

Beyond Mere Words

Wk 2: Text and Event

- How does the study of historical background material affect our understanding of the text of Scripture?
- Do we look for meaning in the text of Scripture, or is the text primarily a witness to the act of God’s self-revelation in the events recorded by Scripture?
- God has acted in mighty ways in historical events to disclose himself to humanity, so the question is ‘Where do we look for the meaning of these events?’
 - Do we look to any means (e.g. archeology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, biology, etc..) that help us uncover the ‘event’ or do we look in the ‘text’ of Scripture?
 - Why? / Why not?

The Proposal:

- We must prioritize the text of Scripture as the source of meaning for God’s acts of self-disclosure in history.
- The text of Scripture provides all of the essential material to adequately understand the author’s communicative action.
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“A text-oriented approach to the [Scriptures] would insist that the locus of God’s revelation is in the Scripture themselves, in the text. There is no reason to discount the fact that God has made his will known in other ways at other times. But, given the theological priority of an inspired text (2 Timothy 3:16), one must see in the text of Scripture itself the locus of God’s revelation today.” John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative*

What is ‘Communicative action?’

Speech Act Theory

Locution	Illocution	Perlocution
Sign/symbol (sounds and letters)	What is meant	What is brought about in saying something
Father	Son	Holy Spirit
It’s hot in here.	Will you open the window?	

Communicative Acts:

- Directives: speech act that is to cause the hearer to a specific action
- Commissives: is a speech act that commits the speaker to some future action (i.e. promise)
- Assertives/Representatives: is a speech act that commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition
- Declaratives: is a speech act that changes the reality accord with the proposition of the declaration
 - “class dismissed”
 - “I know pronounce you husband and wife”
 - “you sins are forgiven”
- Expressives: is a speech act that expresses on the speakers attitudes and emotions toward the proposition

1. Texts have authors

- a. “Texts are embodiments of an authors intention—that is a strategy designed to carry out an authors intention” John Sailhamer
- b. The biblical authors are not news reporters; They are theologians with a theological agenda.
- c. The biblical narratives are not just accounts of what happened, but they were theological interpretations of what happened. That is, the narrative writers were theologians.

2. The author gives you all of the essential information you need to know to properly understand his communicative action.

- a. This does not mean we can know all there is to know.
- b. It does mean we can adequately know what the authors communicative action.
- c. If he didn’t tell you, you don’t need to know.
- d. Example:
 - i. Authorized vs. unauthorized biography
 - ii. Canonical material vs. non-canonical material (e.g. Star Wars)

3. The danger of extra-biblical data
 - a. Defining the trust worthiness of the source
 - b. Extra-biblical data cannot provide definitive proof that it had any influence over the author
 - c. It shifts the source of inspiration from the text to the event.
 - d. It can create an atmosphere where new extra-biblical knowledge is sought to as the key to unlock or decode the text.
(Modern form of Gnosticism)
 - e. It can change the meaning of the text
 - i. Wizard of Oz: Villain = Wicked Witch
 - ii. Wicked: Villain = Glenda
4. The benefits of extra-biblical data
 - a. It can show the possible polemical character of texts
 - b. We can learn how themes, ideas, terms, and literary forms were used by others.
 - c. It can add depth and color to our reading of Scripture

“Our task is not to explain what happened to Israel in OT times. Though worthy of our efforts, archeology and history must not be confused with exegesis and biblical theology. We must recognize that the authors of Scripture have already made it their task to tell us in their texts what happened to Israel. The task that remains for us is to explain and proclaim what they have written.” John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative*

What assumptions does the author make of the reader? (Language)

Is there anything in the Scripture that the author assumes his audience knows (outside of the Canon of Scripture) that is vital to understanding the author’s communicative action.

Case Studies:

- Feast of Dedication: John 10:22
- Baptism for Dead: 1 Corinthians 15:29
- “Jesus is Lord”: Romans 10:9
- Women in Leadership: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Application:

1. **Prioritize the text of Scripture.** (The best reading and understanding of any text is going to be rooted in the Scriptures themselves.)
2. **The work of reading and interpreting the Scriptures is not to uncover new meaning about the event, but to understand the meaning the inspired text provides.**
3. **The meaning of any text is the communicative action of the author.** (The central communicative action of Scripture concerns Jesus)