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What does hermeneutics say

Q: What is hermeneutics and why is it important? "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). How do you interpret that sentence? The answer reveals your hermeneutic. What's Your Lens? Think optometry. Hermeneutics is the pair of glasses. It's what you wear when you interpret something. The lens. Not what you look at but what you look with. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation. It is taking a text and asking—what does this mean? Specifically, how am I as a contemporary person, hundreds of years removed from this utterance, supposed to read this ancient text? What is the bridge between that world and mine? That's what it is. Why does it matter? Because you need your glasses to be the right prescription. The wrong lens skews reality. So take Jeremiah 29:11, probably written in calligraphy somewhere in your kitchen. What does it mean? How would you put it in your own words, for today? Here are two quite different readings. Some might interpret this promise as only for the original hearers. God has a good plan for ethnic Israel. After all, he was talking to the nation of Israel, not modern Westerners, in this statement. Others might interpret it without any awareness of the original context. God has a good plan for me, Dane Ortlund, in the 21st century. Israel who? Guidance for Grinding Your Lens Neither is really a wise hermeneutical approach. Why? Here are a few basic guidelines that inform the lens with which we should read any Bible text. Read with the assumption that Scripture is coherent. God doesn't lie (Num. 23:19), knows all things (Isa. 46:10), and is unerringly consistent (Heb. 13:8). I speak untruths, know less than all things, and am inconsistent. Conclusion: If I find something in the Bible that is difficult to understand or seemingly contradictory, I assume there is something defective in me, not the Bible. Read any given text with an awareness of where it fits in the story. You wouldn't plunk down in the middle of a novel and expect to understand a sentence without awareness of what's happened before and interest in what will happen after. So why would we do that with the Bible? Read the way Jesus did. He said the whole Old Testament is about him (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39, 46). And the New Testament is obviously about him (the Gospels biographically, the epistles theologically). So the whole Bible is about him. The climax of the redemptive-historical story is Jesus (Gal. 4:4). Read with a prayer for the Spirit to illumine the text. Paul tells us that believers have been given the Spirit "that we might understand" divine truth (1 Cor. 2:12). Reading the Bible without the Spirit is like stumbling around an art exhibit with the lights off. There's beauty there, but it can't be seen and felt. So: read humbly, redemptive-historically, Christocentrically, and Spiritually. Grind your lens in those four ways. Reading an Ancient Promise Wisely What then of Jeremiah 29:11? We read it humbly, knowing Scripture is coherent. So even if God gave this particular promise to ancient Israel (his people then) we know that he will act in the same benevolent way toward Christians today (his people now). We see the heart of God in this statement—a heart that delights in prospering, not punishing, his fickle people. That was his heart for them. That is his heart for me. We read it redemptive-historically. We remember Eden, the fall into sin, the calling of Abraham, and so on down through the centuries. So we consider that earlier in the story God had always been seeking to bless his people but that they have persistently rebelled. And we remember that later in the story God will one day come back down to earth and really give them "welfare" and "a future" in the new earth—only then God's people will be from every tribe and nation and people, not just from ethnic Israel. Jeremiah 29 is part of a Story into which I have been swept up. We read it Christocentrically. Jeremiah 29:11 is ultimately about Jesus. He himself said that "everything written about me in . . . the prophets . . . must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). So we remember that the supreme "plans for you" God had in mind was Jesus. God promised welfare not evil for his people because his Son bore evil though he deserved welfare. And we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection—what God calls "a hope" in Jeremiah 29 is "a living hope" because of Jesus by the time Peter was writing (1 Pet. 1:3). We read it Spiritually. We ask for the Holy Spirit's illumination, because otherwise the beauty of this promise will not be truly seen and felt. Everything Is at Stake What is hermeneutics and why is it important? It is reading the Bible rightly, so that we see who God is and become human again. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). hermeneutics, the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. For both Jews and Christians throughout their histories, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible. The term hermeneutics has also been used in connection with the interpretation of the sacred texts of other religious traditions, including the Qur'ān. In a contemporary sense unrelated to religion, hermeneutics refers to the philosophical study of interpretation (see philosophy of language: The hermeneutic tradition and continental philosophy: Gadamer). A brief treatment of hermeneutics follows. For full treatment, see biblical literature: The critical study of biblical literature: exegesis and hermeneutics. biblical literature: The critical study of biblical literature: exegesis and hermeneutics Exegesis, or critical interpretation, and hermeneutics, or the science of interpretive principles, of the Bible have been... The sacred status of the Bible in Judaism and Christianity rests upon the conviction that it is a receptacle of divine revelation. This understanding of the Bible as the word of God, however, has not generated one uniform hermeneutical principle for its interpretation. Some persons have argued that the interpretation of the Bible must always be literal because the word of God is explicit and complete; others have insisted that the biblical words must always have a deeper "spiritual" meaning because God's message and truth is self-evidently profound. Still others have maintained that some parts of the Bible must be treated literally and some figuratively. In the history of biblical interpretation, four major types of hermeneutics have emerged: the literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical.Literal interpretation asserts that a biblical text is to be interpreted according to the "plain meaning" conveyed by its grammatical construction and historical context. The literal meaning is held to correspond to the intention of the authors. This type of hermeneutics is often, but not necessarily, associated with belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, according to which the individual words of the divine message were divinely chosen. Extreme forms of this view are criticized on the ground that they do not account adequately for the evident individuality of style and vocabulary found in the various biblical authors. St. Jerome, an influential 4th-century biblical scholar, championed the literal interpretation of the Bible in opposition to what he regarded as the excesses of allegorical interpretation. The primacy of the literal sense was later advocated by such diverse figures as St. Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra, John Colet, Martin Luther, and John Calvin.A second type of biblical hermeneutics is moral interpretation, which seeks to establish exegetical principles by which ethical lessons may be drawn from the various parts of the Bible. Allegorization was often employed in this endeavour. The Letter of Barnabas (c. 100 ce), for example, interprets the dietary laws prescribed in the Book of Leviticus as forbidding not the flesh of certain animals but rather the vices imaginatively associated with those animals.Allegorical interpretation, a third type of hermeneutics, interprets the biblical narratives as having a second level of reference beyond those persons, things, and events explicitly mentioned in the text. A particular form of allegorical interpretation is the typological, according to which the key figures, main events, and principal institutions of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) are seen as "types" or foreshadowings of persons, events, and objects in the New Testament. According to this theory, interpretations such as that of Noah's ark as a "type" of the Christian church have been intended by God from the beginning.Philo Judaeus, a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Jesus, employed Platonic and Stoic categories to interpret the Jewish scriptures. His general practices were adopted by St. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian and leader of the catechetical School of Alexandria, who sought the allegorical sense of biblical texts. Clement discovered deep philosophical truths in the plain-sounding narratives and precepts of the Bible. His successor as head of the school, Origen, systematized these hermeneutical principles. Origen distinguished the literal, moral, and spiritual senses but acknowledged the spiritual (i.e., allegorical) to be the highest. In the Middle Ages, Origen's threefold sense of scripture was expanded into a fourfold sense by a subdivision of the spiritual sense into the allegorical and the anagogical.Philo JudaeusFrom Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres Grecs, Latins et Payens, Vol. 2, by André Thevet, 1584.The fourth major type of biblical hermeneutics is the anagogical, or mystical, interpretation. This mode seeks to explain biblical events as they relate to or prefigure the life to come. Such an approach to the Bible is exemplified by the Jewish Kabbala, which sought to disclose the mystical significance of the numerical values of Hebrew letters and words. A chief example of such mystical interpretation in Judaism is the medieval Sefer ha-zohar. In Christianity, many of the interpretations associated with Mariology (the study of doctrines related to Mary, the mother of Jesus) fall into the anagogical category.In modern times as in other periods, shifts in hermeneutical emphases reflected broader academic and philosophical trends; historical-critical, existential, and structural interpretation have figured prominently during the 20th and 21st centuries. On the nonacademic level, the interpretation of prophetic and apocalyptic biblical material in terms of present-day events remains a vigorous pursuit in some circles. See also exegesis.

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