Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
LESSON 127 – THE STYLE OF SCRIPTURE

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION – LOUIS BERKHOF, PGS. 60-66
KNOWING SCRIPTURE – RC SPROUL

Exegetically Speaking

- Hermeneutics, from the Greek word "hermeneuo", refers to the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation.

- Interpretation is defined as "the act of explaining the meaning of something."

- General hermeneutics applies to the interpretation of all kinds of writings.

- Special hermeneutics focuses on interpreting specific kinds of literature: law, history, poetry, etc.

- *Hermeneutica Sacra* deals with a book that is unique on the realm of literature, the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

Exegetically Speaking

- In seeking an objective understanding of Scripture, we seek to understand what the word says in its context before we go about the equally necessary task of applying it to ourselves.

- "A particular statement may have numerous possible personal applications, but it can only have one correct meaning."

- This brings us to the terms exegesis and eisegesis.

- Exegesis means to explain what Scripture says. The word means "to guide out of." It is to get out of the words the meaning that is there.

- Eisegesis means "into" and therefore involves reading into the text something that isn't there at all.

The Simplicity of Scripture

▶ When we address the style of Scripture, we will be approaching this exegetically rather than from a literary point of view. We want to draw out from meaning of the Scripture from the Scripture and let the Word of God tell us about itself.

▶ Both believing and unbelieving scholars often comment on the simplicity of the Bible. The most exalted subjects are treated there in a way that is at once profound and simple, the result of an immediate and perfect insight into the truth.

▶ The evident simplicity of style is characteristic of the Hebrew language, and, in measure, also of the Greek of the New Testament.

The Simplicity of Scripture

- In the Hebrew language, nearly all root words consist of three consonants. Words include the pattern of consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (banana rule).

- There are only 2 tenses, the perfect (actions that occurred in the past or that have been completed) and imperfect (actions that are not completed and that occur in the present or future).

- There are only 2 genders, masculine and feminine.

- Compound verbs and nouns are few, and nearly all sentences are coordinate (follow a pattern of noun-verb-adverb).

The Liveliness of Scripture

▶ The Hebrew language was formed in a context that is very vivid in its representations, and the Old Testament authors do not run contrary to their character in this respect. In several ways they lend color to the revelation of God that was mediated by them.

▶ They reveal a decided tendency to represent abstract truths in concrete forms. Spiritual qualities are often described under the figure of those parts of the body by which they are symbolized. Thus the might and anger of God are represented under the image of His arm or His nose, for example.

▶ The expression of His benevolence or displeasure is associated with lifting up or hiding His countenance (Psa. 89:13; 18:8; 4:6; 44:24).

▶ Sin is often personified in the sinner. "The wages of sin is death" makes sin the paymaster paying out the sinner's earnings, for example.

The Liveliness of Scripture

▶ The authors see nature as living, and also personify it often. All inanimate objects are presented as male or female depending on the qualities inherent within that gender.

▶ Intellect, will, emotions, and desires are ascribed to the whole creation (Psa. 19:2-3; 96:12; 98:8; Isa. 55:12; Rom. 8:19-22).

▶ The historians in the Bible do not merely narrate, but picture history. They let the facts pass before the eyes of the readers as in a panorama. Hence the frequent use of the word, "Behold!"

▶ Certain redundant expressions also add to the liveliness of the style of Scripture, as for instance: "he opened his mouth and spoke"; "he lifted his eyes and saw"; "she lifted up her voice and wept."

Figurative Language, Poetry, and Prose

▶ It is difficult to describe spiritual and heavenly things in literal language. We will discuss figurative language in another lesson, but keep in mind, speaking figuratively does not mean the writer is not speaking of literal things. At times we see in Scripture a simple inability of the author to convey what he has seen and heard because it is so otherworldly.

▶ The authors of Scripture often use parallelisms, particularly in the Psalms and other poetic sections of Scripture. There are 4 types of parallelisms:

▶ 1. Synonymous parallelism – the same idea is repeated in different words. Psalm 24:2 - For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters.

Figurative Language, Poetry, and Prose

- ▶ 2. Antithetic parallelism – the second line or verse gives the opposite side of the same thought. Prov. 14:34 - Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

- ▶ 3. Synthetic parallelism – the second line adds something new to the first or explains it. Psalm 27:1 - The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

- ▶ 4. Chiastic (or introverted) parallelism – a parallelism in reverse order. Prov. 23:15 My son, if your heart is wise, My heart will rejoice—indeed, I myself; 16 Yes, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things.

New Testament Language

- Hellenistic Greek, often called Koine, is not classical Greek, but a common language.

- Koine Greek has 7 tenses:

- 1. Present tense - describes something happening right now.

- 2. Aorist tense –simple past tense, an action that has happened.

- 3. Imperfect tense – something that happens in the past with continued action that is repeated or habitual.

- 4. Perfect tense – a completed action that has results that are still in effect.

- (Greek has three tenses that describe the past: aorist, imperfect, and perfect, describing three different types of action: simple, continued, and completed.)

New Testament Language

- 5. Pluperfect tense – this is the perfect tense with one minor adaption, addressing past action with continuing results that have been completed in the past. Example: "When I took the quiz last month, I had learned the Greek alphabet perfectly."

- 6. Future tense – predictions or descriptions of what will happen in the future.

- 7. Future perfect tense – a future action that will happen before a specified time. Example: "I will have finished by tomorrow."

New Testament Language

- Greek has 4 moods:
- 1. Indicative – indicating a statement or fact
- 2. Subjunctive – describes the authors mood toward the subject
- 3. Imperative – a command or request
- 4. Optative – expressing wishes or desires
- Greek verbs have 3 voices:
- 1. Active – the subject of the sentence is the agent of the action
- 2. Middle – the subject is both an agent of an action and somehow concerned with the action
- 3. Passive - the subject of the verb is acted on

New Testament Language

- ▶ Person and Number

- ▶ There are three PERSONS, 1st person, 2nd person, and third person.

- ▶ There are three NUMBERS, as in nouns (31), singular, plural and dual.

- ▶ The English first person singular pronoun is 'I'.

- ▶ The English second person singular pronoun is 'you'.

- ▶ The English third person singular pronouns are 'he', 'she', and 'it'.

- ▶ The English first person plural pronoun is 'we'.

- ▶ The English second person plural pronoun is 'you (all)'.

- ▶ The English third person plural pronoun is 'they'.

  - ▶ https://daedalus.umkc.edu/FirstGreekBook/JWW_FGB5.html

New Testament Language

- Greek grammar and language takes years to master and most pastors have not mastered it! A semester or two of study or a software program do not make an interpreter proficient, and a true Greek student is always learning.

- It is significant that Christ came, and the New Testament was written when Greek was a prominent language in the world. In fact, this helped with the spread of the Word of God and the gospel, because while multiple languages were spoken in various regions of the Roman Empire, Latin and Greek were the official languages.

- Latin was primarily the language of government, legislation, and the military.

- Greek was the language of commerce and business and as such became a shared language far beyond the borders of the Empire.

The Fullness of Time

- Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

- Fullness = stage in time marking the attainment of a designed objective. The time was right. Time was at its peak.

- Next Week: Lesson 128. The Meaning of Words