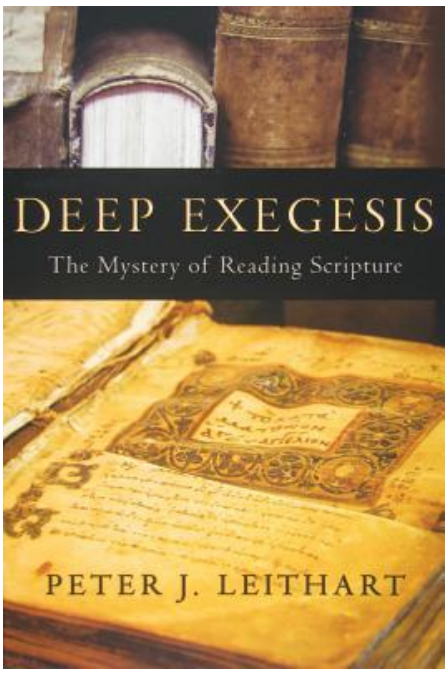

Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture

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Seeking to train readers to hear all that is being said within a written text, Peter Leithart advocates a hermeneutics of the letter that is not rigidly literalist and looks to learn to read—not just the Bible, but everything—from Jesus and Paul. Thus *Deep Exegesis* explores the nature of reading itself taking clues from Jesus and Paul on the meaning of meaning, the functions of language, and proper modes of interpretation. By looking (and listening) closely, and by including passages from the Bible and other literary sources, Leithart aims to do for the text what Jesus did for the blind man in John 9: to make new by opening eyes. The book is a powerful invitation to enter the depths of a text.

Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture Details

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From Reader Review Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture for online ebook

Lucas Bradburn says

Phenomenal.

Samuel Parkison says

Wow, what a strange book. What a strange author. I get the sense from this book, far more than when I read *Traces of the Trinity,* that Peter Leithart is probably the most interesting guy in Christian scholarship right now. He is very provocative and makes you feel, at times, like he is a crazy postmodern deconstructionist, and then he destroys postmodern deconstructionism. You think you're reading a church father or a medieval scholastic, but then he says something like, "Reading the Bible is like good sex; it takes time."

He has some very bizarre sections, and I would by no means recommend his proposal in this book without a huge list of qualifications, but he offers quite a bit of refreshing and important insights. Also, the man knows how to argue. Even some of his sections that struck me as outlandishly wacky at first ended with me putting the book down, mumbling, "Hmmm... maybe... maybe." The last thing I'll mention is this: his bibliography is ridiculous. I mean, the range of material he interacts with in this work on hermeneutics will make you chuckle. Just to give you an example, he has an entire section where he interacts at length with the novel, *No Country for Old Men.* And all of this is, I think, no small part of what makes Leithart so enjoyable and refreshing to read. He's a wordsmith-scholar, a rare breed.

Dan Glover says

Peter Leithart has done ministers, Christian scholars and the Church in general a huge favour with this book. He declares that the Scriptures themselves ought to be the authority for how one interprets them. In evangelical, reformed and conservative Christian circles of scholarship, sola scriptura (the reformation principle that "Scripture alone" is the Church's authority for all of life and doctrine) has been the basis for the rejection of all sorts of heretical doctrines and errant practices and for holding fast to "the faith, once for all delivered to the saints", and rightly so. However, without even batting an eye, many of those same well-meaning folks have adopted a model of interpreting those Scriptures which is itself imported from outside of God's Word and then imposed upon it.

Dr. Leithart traces this outside and extra-biblical system of viewing and interpreting Scripture, with its mindset of scientific and systematic compartmentalization, to Spinoza and his contemporaries and up through modernism. Such thinking tended to "spiritualize" Scripture since it had to do with religion, relegating its relevance and application to the private, inward life of the soul and separating it from the political and material realms. However, the Hebrew mind (the culture into which the Scriptures were given by God and from of which they spread) did not divide man into body, soul, spirit and mind but understood humans in terms of organic wholeness. Therefore, to the Hebrew mind, the Scriptures have a much broader relevance. In fact, there was not a single area of life or thought that Scripture did not speak to - and all of Scripture spoke to all of man.

