakness:** The juxtaposition of Moses providing water from the rock (Exodus 17), his struggle in the battle with the Amalekites, and his inability to handle all the cases in Israel (Exodus 18) are not isolated incidents. They serve to highlight Moses' human limitations, creating the question "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7).
- **God's Presence:** By portraying Moses as weak, the narrative suggests that God's power is at work because Moses alone could not achieve what has been accomplished. This isn't solely about delegation of authority but rather to portray God's presence and power working *through* a flawed leader. "By portraying Moses as a weak human being who can't handle things, it's as if the author is trying to portray God must be with his people because it's not Moses."

- **Psalm 15 Example:** Psalm 15 is presented as a straightforward example of a question-and-answer format, demonstrating a more direct relationship with the literary context.
- The question posed in verse 1 – "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?" – is directly answered in the following verses, describing the qualities of the righteous.
- **Importance of Specificity:** Dr. Mathewson cautions against vague appeals to "the context." He states, "Don't just say the context says this, or the context demands this. Show me in the context what it is that requires or suggests that you have read it accurately or correctly." It's important to identify the specific elements within the context that justify your reading.
- **Matthew 4-9 Example:** In Matthew 4:23, the summary statement about Jesus preaching the kingdom and healing serves as a framework for the following chapters.
- **Structure:** Chapters 5-7 detail Jesus' teaching (Sermon on the Mount), while chapters 8-9 record his healing ministry. This illustrates a literary pattern of summary and expansion, demonstrating a deliberate organization by the author. As Dr. Mathewson says, "Matthew has carefully arranged this section of Matthew with a summary and an expansion, a summary of two ideas, preaching the kingdom, healing, an expansion of both of those, and then another summary that kind of acts as a bracket between those two large sections." The summary at the end of chapter 9 then echoes the summary in 4:23
- **Galatians 1-2 Example:** Paul's narrative in Galatians 1-2 about his conversion and interactions with other apostles supports his thesis statement in 1:11-12 that he did not receive the gospel from any human source but from direct revelation.
- **Purpose of Narration:** The autobiographical details of his life before, during, and after conversion serve to prove he was *not* influenced by human teaching. This refutes claims that his gospel is illegitimate. "Nothing before my conversion, during it, or after my conversion calls that into question. But everything that took place instead demonstrates that my gospel could have come in no way other than a direct revelation from Jesus Christ."
- **1 Corinthians 12-14 Example:** The famous love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) must be read in its context within Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts (Chapters 12 & 14).

- **Love as the Foundation for Spiritual Gifts:** Chapter 13 clarifies the way spiritual gifts should be used, saying that they should always operate out of love that benefits the entire community. It's about the proper use of spiritual gifts rather than the gifts themselves. As Dr. Mathewson suggests, "If they have the kind of love in 13 that is patient, it's kind... then they will pursue the gift of prophecy in chapter 14 because it is immediately intelligible and has a benefit for the entire congregation, not just for the person exercising the gift."
- **Colossians 3:1-4 Example:** Colossians 3:1-4 ("seek the things above") is not about escaping from earthly reality.
- **Ethical Exhortation:** These verses introduce the ethical section of Colossians. Paul responds to false teachings by emphasizing a life transformed by Christ. To set the mind on things above, "means to not pursue and not be characterized by these kinds of vices" found in the vice list that follows and it means to pursue the virtues characteristic of life in Christ. "So setting your minds on heavenly things and not on earthly things has nothing to do with somehow escaping to some spiritual existence or ignoring or downplaying things in this life..."
- **Revelation 6-7 Example:** The vision of the seven seals in Revelation must be read contextually.
- **Interconnected Visions:** Chapter 6, ending with the question of who can stand in God's wrath, is answered by the vision of the sealed 144,000 in Chapter 7. The narrative forms a coherent whole. "So chapter 6 is not just a discreet vision that is unrelated to anything else, but again, chapter 6 grows out of chapter 4 and 5, the vision of the throne and the seven-sealed scroll."

