

hermeneutic task and then to a greater precision in dividing the word of truth. By “us” I mean both professional interpreters - pastors, exegetes, and theologians – and believers in general, especially those who will forgive Chou for using some Hebrew and Greek words and technical terms. Indeed, as Chou wrote at the very beginning, hermeneutics is “essential for the Christian walk” (13). We could then say that, to ignore this work would, to an extent, mean ignoring the richness of the Scriptures, as its purpose is to open our eyes and prepare us to discern the intertextual and directional tapestry, indeed, hermeneutical and theological artistry of scriptural authors.

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**How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology**

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In March 2017 P&R Publishing published the book, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, by the author Andrew David Naselli. Naselli, who is associate professor of New Testament and Theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, wrote a book that seeks to explain how to interpret and apply the Bible, but his focus is on the New Testament. This book came as a result of notes that Naselli prepared for a course, “New Testament Exegesis” back in 2015 and this is reflected in the text, because the books maintain informal tone and personal anecdotes from those lectures. The book has introduction, twelve chapters, conclusion, two appendixes, and ends with glossary, selected bibliography, index of scripture and index subjects and names.

“Introduction” starts with a question, “What is an Exegesis?” and Naselli begins his response with Ezra 7:10 saying that practice precedes teaching others, but in order to live and practice the Word of God, we must know it. Hence, we must study it. With that in mind, Naselli says: “That’s what this book is about: How should you study the Word so that you can practice and teach it? More specifically, how should you understand and apply the New Testament (p. 1)?” Naselli claims that exegetes are primarily concerned with interpreting a text, that is, discovering what the author meant. But an exegesis is not enough because we must also do biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology, and apply what the text means in our contexts. Naselli then briefly discuss the difference between exegesis and hermeneutics, where does expository preaching fit into this process,

and introduces the process of doing exegesis and theology into twelve steps. To each step, one chapter of the book is devoted. He then offers short definitions of five theological disciplines: exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology and explains the complex interrelationship between them.

Chapter one, “Genre: Establish Guidelines for Interpreting a Passage’s Style of Literature,” is the starting point for Naselli in exegetical process and not textual criticism because when we approach to some text, we intuitively sort it according to genre before we read it. After offering ten general principles for interpreting the Bible, Naselli also explains how we should interpret figures of speech. Since the New Testament contains from genres such as: gospel, acts, parables, epistles, and revelation, Naselli discusses each of these genres and offers some guidelines for interpretation.

Chapter two, “Textual Criticism: Establish the Original Wording,” Naselli begins with an observation that we do not have any of the original manuscripts of the New Testament and defines textual criticism as the study of manuscripts in order to determine the original text’s exact wording. This happens by gathering and organizing data, comparing and evaluating variant readings, and reconstructing the transmission history. Naselli says that the copies of the New Testament fall into three categories: Greek manuscripts, ancient translations, and New Testament quotations in writings of church fathers and then discusses the number and quality of New Testament manuscripts in comparison to those of other ancient literature. Observing that the New Testament is without peer and that no other ancient literature comes close, Naselli then discusses the significance of textual criticism for exegesis and theology, claiming that not a single major New Testament teaching depends on textual criticism and that “not a single textually disputed passage is the only passage—or even the primary passage—that supports a mainstream Christian doctrine (p. 38).” Naselli furthermore discusses how we should evaluate variant readings, because there is about 500,000 variants, and he puts them in three categories: a) insignificant, b) significant but not viable, c) significant and viable. He also addresses the issue of “KJV-only” view, and ends this chapter with one example of textual criticism based on 1 Cor. 13:3, “If I Deliver Up My Body That I May Boast” vs. “If I Deliver Up My Body to Be Burned.”