Leithart shows examples of current exegetical theory which limit interpretations of a given passage to one and only one proper meaning. This is not the way we are shown how to interpret the Bible by the examples we see within its own pages. Leithart gives examples of "poor" apostolic exegesis by the standards of current exegetical practice (Paul's famous "do not muzzle the ox while it treads out the grain" to argue for monetary support for faithful ministers of the gospel and his allegorizing of the Sarah/Hagar story - "these are two covenants...") and argues that, far from being unique and scattered exceptions to the rule of interpretation, these passages display the interpretive rule; they show us how we are to understand and interpret Scripture properly. One can see many hermeneutics professors rolling over in their graves or toppling over at their lecterns at this point.

Instead of an "only one correct interpretation for any given text" approach to hermeneutics, Leithart makes the case for reviving some form or approximation of the medieval quadriga. With this exegetical method of reading and interpreting the text, there is a literal sense (the plain meaning, with an element of both the historical understanding the original recipients would have understood and the continuing implications for a present day audience), a moral sense (what does this passage call the reader to do or imitate), an allegorical or typological sense (what does this passage say about Christ and/or what is the theological learnings based in this passage) and an anagogical sense (what future hope is the reader called to). Here, many reading this review might either write me as reviewer or Leithart as author completely off based on wild and fanciful interpretations they have heard promulgated by the medieval interpreters but hang on...that would be a mistake. One may not be 100% convinced of such a method of interpreting the Scriptures and still receive a good deal of benefit from reading this book. For one, it will make you think about the scriptural basis for your own model of interpreting Scripture.

One theme Leithart returns to over and over is that in our interpretation, we ought to desire to hear ALL God has to say to us through his Word and Leithart argues that God is not saying only one thing in any given passage. It is clear from the way some passages of Scripture treat others that at least the passages they specifically deal with have more than one true sense. If this is the case, one needs to make the decision about whether the Bible itself is our authority on how to interpret it or if modernist literary interpretive method is the authority for understanding Scripture. If we go with modernist methodology, we have departed (in our hermeneutic) from the authority of Scripture and placed it underneath our model, the very thing a faithful Christian knows must not be done.

Leithart gives examples from everyday experience in which we already inherently recognize that there is purposefully more than one true sense in which to understand something. A joke, for example, may be humorous on multiple levels, or a scene in a play, book or movie may have layers of correct, varied and multiple meanings. John 9 is explored in great depth to show how the story of Jesus healing of the man born blind is so much more than merely a miracle story. And while not everyone will be convinced by all aspects of his John 9 example, one cannot come away merely content to see this narrative the way one has always seen it. Leithart convincingly shows that by Scripture's own rule, a wooden "literal only" interpretive model is not an option for the exegete whose own interpretive work is itself subjected to the authority of the Book he/she is attempting to understand. At the same time, Leithart stresses that the model he advocates must itself be subject to all of Scripture when gleaning the manifold meanings of any given passage. This book is not a license for fanciful "reinventions" of the text but a rigorous reexamination of what biblically informed and faithful interpretation should look like. Knowing Leithart's passion for a full-orbed trinitarian theology of all things, I believe it is safe to say that his interpretive model could be summarized as seeing the different meanings or senses of a text as a one-in-three (or more) and a three (or more)-in-one. This guards against an "anything goes" or a "new is true" free-for-all because it disallows any interpretation that would counter or contradict one of the other senses of the text (say, the literal, for example).

In my opinion, the greatest strength of this book is that it calls interpreters back to basing their interpretive methods and principles themselves on Scripture. In the end, Dr. Leithart admits that this subject needs further exploration and that the parameters of the present volume didn't allow for it. I for one look forward to the conversation this book is bound to spur among exegetes and I hope for further material on this subject from Peter Leithart in the future.

Jeremy says

Published by Baylor University Press. Bought a copy the day he spoke at Baylor (Feb. 27, 2014). Same day I had lunch with him and others for the Baylor Society for Early Christianity as we talked about his book on Constantine.

Here is a good related article on the historicity of Adam, and why it matters. Thoughts from Doug Wilson. Here is a response to one of Leithart's arguments (the defenestration of Prague) in the book.

