

# Lesson 1. Overview of Hermeneutics

(Histories of how key leaders at different stages of church life handled the scriptures)

## I. Introduction to Hermeneutics<sup>1</sup>

### A) **DEFINING** HERMENEUTICS AND INTERPRETATION

Hermeneutics designates

- a) Both the Science
- b) and the art of biblical interpretation.

Hermes was the Greek god who served as the messenger for the gods. Hermes was responsible for interpreting the will of the gods.

*Hermeneuo* is the Greek verb that means “to express,” “to explain,” “to translate,” “to interpret.” The Greek noun *hermeneia* means “interpretation,” “explanation.” In both the Greek counterpart and the contemporary technical term,

# interpretation has to do with meaning.

# Interpretation as a discipline is important because meaning has to **do with the core of our thinking.**

# The need for interpretation is not peculiar to the Scriptures. **Any document, ancient or modern, must be interpreted.** The decisions of the Supreme Court are actually interpretations of the Constitution of the United States. Philosophers often debate what Plato, Aristotle, or Kant meant by certain phrases or assertions.

**# Whatever the documents, the interpreter must be careful not to distort the meaning. Such care is required especially in the interpretation of Scriptures, for they not only involve history, proverbs, peoples, and institutions, but the very message or revelation of God.**

Timothy was commanded to exercise great care in handling this authoritative message: “Make every effort to present yourself approved to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the message of truth,” **(2 Timothy 2:15)**. To handle the message of truth rightly demands sound principles of interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Notes taken and adapted from Dr. Wayne Mancari

The task of interpreters of the Bible is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers (original audience), and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers. The interpreter will observe *whether a given statement tends to be understood by a modern reader identically, similarly, or differently from the sense intended by the ancient writer, and will adjust his explanation accordingly.*

It is evident that all biblical interpretation **has two dimensions.**

# The **first** is concerned with discovering the original meaning of a statement,

# while the **second** takes account of changes in meaning, which contemporary readers may attach to the same words.



From the first century A.D. through the Middle Ages, the gulf between the New Testament world and later generations was not great.

From the renaissance to the present day, however, the gulf widened, and today we can scarcely appreciate many features of the ancient world and its outlook that are simply assumed by biblical authors.

Osborne:

Hermeneutics is important because of its *highest aim*: **“to allow the God-inspired meaning of the word to speak to today!”** (Encountering the New Testament, by Walter Elwell and Robert Yarbrough, pg.162).

We belong to an age of technology and to the culture that accompanies it. Our environment is different, and our concepts are correspondingly different. **For instance, we tend to think of society individualistically, while the biblical writer emphasizes group unity.**

Why it is a science: Hermeneutics is a science because there **are principles that can be reduced to a set of guidelines. Biblical Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible.**

Why it is an art: because the application of those guidelines **requires a skilled and experienced interpreter. There is a skill to hermeneutics that can be developed through understanding the guidelines and in the experience of applying those guidelines.** The Scriptures are made up of many genres, or forms, of communication. There is an art to knowing how to approach each one of these genres to understand the true meaning of the text.

**The goal of this class** is to help us all to learn the principles that will help us in accurately interpreting the Bible. Our aim is to understand “the plain meaning of the text.”

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The Scriptures were written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by about 35 different authors, (Moses to John), over a period of about 1600 years. The authors of the Bible had very different life experiences, and wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek.

## B) **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXEGESIS AND EISEGESIS**

However, exegesis and eisegesis are **two conflicting approaches** in Bible study.

### **Exegesis:**

#. Every time we read the Scriptures, we involve ourselves in the exercise of exegesis.

“What did a given verse mean to the intended listener in Bible days, and what does it mean to me today? Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means “to lead out of.” That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text.

#. Exegesis is “to bring about the intended meaning of a verse.”

### **Eisegesis:**

The opposite approach to Scripture is eisegesis, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means “to lead into,” **which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text**, making it mean whatever he wants.

Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the text. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words.

## MY THOUGHTS

In my opinion this is a unqualified reaction to Eisegesis. I agree Eisegesis is a dangerous handling of scripture when the price has not been paid to first Exegete the passage first. But the Holy Spirit can show a deeper meaning in the text when looked at from a contextual point of view especially look back through the New Testament or later usage of that text by New Testament writers. We will cover this more fully later.

