

Interpreting Scripture in light of Culture

(Andrea Holton, 2019)

Hermeneutics

Interpreting the Word of God

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Where to Begin

- Strong Biblical Hermeneutics (Interpretation) begins with a thorough knowledge of the Biblical passage taken in context with the section of scripture it is in, the book of the Bible it appears in, and the entire canon of scripture.
- It is important to look at the culture and customs of the time to understand the context of the teaching. This does not mean that scripture changes with culture, but looking at what it is said in light of the culture is important in our understanding and application.

First Steps

1. Pray and ask the Lord to give you His insight into His Word
2. Look and see where your section of scripture is in the Book and the whole Bible
3. Read the entire section at least twice

Content

- Who / What / Where / When / Why – 5 Ws
- Contextual Setting
 - Who is in the passage?
 - What is happening?
 - Where is it happening? – cultural / historical context
 - When is it happening? – historical – timing (time of day, holiday, etc)
 - Why is this event happening – timeline context (event did not occur in a vacuum)

Content

Make a List according to the verses:

- People
- Place
- Events
- Topics
- Repeated Phrases or Words

Content

Romans 11:1-32

- Who – Writer=Paul, God, Israel, Gentiles,
- What / Themes – Did God reject Israel and replace with the Gentiles? Remnant, Grace, Salvation, Fullness, Branches, Grafted, Root, Kindness
- Where – Letter to the early divided church in Rome
- When – After Christ's death and resurrection, time of Christian persecution
- Why – Gentiles boasting, question of rejection of Israel

Themes

- Who are God's people? Did God reject Israel and replace with the Gentiles?
- Fulfillment of prophecy
- God's Grace, Kindness, Mercy, Sovereignty
- Salvation
- Partial / Fullness
- Branches, Grafted, Root (Illustration)

Culture / Background

- Written by Paul: Jewish, Roman Citizen, Brilliant Scholar, Former Pharisee and persecutor of the Church – salvation was by grace not works
- Romans written in Corinth around AD55-57 – 25 years after Christ death and resurrection
- Paul did not start the church in Rome. Their faith is being reported all over the world. Longs to go to encourage them.

Culture / Background

- The Church in Rome to whom the book was written
 - Growing Community, strong in their faith
 - Both Jew and Gentile, but Gentiles were the majority
 - Questions if you have to give up being Jewish to be Christian
 - Paul continually points the spiritual condition that all people share before a Holy God. Only God is righteous. (Rom 3:23) He confirms that all people need Jesus.
 - Jews (Paul being self described as the worst) persecuted the Christians – Acts 8

Culture / Background

Rome

- The first mention of Christians from a perspective of Roman government intervention occurred under Claudius. The limited description is provided by Suetonius, the somewhat gossip oriented historian of the 'Twelve Caesar's':
- *"Since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Christ, he (Claudius) expelled them from the city (Rome)."* 49AD

54 AD - Nero become Emperor

Emperors were considered deities and there was constant conflict with the Christians who refused to recognize them as gods or offer sacrifices to them.

Persecution will increase and escalate with Nero blaming them for the large fire in 64 AD

Culture / Background

Rome

- Urbanized with over 1 million people
- Center of the Empire – theatres, sporting events, gladiators
- Slaves were part of the social order. (Mostly prisoners of war.)
- Highly sexualized and spiritual society
- Romans worshipped multiple gods – Aphrodite (Greek god – Venus)
- Aphrodite temple in Corinth – known for temple prostitutes

Culture / Background

Reference to Elijah

OT event shows that God has not rejected Israel – The people of Israel had turned their backs on the Lord and worshipped Baal. Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal – fire – victory – Jezebel’s threat – Elijah’s fear – called out to the Lord. God did not rebuke Elijah’s fear but cared for him and gave him a new vision Himself – gentle whisper – Assurance - God had reserved 7000 faithful – Pentecost alone 3000 (Acts 2:5 – God fearing Jews) believed.

Words

- Remnant – how is this word used in other biblical passages?
 - Most often to the believing Jews who survived the prophesied invasions and exiles of the 8-6 centuries BC – 2 Kings 19:4, 30, 31; Ezra 9:8
- Grace / Kindness of God
 - Chosen remnant both in Elijah’s time and “present” (the Roman Church)
 - Gentiles have received Mercy

Did God reject Israel and replace with the Gentiles?

Romans 11

11:1 – “by no means”

11:2 – God did not reject His people

11:3-5 Elijah example: preserved a remnant then and now

11:7-10 Hardening of their hearts

11:11 – Jews did not stumble beyond recovery

11:12 & 15 – their fullness will bring riches / life

11:17 – Root is holy, branches broken off by unbelief, through belief grafted back in

11:29 – God’s gifts and call are irrevocable – God has mercy on all

Romans

- 1:16 – Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.
- 3:22 – God’s righteousness comes to all who believe. No difference between Jew and Gentile
- 5:18 – One act of righteousness brought life for mankind
- 8:37-39 – Nothing can separate us from the love of God
- 10:4 – Righteousness for everyone who believes

Other Scriptures

- Genesis 17:7 - I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.
- Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Colossians 3:11 - Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Themes

God has not rejected His people

- Paul, an Israelite, was chosen by God
- Rom 12 – looking forward to Israel’s fullness – bringing life

Fulfillment of Prophecy

- God has always reserved a remnant by grace, then (time of Elijah) and now
- Prophecy from Isaiah 29:10 – blinding of the Israelites was part of the plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles and all people.

Themes / Illustrations

Vine and Branches

Romans 11: Christ is the vine and believers are branches – root is Judaism

Psalm 80: Vine and branches are Israel that God brought out of Egypt

John 15:5: Jesus – “I am the Vine and you are the branches”

Truth / Applications

God never breaks His word nor leaves His promises unfulfilled because of His unchanging character.

- How are you seeing God’s power work through the events of your life as He keeps His promises?
- How does this truth bring peace and confidence knowing God’s commitment to carry on to completion the good work He has started in you? (Phil 1:6)

Truth / Applications

What appears to be God’s rejection is His wise and merciful plan to bring salvation to all people.

- Are you angry at God for rejecting your plans? Will you trust in His wise loving mercy and look to see where He is faithfully at work?

Bible = Counter Cultural

- Treatment of Women as Individuals
 - OT – Deut 24 – certificate of divorce
 - Listing of Women in genealogies
 - Peter healing Tabitha – Acts 9
 - Priscilla and Aquila (woman named – first)
 - Paul – In Christ there is no male or female - equals
 - Jesus – Woman at the well.
- Bible calls out sexual sin for both male and female

Homiletics - Preaching

- Opening – Short story that matches the aim (main truth) of the passage
- More Scripture – Majority of your words need to focus on scripture and only a small percentage on non-biblical illustrations. Power in God's Word.
- Make sure everything comes back to the aim
- Good solid applications – take away questions that drive home the aim and that the listener can ponder and listen to God speak to them.

Thank you and God Bless You!