Brian says

Post-post-script: Oh dear. There's some sophistry here. While it is true that our writings have implications far beyond our knowledge, that does not mean that the text changed it's meaning. As a matter of fact, such a move actually hurts the kind of exegesis Leithart wants to do. Leithart wants to show there was a lot more to the original meaning than we thought (i.e. there IS a contrast in Genesis between flesh and spirit) so Paul is not being weird in Galatians, not by a long shot. I hate to say it, but Leithart looks to the wonky church fathers because he WANTS to look to them rather than to Protestants. While the tradition has gone dead, Leithart actually stands on Calvin's shoulders (via Northrop Frye and others). As a matter of fact, I'll add that where I differ with Leithart and Jordan it is exactly this spot. Paper was expensive, so we'll find LOTS of stuff in the Old and New Testaments that will make our writings look haphazard and sloppy. There will be wonky numbers and super wonky literary stuff. But when literary readings cease to be carefully tethered to the text and start to focus more on your ideas than on what's on the page, we need to hold our interpretations less forcefully in proportion. I think a good example of this would be Jim Jordan making the Bible out to be a chiasm. That is not something the authors of the New Testament really could have done since the New Testament was probably written over a large period of time with little collaboration (though more than we usually think). Still, a lot in this book is great. I was so lucky to read this in high school. The worst stuff is in the first chapters on texts in time and words having meanings. Even then, the chapter on words was revolutionary for me and helped me see the glories of poetry. It's definitely a revolutionary book; it's just too bad it had to be shoved into the wrong paradigm. But yes, the text is music, the text is a joke, and the text is Christ. And the stuff on John is great, and convinces me that Leithart is definitely on the right side.

Post-script: Just re-read after college. This book has shaped my reading so much that coming back to it feels very old hat. Having finished a class in hermeneutics I do wonder whether Leithart has explained the relation between authorial intent and reader implication, but I am tempted to say this doesn't matter much; writers want readers to see things that aren't there.

The second chapter on time I feel might have problems, but all the presuppositions are very tempting. Three through five are solid. Six is a bit speculative, but application is always that way and Leithart's alternative to much of Evangelical individualism.

My only critique coming back to it (and it is a criticism of greatness, not the sort of thing you take off stars for) is that Leithart does not allow for a human element--he still seems to be concerned with the Bible primarily as informer of human action. Not bad, but there is more to be said. Also, Leithart is not a great writer of prose; here he's at his best, funny and happily poking fun at our modern assumptions of exegesis. I definitely need to keep selling this book.

Older: Dr. Leithart makes some rather controversial claims in this book that took me a while to work over-particularly his views on how meaning actually can be packed into a word. But, after deep thought and long reasoning, I came around.

Every chapter says something, and there were more and longer chapters than in a usual Leithart book. I cannot recommend it enough to anyone interested in hermeneutics. Aside from the orthodoxy, it does stuff you won't find in your typical exegesis book.

A quick re-reading of the book reminded me what a colossal influence this has been in my thinking. This book got the machinery in place for me to see everything as typological and every detail as significant and added for a reason. I like that. This book taught me to read, not just the Bible, but Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Virgil, Boethius, Dante, Shakespeare, and even C.S. Lewis.

Douglas Wilson says

Good stuff, as always. Peter is fantastically learned, and lots of fun. Some objections, which we will be discussing at an NSA grad forum.

Joshua Nuckols says

I like reading Leithart. Makes me want to enjoy and recognize the "twists and turns" of the Bible, instead of looking for kernels of truth amidst unnecessary or irrelevant husks.

Ray Clendenen says

This is an outstanding book on biblical (and even general) hermeneutics. It's my first book by Peter Leithart, and I found his perspective very refreshing and insightful. He's highly imaginative and fun to read. He applies all the chapters to John 9. I greatly benefited from every chapter: The Text Is a Husk (he argued against this), Texts Are Events, Words Are Players, The Text Is a Joke (especially good, perhaps essential reading for Bible students), and Texts Are Music. The last chapter, Texts Are about Christ, is good when discussing John 9, but then he starts finding Christ in Sophocles, etc., and I lost interest. But I loved the book.

Johnny says

Would you pick up a book like *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* if it wasn’t a textbook? I

purchased it because systematic analysis of literature in general and the Bible in specific have always been fascinating to me. Not only does it build on the work of one of my late New Testament professors (Dr. George R. Beasley-Murray), but it also works from a marvelous dissertation/book from a fellow-member of a seminar I attended (Dr. Paul Duke's marvelous work on irony in the Gospel of John). So, Leithart's *Deep Exegesis* hit me from multiple directions.