III. Old Testament Use in the New Testament

- **Canonical Relationship:** The Old and New Testaments are in a "canonical relationship" of promise to fulfillment. The New Testament draws on the vocabulary, concepts, and structures of the Old Testament. The New Testament authors understood the new revelation of Jesus to be in continuity with the Old Testament.
- **Intertextuality:** The New Testament must be read in constant "intertextual relationship" with the Old Testament.
- **Variety of Uses:** The New Testament authors utilize the Old Testament in a variety of ways. They are not using it in a single, uniform method.

- **Key Questions in Studying OT use in NT:Text Form:** What text form does the New Testament author appear to be utilizing (Hebrew Masoretic or Septuagint)?
- **Contextual Awareness:** Does the New Testament author demonstrate an awareness of the Old Testament's broader context when they quote a specific passage?
- **Respect for Context:** Does the author use the Old Testament passage in a way that is consistent with its original meaning?

IV. Conclusion

This lecture excerpt stresses the crucial and essential nature of literary context when interpreting biblical texts. It also provides an introduction to a series of issues that must be considered when analyzing how the New Testament uses the Old Testament. Without understanding the literary flow and context of a passage, its meaning will be lost. The examples provided demonstrate that correct understanding of the Bible is dependent on a careful attention to literary context, as well as the intertextual relationships that inform the text.

This briefing document should give you a solid overview of the core ideas presented in the lecture excerpts. Let me know if you have any other questions or need further clarification.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 23, Literary Approaches

Literary Context in Biblical Interpretation

Study Guide

Quiz

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

1. What is the key question raised in Exodus 17:7, and how do the subsequent stories in Exodus 17 and 18 relate to it?
2. How does the portrayal of Moses in Exodus 17 and 18 contribute to the overall message of those chapters?
3. What is the function of Psalm 15, and how does its structure contribute to its purpose?
4. In Matthew 4, what is the summary statement made in verse 23, and how does it relate to the content of chapters 5-9?
5. What is Paul's central argument in Galatians 1-2, and how does his narrative about his past and interactions with the apostles support this argument?
6. In 1 Corinthians 13, what problem is Paul addressing, and how does the chapter on love fit into his response?
7. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, how does Paul address the issue of spiritual gifts and the perceived hierarchy of gifts within the Corinthian church?
8. How does Paul explain what it means to "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" in Colossians 3:1-4?
9. How does Revelation 6 relate to chapters 4 and 5, and what is the significance of the question posed at the end of chapter 6?
10. What are some of the important questions scholars ask when studying the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament?

Answer Key

1. The key question in Exodus 17:7 is, "Is the Lord among us or not?" The subsequent stories of the battle with the Amalekites and Moses delegating

authority are not direct answers but portray Moses as weak, implying that God is at work because Moses cannot do it on his own.

2. The portrayal of Moses as a weakened individual in Exodus 17 and 18 contrasts with his earlier heroic depictions, suggesting that God's power, not Moses' strength, is responsible for Israel's victories and sustenance. This shows how divine power works through human weakness.
3. Psalm 15 functions as an entrance psalm to God's sanctuary. It begins with a question of who may dwell there and answers that question by outlining the characteristics of a person who is acceptable to God, following a question-answer format.
4. In Matthew 4:23, Jesus is described as preaching the kingdom, teaching, and healing diseases. This summary is followed by the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7, which represents the teaching aspect, and a collection of healing stories in chapters 8-9.
5. Paul's central argument in Galatians 1-2 is that his gospel did not come from human sources but was received directly by revelation from Jesus Christ. His narrative demonstrates how his pre-conversion zeal and his interactions with the apostles after his conversion did not contribute to his gospel or apostleship.
6. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is addressing the problem of the misuse of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, especially the elevation of certain gifts like tongues. The chapter on love functions as a guide for how to properly use gifts, emphasizing a selfless and beneficial approach rather than one based on personal status.
7. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul addresses the Corinthian church's issue with spiritual gifts by stating that all gifts are equal and do not demonstrate a spiritual hierarchy. He particularly emphasizes prophecy in contrast to tongues because prophecy benefits the whole congregation.
8. Paul explains that "setting your minds on things above" involves actively pursuing virtues like compassion, kindness, and humility while rejecting vices associated with the "earthly nature", such as sexual immorality, greed, and anger, not to escape but to engage more authentically with the world as a child of God.
9. Revelation 6 is a series of judgments that begin to be unleashed on the earth based on the heavenly vision in chapters 4-5. The question of who can stand implies the coming of God's judgment and prompts the answer in chapter 7 with the sealing of the 144,000.