In chapter three, “Translation: Compare Translations,” Naselli defines four qualities of excellent translation (accurate, clear, natural, audience-appropriate) and three main approaches to translation (formal equivalence, functional equivalence, and a mediating approach). He then compares different English Bible version, giving special attention to comparison between NASB, ESV, and NIV. Giving the fact that there are so many different translations, Naselli brings some guidelines how to disagree about Bible translation philosophy and how to use

them. Naselli observes how difficult is sometimes to translate idioms, metaphors, and similes into another language, reminding us that human biblical authors did not write it directly to the people in the first-century Greco-Roman world with whom they had a lot of common historical-cultural context. The same problematic applies to money, weights, measures, and euphemisms. Naselli ends this chapter with illustrations which demonstrate need for dignified, culturally appropriate translations, translations that are gender accurate, explanation of purposes of footnotes in the New Testament translations, and based on examples from Matthew 6:34b, Romans 11:33a, and 1 Corinthians 7:1, demonstrates translation differences between various English translations.

In Chapter four, “Greek Grammar: Understand How Sentences Communicate by Words, Phrases, and Clauses,” Naselli provides a crash-course in biblical Greek. He discusses basics of Greek grammar by briefly explaining nouns, adjectives, adverbs, articles, pronouns, prepositions, verbs, participles, and infinitives in the Greek language. He also provides short guidelines for identifying and analyzing exegetically significant words, phrases, and clauses. In the next eight sections of this chapter, Naselli highlights exegetically significant syntax for the following: analyzing the nominative case, the genitive case, the dative case, the accusative case, analyzing articles, participles, infinitives, and antecedents of pronouns.

In chapter five, “Argument Diagram: Trace the Logical Argument by Arcin, Bracketing, or Phrasing,” Naselli argues that knowledge of the biblical languages enables us to trace the flow of the argument of the text. And while commentaries save us time by providing the historical, linguistic, cultural, canonical, and literary insights that we simply do not have time to mine for ourselves, often commentaries are atomistic while a translation often must obscure the density and complexity or ambiguity of the original for the sake of its target language. Hence, Naselli demonstrates several ways how we can trace the logical arguments by using several techniques: arcing, bracketing, and phrasing, but he also briefly introduces sentence diagramming. He ends up this chapter with six examples of phrasing using different New Testament texts (1 Pet. 5:6–7; Matt. 28:19–20a, Jude 20–21; Rom. 11:33–36; Col. 1:9–14; Rom. 3:21–26).

In chapter six, “Historical-Cultural Context: Understand the Situation in Which the Author Composed the Literature and Any Historical-Cultural Details That the Author Mentions or Probably Assumes,” Naselli discusses the question of the importance of background information for understanding of the Bible. His argument is that background information is sometimes necessary for understanding the Bible accurately, but there is a danger if you answer that question either yes or no. To prove his point, Naselli offers two examples: the issue of head coverings from 1 Cor. 11:2–16, and the topic of hot, cold, and lukewarm water

from Rev. 3:15–16. Furthermore, Naselli suggests seven questions that we can ask while analyzing historical-cultural context of a New Testament book or passage. He also discusses the practice of mirror-reading, for which he says that it can be both good and bad practice, and for that he gives two reasons. In the rest of the chapter, Naselli brings a list of primary resources we should use to understand the historical-cultural context, argues for a six ways in which we can use Jewish and Greco-Roman resources responsibly, and provides two examples of how understanding of the historical-cultural context can assist us in understanding of the biblical text: “It Is Easier for a Camel to Go through the Eye of a Needle” from Matt 19:24 and Paul’s mentioning of rhetoric in 1 Cor. 2:1–5.

Chapter seven, “Literary Context: Understand the Role That a Passage Plays in Its Whole Book,” Naselli starts with different levels of the literary contexts that we face in Bible study (lit. context of the: passage, immediate context, section, larger section, book, authorial context, context of the Testament, and the whole Bible), and then briefly summarizes theological message of each book in the New Testament. Naselli then brings four practical suggestions for reading the New Testament in its literary context: listening to audio Bibles, reading a book of the Bible in one sitting, reading without any chapter or verse references, and finally, that we do not read a Bible that puts the words of Jesus in red. Naselli argues that there’s simply no substitute for reading whole books of the Bible in one sitting—over and over and over, and that will help us to read Scripture in its literary context(s), which is so crucial for proper interpretation. He also ends this chapter with two examples in this regard: “Judge Not, That You Be Not Judged” from Matt. 7:1, and “I Can Do All Things through Him Who Strengthens Me” from Phil. 4:13.