Remember some of the ultra-right-wing histrionics (like those of Harold Lindsell and James Draper) during the so-called Battle for the Bible? The basic premise of their argument was that words have meanings and we mustn't stray from those literal meanings. At the time, I claimed it was a naïve understanding of language because those meanings change over time and even if the meanings don't specifically change over time, they have different nuances in different contexts. Leithart illustrates this marvelously with the phrase, "She was nice, glamorous and gay." In earlier times, nice mean naïve or ignorant, glamorous had to do with witchcraft, and gay meant happy. Today, it would suggest a polite and beautiful lesbian (p. 47). He takes translators who don't believe they should translate the style as well as the meaning to task (p. 79), pointing out that the style shapes the meaning contextually (as the writings of Luis Alonso-Schökel so brilliantly emphasized).

Don't take this to mean that Leithart has created a screed against the right-wing interpreters of scripture. He hits the left-wing very hard. I personally have a problem with the left-wing interpreter's faddish hermeneutical rule in the late 20th and early 21st century of deciding that parables only have one simple lesson. They contend that parables should never be interpreted allegorically or with an eye to typology. Leithart points out that the mainstream liberal commentators of this era always complained that we needed to get away from the Medieval *quadriga* of interpretation [literal (ie. historical), allegorical, tropological, and anagogical—p. 14). Using the *quadriga* one might interpret Zion as literally a hill in Jerusalem, allegorically as either the synagogue or church as the people of God, tropologically as symbolic of ritual righteousness through the temple/synagogue/church emphasis on obedience, and anagogically as the future glory of living in God's presence (p. 14). Leithart contends throughout this volume that the modern tradition of interpretation keeps trying to get interpreters and readers to choose ONE option in a reductionist fashion when the use of such a term , pericope, or phrase might offer a synecdoche where all of the approaches offer a more holistic meaning than any one section of the four (Yes, I know synecdoche sometimes means a part representing a whole, but it can also be the whole representing a part and that's how I mean it here—Leithart didn't use the term, simply stating that we don't have to CHOOSE!]
Further, in the attempt to be tropological, to slice through quickly to the supposed application of a text as is so popular among pulpit professionals on both sides of the theological spectrum, Leithart states that it is unfair to say that only academics (and old-fashioned expositors) are interested in the etymologies and history of use of individual words. He wisely points out that ancient writers *were* interested in etymologies (witness Socrates, Aristotle, Ovid, Virgil, Quintilian, and Philo, to name a few—p. 95).

The bulk of the book uses different perspectives on the healing of the blind man in John 9. Leithart points out that understanding a joke requires the listener/reader to draw information from outside the text itself. He uses a twist on a classic joke about a mix of people going into a bar (p. 113). Since the great Yankee catcher/manager Yogi Berra died the day before I wrote this review, I'll use one of his malapropisms to demonstrate how that works. Berra was mocked when he referred to the left field in the House that Ruth Built (literally, not either of the modern Yankee Stadiums) by saying, "It gets late early out there, sometimes." If you know that for part of the day, that field was horrible for its glaring sun but was the first of the three outfields to be covered in shadows, you know that the silly-sounding phrase meant that the shadows actually made it easier to see the ball. If you had additional information, you could see the logic; if not, it just sounds dumb.

I particularly enjoyed the section on the "Text as Music" where Leithart dealt with particular structures.

First, after discussing some actual musical compositions, he considers Beasley-Murray's straightforward presentation of John 9 as six linear scenes (p. 161). Then, he demonstrates how the *inclusio* which ends Chapter 9 (it starts discussing blindness and sin and ends discussing blindness and sin—p. 162). But he also notes that there is an *inclusio* that wraps back onto the whole section from 9:1-10:21 when, after the Good Shepherd teaching, Jesus comes back to the healing of the blind man (p. 163).

Okay, so you don't have to choose between the ninth chapter alone structure and the ninth and tenth chapter structure, but have you noticed that there is a chiasmic structure to John 9? Jesus opening the eyes of the blind man and saying that said man didn't become blind because of sin, but Jesus saying at the end of the chapter (in counter-balance) that the Pharisees are blinded because of their sin (of disbelief). Leithart balances each section except for the asymmetrical piece in the middle (my experience and Leithart's is that such asymmetrical pieces represent a very significant lesson in a passage). Leithart spells this out on page. 167. Now, which structure should one choose? But wait, there's more! In chapters 9, 10, 11, the word "eyes" appears 12 times. "Blind" is used 13 times in chapter 9 and once more in 10, giving 14 (or two sevens). The blindness is double-complete, but Jesus brings a more perfect (12) healing (p. 166). It is even more interesting when he demonstrates a chiasmic structure to the entire gospel (p. 168).