10. Scholars ask about the text form the author uses (Hebrew or Septuagint), whether they are aware of the Old Testament context, and if they respect that context or use passages in ways that violate the original meaning. These questions help understand the author's intent.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of literary context in biblical interpretation. Using examples from the provided text, illustrate how a passage's meaning can change when it is understood within its immediate and broader context.
2. Compare and contrast Paul's approach to using the Old Testament in Galatians versus his approach in 1 Corinthians, discussing what that reveals about his interpretative methods. How does this influence how one should study the texts themselves?
3. Analyze the literary structure of the provided passages from Matthew and Revelation. How do the authors utilize summary statements and narrative flow to guide their readers to a better understanding of their argument?
4. How does Paul use both vice and virtue lists in his letter to the Colossians? What can we determine from their use and how can this help clarify what he means by setting the mind on heavenly things rather than earthly ones?
5. Explain the relationship between promise and fulfillment in the Old and New Testaments. Using examples from the source material, illustrate how the New Testament authors understood their writings in continuity with the Old Testament.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Literary Context:** The surrounding text of a passage, which includes what comes before and after it, and how it contributes to the overall flow of thought and argument of the book.
- **Septuagint (LXX):** The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was widely used by early Christians and quoted in the New Testament.
- **Masoretic Text:** The authoritative Hebrew text of the Old Testament, which is the basis for most modern translations.
- **Epistolary Literature:** Texts written in the form of a letter, such as many of the books of the New Testament by Paul. These have distinct formats that signal their purpose and intention.
- **Canonical Relationship:** The relationship between the Old and New Testaments as a unified body of scripture, where the New Testament is seen as the fulfillment of promises made in the Old Testament.
- **Intertextual Relationship:** The connection between different texts, where the meaning of one text is understood in light of its relationship to another. In this case, the constant relationship between the Old and New Testament.
- **Vice List:** A list of actions or behaviors to be avoided, often used in ethical instruction within the New Testament.
- **Virtue List:** A list of actions or behaviors to be embraced, often used in ethical instruction within the New Testament.
- **Salutation:** A greeting in a letter, often used by Paul to introduce key themes and arguments in his letters.
- **Enconium:** A speech or piece of writing that praises someone or something highly.
- **Judaizers:** In the context of Galatians, a specific group of false teachers who were insisting that Gentile Christians needed to submit to the Law of Moses to be properly saved.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 23, Literary Approaches, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Understanding Biblical Interpretation

- **Why is understanding the literary context of a passage so crucial for biblical interpretation?**
- Understanding a passage's literary context is vital because it reveals how the passage contributes to the overall flow of thought and argumentation within the text. It's essential to understand how a passage relates to what precedes and follows it, its function in the narrative, and what would be lost if it were absent. Examining the literary context provides crucial insight to a text's purpose. For example, the portrayal of Moses as a weak human being in Exodus is not primarily a story about delegation of authority but emphasizes God's presence among his people since Moses' strength was not the source of Israel's victories. Without this contextual understanding, misinterpretations about the author's intent and the passage's significance are likely.
- **What does it mean to analyze the literary context of a biblical text, and why is it important to do more than just say "the context suggests"?**
- Analyzing the literary context of a biblical text involves examining how a specific passage functions within the broader literary unit it belongs to. This includes identifying its role in the flow of thought, how it connects to what precedes it, how it leads to what follows, and what its overall purpose is. It's not enough to simply claim, "the context suggests this," because this lacks specific evidence from the text. Instead, you must pinpoint *what* within the context supports your interpretation. You have to explain the evidence from the text, rather than simply asserting it. Doing this ensures a more accurate and grounded understanding of the text.