Chapter eight, “Word Studies: Unpack Key Words, Phrases, and Concepts,” discusses the importance of word studies. Naselli first introduces his readers with four steps for doing a word study: 1. choose a Greek word to study, 2. discover the word’s range of meanings in the New Testament, 3. compare how the word functions in the LXX and extrabiblical contemporary Greek literature, 4. determine what the word most likely means in key New Testament passages. He also brings four common dangers to avoid when doing word studies, and these are: 1. determining a word’s meaning by its etymology, 2. determining a word’s meaning by anachronistic etymology, 3. distinguishing synonyms in contexts where they function synonymously, 4. appealing to an unknown or unlikely meaning of a word. To demonstrate how sometimes biblical commentaries do a poor job with word studies (speculation about the meaning of a word without tracing the argument in context), Naselli takes a paragraph from one of the books of J. K. Rowling which is a well-known piece of literature today, and imagines what will happen if in 2000 years some world-famous philologist would try to explain what

it means, under the assumption that the dominant world language is Chinese, and no one has spoken English for a thousand years. After showing how that might go wrong, he ends up this chapter with three examples of how to do word studies: συνείδησις (Suneidēsis, “Conscience”), σὰρξ (Sarx, “Flesh”) and πνεῦμα (Pneuma, “Spirit”), and μὴ γένοιτο (Mē Genoito, “God Forbid”).

Chapter nine marks the bridge in the book when author is moving from exegesis to theology. Naselli observes that some books and courses on New Testament exegesis stop at exegesis and leave theology to the theologians, but he also concludes that the task of Bible interpretation is incomplete if we do not move from exegesis to theology. Hence, in the rest of the book Naselli will discuss biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology as chapter nine, “Biblical Theology: Study the Whole Bible Progress, Integrates, and Climaxes in Christ,” is dedicated to biblical theology. He defines it as “a way of analyzing and synthesizing the Bible that makes organic, salvation-historical connections with the whole canon on its own terms, especially regarding how the Old and New Testaments integrate and climax in Christ,” and then more in-depth explains different parts of that definition. As an illustration, Naselli again uses books from Harry Potter series to make his point. He says that first time when he and his wife were reading these books, they were focused on their story line (*Who are the characters? What happened? What will happen next?*), but when they read the books a second time, they started to make thematic connections the second time through that we missed the first time. And this is what biblical theology seeks to accomplish: making organic, salvation-historical connections with the whole canon, especially regarding how the Old and New Testaments integrate and climax in Christ. He ends this chapter with four examples of how to do a biblical theology (Holiness; Temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20); Mystery (Eph. 3:1–6) and Work), and with two highlights from an essay “Biblical Theology and Preaching” written by Jim Hamilton that should motivate us to do biblical theology.

Chapter ten, “Historical Theology: Survey and Evaluate How Significant Exegetes and Theologians Have Understood the Bible and Theology,” begins with the definition of a historical theology as a theology that “surveys and evaluates how significant exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible and theology.” Naselli brings a list of some of the most significant exegetes and theologians in the church history, and provides his readers with ten helpful reasons to study historical theology: 1. it helps you distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy, 2. it displays the fruit of orthodoxy and heresy, 3. it can foster God-glorifying unity when fellow Christians disagree on nonessential issues, 4. it helps you think globally, 5. it can reveal your theological blind spots, 6. it gives you perspective regarding seemingly novel views, 7. it cultivates humility, 8. it guards you against chronological snobbery, 9. it inspires you, 10. it reminds you that God sovereign-

ly controls everything for his glory and our good. He ends up this chapter with an example of Keswick theology showing how this theology has shaped various well-known Christians and movements.