**Merriam Webster:** Is the interpretation of a text (as the Bible) by reading into it ones own ideas.

**Wikipedia:** Is the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases.

### READ THIS

**When Eisegesis is given such attitude and action it is a wrong way to deal with scripture. The caution is that we not accuse anyone finding the Holy Spirit speaking to them from the scripture passage Personally or with a double or deeper meaning later from a New Testament point of view. This will be explained better later but the key is that the idea being introduced does not ignore the true meaning by the biblical writer and has not support in any other context in scripture.**

Paul commands us to use exegetical methods:

#. "Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

An honest student of the Bible will be an exegete, allowing the text to speak for itself.

Eisegesis easily lends itself to error, as the would-be interpreter attempts to align the text with his own preconceived notions.

Exegesis allows us to agree with the Bible; eisegesis seeks to (or can force) the Bible to agree with us.

#### Exegesis involves

- 1) **Observation:** what does the passage say?
- 2) **Interpretation:** what does the passage mean?
- 3) **Correlation:** how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible?
- 4) **Application:** how should this passage affect my life?

#### Eisegesis on the other hand involves

- 1) **Imagination:** what idea do I want to present?

2) **Exploration**: what Scripture passage seems to fit with my idea? (exploring is not wrong with seeing what ideas you have that are supported by scripture – as long as you are not forcing the passage to support your idea)

Key insight here.....

3) **Application**: what does my idea mean? Notice that, in eisegesis, **there is no examination of the words of the text or their relationship to each other, no cross-referencing with related passages, and no real desire to understand the actual meaning.** Scripture serves only as a prop to the interpreter's idea.

To illustrate, let's use both approaches in the treatment of one passage: **2 Chronicles 27:1-2**

"Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years...He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD."

#### Example of Eisegesis

First, the interpreter decides on a topic. Today, it's "The Importance of Church Attendance." The interpreter reads 2 Chronicles 27:1-2 and sees that King Jotham was a good king, just like his father Uzziah had been, except for one thing: he didn't go to the temple! This passage seems to fit his idea, so he uses it. **The resulting sermon deals with the need for passing on godly values from one generation to the next. Just because King Uzziah went to the temple every week did not mean that his son would continue the practice. In the same way, many young people today tragically turn from their parents' training, and church attendance drops off. The sermon ends with a question: "How many blessings did Jotham fail to receive, simply because he neglected church?"**

Certainly, there is nothing wrong with preaching about church attendance or the transmission of values. And a cursory reading of 2 Chronicles 27:1-2 seems to support that passage as an apt illustration. However, the above interpretation is totally wrong. For Jotham not to go to the temple was not wrong; in fact, it was very good, as the proper approach to the passage will show.

#### Example of Exegesis

#. First, the interpreter reads the passage and, to fully understand the context, **he reads the histories of both Uzziah and Jotham** (2 Chron 26-27; 2 Kings 15:1-6, 32-38).

#. In his observation, he discovers that King Uzziah was a good king who nevertheless disobeyed the Lord when he went to the temple and offered incense on the altar—something

only a priest had the right to do (2 Chron 26:16-20). Uzziah's pride and his contamination of the temple resulted in his having "leprosy until the day he died" (2 Chron 26:21).

# Needing to know why Uzziah spent the rest of his life in isolation, the interpreter studies Leviticus 13:46 and does some research on leprosy. Then he compares the use of illness as a punishment in other passages, such as 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chronicles 16:12; and 21:12-15.

By this time, the exegete understands something important: when the passage says Jotham "did not enter the temple of the LORD," **it means he did not repeat his father's mistake. Uzziah had proudly usurped the priest's office; Jotham was more obedient.** The resulting sermon might deal with the Lord's discipline of His children, with the blessing of total obedience, or with our need to learn from the mistakes of the past rather than repeat them.