I also liked the observation that there are seven "signs" in John comparable to the seven days of creation, as well as the fact that John begins with the idea of light just as does Genesis (p. 170). I liked the balance between the echo of Christ in the blind man's "I am…" of John 9 compared with Peter's cowardly, "I am not…" of John 18 (p. 177). Mostly, I liked the way Leithart used known rhetorical schemes (particularly those used in other parts of Greek literature) to demonstrate the "turning of the tables" on p. 204.

Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture is a phenomenal book. If I were currently teaching a class in Hermeneutics, it would definitely be one of my textbooks. It is great value for the seminary and the pastor's study alike.

Michael says

Just fantastic. What a game changer.

Adam Ross says

What a book. If you want to explore more deeply the ways in which Scripture "means," then this is the book for you. Rich and textured, just like it asserts Scripture itself is, it will open your eyes to new ways in which to read, understand, and interpret the Bible.

Jerry says

Easily the best book on hermeneutics I've read, Leithart continues to delight as he teaches. He gets a lot done in 200 pages and makes you want more, much like when I've heard him preach. This is a constructive book, laying out ways to get the most out of Scripture. I would have liked to see some counter-examples of certain "maximalist" interpretations that go too far. When is it inappropriate to link two passages that both include

water in Scripture? That sort of thing. If you love the Bible, and any literature really, read this book.

Ryan Richetto says

The Text is a Joke. Get it?

Clayton Hutchins says

A lot of really good stuff, some iffy stuff, some mistaken stuff (in my judgment). And all a joy to read. Count on Leithart to bring in a host of philosophers, Shakespeare, Bach, and Oedipus in a book on hermeneutics!

Perhaps his main concern is to say that interpreters should not just take care to avoid "seeing things" in the text that the Biblical author didn't mean to communicate, but should also avoid missing out on all that's there in the Biblical text. I needed to hear that, and when you read his book in the light of this larger point, there is much to appreciate and learn from.

However, at times it seemed like Peter's hermeneutical car did not have seat belts, or if they did, they were scrunched way down in the crevices so that I couldn't find them. He made a lot of good, general points in principle, but he didn't always clearly show how he got from there to the specific interpretations he offers as examples, many of which I ended up questioning! Maybe I'll explain more later.

Spencer R says

Read my whole review here: https://spoiledmilks.wordpress.com/20...

How are we to interpret the Bible if we can’t always follow the apostles’ methods? Isn’t the historico-grammatical method the only way to correctly interpret the Bible? In his book “Deep Exegesis” Leithart challenges the strict historico-grammatical structure and brings us back to a time of the patristic authors.

Leithart finds meaning in the text itself rather than in the intention of the author (though I wonder if this could be the intention of the author). Leithart covers typology (chapter 2, the clues point to Jesus), semantics (chapter 3, the words are actors on a stage), intertexuality (chapter 4, works off of prior knowledge of OT Scriptures), structure (chapter 5, like a symphony, John 9 has multiple layers holding it up), and application (chapter 6, against, it’s all about Jesus).

While I would have liked to have seen this exegetical method played out in other biblical texts, Leithart stays in John 9 to show the reader how one simple text can have so many layers, how it connects other parts of John and the Bible to each other, and how these deep layers can bring us to spiritual maturation in Christ.

With Leithart there are times when I think his interpretations are stretched. Yet here he gives enough detail and evidence to make a convincing case for the parts that seem stretched.

This book seems to be a defense of Leithart’s exegetical method, and for the most part he’s very convincing. I’ve always heard negative examples of the medieval interpretive method (simply look up Augustine’s

interpretation of the Good Samaritan) and found it to be plain weird. Yet throughout this book, it seems (almost) completely natural. Here Leithart shows what is really going on.

I found this book hard to put down. Leithart's conclusions are easy to latch on to, most of his examples were easy to follow, and his style of imagery writing enviable. He will have an impact on your interpretive thinking, whether you agree with him or not.

[Special thanks to David at Baylor University Press for allowing me to review this book! I was not obligated to provide a positive review in exchange for this book.]