Chapter eleven, “Systematic Theology: Discern How a Passage Theologically Coheres with the Whole Bible,” Naselli starts with a definition of a systematic theology: “Systematic theology discerns how a passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible,” and answers the question “*What does the whole Bible say about \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank]?*” (p. 283). Even though it organizes the content of the Bible in particular topics, themes or categories (ca. ten categories), it also incorporates other branches that focus on apologetics and philosophy. Hence, systematic theology will employ the tools of logic, history, and experience to interpret and coherently organize what Scripture says about these topics. With that in mind, Naselli furthermore discusses ten corresponding strengths and dangers of systematic theology, and in two examples demonstrates how systematic theology can help us to explain what the Gospel is and how to address the logical problem of evil, by organizing biblical data in a clear, concise, and responsible way.

Chapter twelve, “Practical Theology: Apply the Text to Yourself, the Church, and the World,” Naselli begins with defining practical theology as the application of “the text to yourself, the church, and the world by answering the question ‘*How should we then live?*’ Or to put it more bluntly, ‘*So what?*’ (p. 309).” Naselli argues that we need to apply the Bible to how we live because God’s Word is authoritative, and then introduces traditional categories of practical theology. In all that, Naselli points out that exegesis always precede application. That means that our application must be based on the biblical text (not our ideas) and also that our exegesis is incomplete if we do not know how to apply the text in our context. Recognizing that the process of applying the Bible is complex, Naselli offers six guidelines: 1. Recognize that exegesis and theology control application; 2. State a truth from a passage as a universal principle; 3. Exegete your audience and their culture; 4. Target specific categories of people; 5. Apply a universal principle to a specific contemporary situation regarding duty, character, goals, and/or discernment; 6. Recognize that applications have different levels of authority. The chapter ends with two examples: how Paul uses Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34–35, and how should we work?

The title of the conclusion, “Look at the Book!” summarizes Naselli’s intention from the outset: “So practice, practice, practice. Read the text carefully, over and over and over. Look at the Book!” Using the sentence from Piper’s book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t,” Naselli cries similarly: “Exegesis exists because worship doesn’t. New Testament exegesis exists because worship doesn’t. Don’t miss the whole point of exegesis. It’s to know and worship God.”

In its form and content this book is truly magnificent. Naselli covers both ends of biblical interpretation: exegesis and application, reminding us that application must be grounded in the Scripture, and that Scripture must be lived out. It is not enough to know. Knowledge must be lived out before it is taught. Hence, it is not surprising that Naselli begins his book with the text from Ezra 7:10. Each chapter ends with “Key Words and Concepts,” “Questions for Further Reflection” and “Resources for Further Study,” which is a valuable resource for those who want more. Also, at the end of each chapter, Naselli offers practical examples in which he demonstrates the content of the chapter in a practical manner.

The fact that this book came into existence as a result of Naselli’s preparation for lectures, resonates in the book. When one reads it, it has a feeling that he is present in the classroom, which is a good feeling to have. The book is easy to follow, and understandable, but for those who do not know Greek, those parts where Naselli uses Greek might be difficult. But Naselli recognizes that (p. 3) saying that those who do not know Greek can easily follow the vast majority of this book.

The value of this book is that it is a great tool for learning how to interpret the New Testament. But I would like also to point out some other reasons why this book is valuable. First, the chapter about word studies is illuminating for those who think that exegesis consists out of word studies. Pastors and preachers might have a tendency to build their doctrine based on etymology, thinking that for interpretation of the biblical text word study is sufficient. But it is not and Naselli’s book nicely portrays the vast spectrum of steps that are needed for biblical interpretation. Second, the chapter on historical theology reminds us that Christianity did not start with “us.” Naselli’s point is also that knowing historical theology enable us to distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy. That leads me to conclude that Christians today are willing to tolerate and even support heretical teachings because they do not know Church history and historical theology. Third, in the chapter on biblical theology, Naselli also hits the nail when he observes, and let me say this in my own words, that only if we read the Bible over and over again, we would be able to connect dots between different parts of the Bible (pp. 231-239). From my own experience, Christians have huge problems seeing that the Bible is one big story, and part of the problem, for sure, lies in the fact that Christians do not read their Bibles enough.

This book is primarily aimed at students of theology, but all those who are in some form in the ministry of the Word can benefit from it. This book is wide, deep, simple, and practical and my hope and prayer is that this book will be one day translated to Croatian because God knows that we need such quality books.

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