Of course, exegesis takes more time than eisegesis. But if we are to be those unashamed workmen "who correctly handle the word of truth," then we must take the time to truly understand the text. Exegesis is the only way. The secret lies in learning to ask the right questions of the text. Proper handling of the Scriptures will help us to know the "then and there" of the original text and move it to the "here and now" of our own life settings.

**We have two tasks (this is a repeat.....)**

**First**, we find out what the text originally meant is called exegesis.

**Second**, we must learn to hear that same meaning in the variety of new or different contexts of our own day, which is hermeneutics. **The aim of good interpretation is to see the plain meaning of the text. EXEGESIS is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.**

**C) THE ART OF INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE** *(this has to do with the skill of using your tools)*

All of us interpret when we read. We tend to assume that we understand what we read. We also tend to assume that our understanding is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's intent.

*However, we bring to the text all that "we are" (how we look at life, our focuses, our issues) with all of our experiences, culture and prior understandings of words and ideas. Our studies and discipline will make us more effective at separating our background and views from actual meaning of the writer with the goal of discerning the living the truth.*

The Bible is both human and divine.

One Bible scholar, George Ladd put it this way, “The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of people in history.”

It is because it is God’s word communicated in time that we need to learn the art and science of interpreting.

*The Bible, as God’s Word, has eternal relevance and is for everyone in every culture and every time period.*

Crucial to read!

As a result, we must listen and obey. However, these words were communicated by God, through humans in an historical context. This results in the words being colored by the language, time, and culture in which they were written. As Gordon Fee writes, “Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the ‘tension’ that exists between its eternal relevance and its historical particularity.”

Rather than just giving a series of propositions and imperatives, God chose to speak His truths within particular circumstances and events of human history. As a result, we can have hope. God did speak to real people, in real situations, and we can have courage and hope that these same words will really work in our lives.

This is the starting point. THE BIBLE CANNOT SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT IT TO SAY!

The true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken. A text cannot mean what it never meant. The purpose of hermeneutics is to establish guidelines & rules for interpretation of written documents. The goal of Hermeneutics is to discover the thoughts and meaning of the writers when they communicated through the medium of the written document.

Any written document is subject to misinterpretation. This includes the Bible.

The written documents we base our faith on present a special problem for us because they were written between 2,000-3,500 years ago because they were communicated to people in societies, cultures and languages very different from ours.

In the United States there is a supreme board of hermeneutics called the Supreme Court. They are to interpret the Constitution following the grammatico-historical method. The grammatico-

historical method meant to interpret the words in light of what the words meant when they were used at the formation of the document.

## II. A Brief History of Interpretation<sup>2</sup>

### A) BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE OT

Ezra (450 BC) made an early attempt to establish a systematic interpretation of the law. Ezra emphasized observance of the law that ultimately led away from the meaning of the law. Ezra founded a Jewish class called scribes who were devoted to the exposition of the scriptures. Ezra's Scribes developed a systematic way of reducing the law to a formula that was both legalistic and imaginative. The scribes system of interpretation made it impossible to correctly interpret OT by Jesus day.

#### 1) Jewish Literalism

OT was dissected into separate words and phrases, which were given meanings completely void of history, spirit, and context of the material.

#### 2) Jewish Allegorism

# People, things, and happenings were given another meaning, as in a fable or parable.

Alexandria, Egypt was the center of Jewish allegorical interpretation. Philo made the major contribution to harmonize the institutions and ideas of Judaism with Greek culture and philosophy. He taught that all Scripture contained a twofold meaning.

Every statement had a two fold meaning taken wrongly from scripture

1) They were the literal and the allegorical meanings, which were like the body and soul. (Did not Psalm 62:11 say, "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard.") This was the basis for Philo's assumptions and allegorical teaching. Like the soul is more important than the body, likewise the allegorical meaning was more important than the actual literal meaning. An example: The four rivers of Genesis 2:10, Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates, were symbols for the four virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice.

#### 3) Jesus as Interpreter (He accepted the inspiration of the OT)

#. Jesus never had any criticism of the OT as the divine record. Although He was not a rabbi, nor trained in their schools, but he was familiar with their methods. Jesus often described them as, "ever hearing but never understanding, . . . ever seeing but never perceiving." (Mt. 13:14)

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<sup>2</sup> Notes taken and adapted from Dr. Wayne Mancari



#. Jesus credited David's words to the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36) – Spirit inspiration!

