



How to Read the Gospels as Scripture

To read the gospels as Scripture is to listen to them as God's word. By what method they are read depends upon what kind of word from God is being sought: doctrinal or devotional.

When the Gospels are read by Christians to decide doctrinal matters, it is the final form of the text as it appears in the New Testament canon that is authoritative. The method employed is historical and literary, and asks: what did the Gospel text mean in its original context in the first century? To answer this question one must know such things as these:

1. What did the words being used mean in the first century Mediterranean world?
2. What form of material is being employed (parable, miracle story, conflict story, etc.)?
3. Is the story or staying shaped in a distinctive way in this gospel?
4. How is the material organized?
5. How does the text fit into its larger context?
6. Does the text contain a theme that is found elsewhere in the Gospel?
7. How does the point of the passage fit into the thought of the Bible as a whole?

On the basis of such reading of a Gospel doctrinal matters are determined: e.g., What do we Christians believe about God, Christ, human beings, sin, salvation, the church, etc.?

When the Gospels are read with a devotional purpose, it is again the final form of the Gospel text that is used. The method aims to elicit an intimate personal relationship between Good and the reader of Scripture by employing a listening posture in an attitude of prayer. It seeks to hear God speak to us about the concerns of our daily lives.

A devotional reading of the Gospels includes three steps:

1. Select a short passage from a Gospel; read it slowly, attempting via your imagination to enter into the story until you are a participant in it or closely identified with someone in the narrative.
2. Stop and analyze what type of word your identification has caused you to hear. Such words may be theological (something about who God/Christ is), psychological (something about yourself), or moral (something you are asked to do).
3. Finish with an appropriate prayer.

If the word one has heard is theological, the appropriate response is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. If the word spoken is psychological, the proper prayer is usually petition. "Save me; heal me; help me. If the word heard is a moral one, the appropriate reply is, of course, "I'll do it." No devotional reading of a Gospel is complete without such prayer.



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