- **How does the structure of Matthew 4:23-9:35 demonstrate the literary importance of summary statements and expansions?**

In Matthew, the summary statement in 4:23, which highlights Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing ministry, sets the stage for the subsequent chapters. Chapters 5-7 then provide a detailed account of Jesus' teachings (the Sermon on the Mount), while chapters 8-9 offer a collection of stories that exemplify his healing ministry. This pattern is then echoed in the summary in 9:35, which repeats the same elements, that form a type of bookend. This literary arrangement reveals how the summary acts as an introduction and then as a conclusion to these longer narratives. This literary structure highlights the importance of these key aspects of Jesus' ministry, and that Matthew has structured his narrative carefully to highlight his intended meaning.

- **In Galatians 1 and 2, what is the purpose of Paul's autobiographical narrative, and how does it connect to his main argument?**
- In Galatians 1 and 2, Paul's autobiographical narrative is crucial for demonstrating the divine origin of his gospel and apostleship. The narrative emphasizes that his understanding of the gospel did not originate from any human source or from his Jewish background. He highlights his past zealous persecution of the church and emphasizes that his understanding came directly from a revelation by Jesus Christ. This narrative establishes the main thesis, stated in 1:11-12, that his gospel was not humanly taught or conceived, it was revealed. His interactions with other apostles also affirm his apostleship and the validity of his teachings. Paul's narrative serves to counter any claims of falsehood made against him, that he was an illegitimate apostle, and did not receive his message from a divine source.
- **What is the primary context of 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter), and how does it relate to the preceding and following chapters?**
- 1 Corinthians 13, known for its poetic description of love, is best understood within the context of Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. It is not isolated from the rest of the text, as it often is read in a wedding context, but is instead directly pertinent to the specific issue. It is the middle of two chapters that directly address problems within the church. Chapter 12 introduces the issue that the Corinthians were misusing and overvaluing certain spiritual gifts, while chapter 14 emphasizes prophecy as a more beneficial gift. Chapter 13 describes the type of love that should guide the exercise of spiritual gifts, which is a love that seeks to benefit others and unite, rather than divide. This context is key to understanding that love is not merely an ideal sentiment but

an active principle that should guide spiritual practices and interpersonal relationships.

- **How does the interpretation of Colossians 3:1-4 change when considered in its broader context, particularly concerning the ethical implications?**

Colossians 3:1-4, which discusses seeking "things above" rather than "things on earth," is often misinterpreted as a call to escape worldly concerns and live a mystical, detached life. However, within its broader context, it actually marks the beginning of an ethical section. The preceding chapter denounces a false teaching for its ethical bankruptcy, which has led to the understanding that "things above" means pursuing godly virtues, such as compassion and kindness, and resisting vices like anger, greed and sexual immorality. Thus, living "in the heavenly realm" is not about ignoring this life, but about how to live this life ethically, as one who has been united with Christ, according to the virtues and morals of the kingdom.

- **In Revelation 6 and 7, how do the opening of the seals and the sealing of the 144,000 relate to each other, and how does this address the question "Who can stand?"**
- In Revelation, the sixth seal in chapter 6 depicts catastrophic events signifying God's end-time judgment, which leads to the question, "Who can stand?" in the face of God's wrath. Chapter 7 answers this question by describing the sealing of the 144,000, a symbolic representation of the church. This sealing ensures that these individuals will be able to endure God's wrath and judgment in the end times. The sealing of the 144,000 are those who are sealed with the mark of God and who are able to withstand his judgement. The structural relationship between chapters 6 and 7 thus illustrates that God's judgment is coupled with a plan for the salvation and protection of His people.

- **What are some of the key issues to consider when studying how New Testament authors use the Old Testament, and why are these important?**
- When studying the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, several key issues are important to consider. First, it's essential to identify the text form being used (Hebrew or Septuagint) and whether this choice impacts the meaning. Second, one should explore whether New Testament authors demonstrate an awareness of the Old Testament's broader context, not just the verse they quoted. Finally, it is important to determine whether the New Testament authors use the Old Testament text consistently with its original meaning, or if they are using the original text in a new way. These questions are important because they illuminate the author's interpretative method and help readers understand how the New Testament builds upon and reinterprets the Old Testament, while remaining faithful to the underlying message.