#. Jesus accepted the historical reliability of the scriptures citing stories about Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon, Jonah, Isaiah, etc. as true and accurate. Jesus' interest was in the spiritual values of the OT. He could see God's purpose in the scriptures for the human race.

Jesus saw his words as from God and equal in authority to rest of scripture

Jesus gave 36 direct quotes of the OT. He often used OT terminology. When he did use the OT it was to reinforce his own teaching. Jesus appealed to no higher authority when he taught. He was the source of his own teaching. "He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." (Mark 1:22) Jesus' interpretation method was completely new as he explained the meaning of the OT.

### Crucial Realization

Jesus did not give a new intellectual approach, (such as literal or allegorical), but instead was the coming of God into the world to explain His written word, His plan. (Matthew 5:17) A change occurred with the coming of Christ because the question was not the true meaning of the text but the relationship of the text with Jesus and his purpose. "He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

From now on we measure the OT by how Jesus' quotes it and interprets it! No higher authority.

### B) INTERPRETATION AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

#### **1) Apostle's Interpretation**

# Even though Jesus stood independent of the rabbi's approach to scripture and **did not use the methods of interpretation used in His day,**

# **the writers of the NT did follow their Jewish heritage.** The apostles used the methods of their culture **but they used these methods to reinterpret the OT through the views they learned from their Lord and teacher Jesus.** They spoke as the Holy Spirit inspired them and confirmed the many things Jesus said. **This is why apostolic testimony of the Twelve and the 70 are in the canon and why the canon is now closed.**

Other INSIGHTS>>>>

As always, inspiration did not separate the writers of the NT from their own personal culture, background, vocabulary or education.

....**Extreme liberalism of the rabbi's** appears in Gal. 3:16 and Hebrews 2:11-13. (taken from Ps.22:22 and Isa.8:17-18)

**Gal. 3:16** The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.

**Heb. 2:11** For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

**Heb. 2:12** saying:

*“I will declare Your name to **My brethren**;  
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”*

**Heb. 2:13** And again:

*“I will put My trust in Him.”* And again:

*“Here am I **and the children whom God has given Me.**”*

.... **Rabbinic disregard of context and historical background** appears in Romans 9:25. Although Paul disregards the context and historical background here, he did not abuse the intent of the passage to reveal God's character. The coming of the Messiah had shed light on these words and opened a new door of application. An example of Rabbi allegorical interpretation is found in Galatians 4:21-31. Paul does not deny the historical accuracy but does find a parallel in his own life.

### Rabbinical Allegory

**Gal. 4:21** Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

**Gal. 4:22** For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.

**Gal. 4:23** His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

**Gal. 4:24** These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.

**Gal. 4:25** Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.

**Gal. 4:26** But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

**Gal. 4:27** For it is written: “Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.”

**Gal. 4:28** Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

**Gal. 4:29** At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

**Gal. 4:30** But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.”

**Gal. 4:31** Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

The apostles looked for Christ in every passage of the OT as can be seen by Matthew’s use of Hosea 11:1 in Matt. 2:15. We cannot expect to find 21st century methods of interpretation used in the 1st century, but neither can we justify the radical use of 1st century rabbinical methods of interpretation in modern times.

## 2) Peter and Hermeneutics

Problems in interpretation were arising even at the point of Peter’s death as is seen in 2 Peter 3:15 –

“(Paul’s) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:4 –

“They will say, ‘Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ 2 Peter 1:20 – “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation.”

Peter makes the need for proper interpretation clear when he writes in 2 Peter 1:21 That “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

So man cannot correctly interpret it without that same Spirit. Then, in 2 Peter 3:16, That “ignorant and unstable people distort” the scriptures because the scriptures “contain some things that are hard to understand.”

### CRITICAL INSIGHT:

And in 1 Peter 1:10, even the prophets who originally wrote the scriptures did not fully understand all the revelation and meaning of the words they wrote because, “the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

The prophets who wrote the scripture had to apply hermeneutics as they tried to find the full message.

**Double meaning:** Identifying a deeper meaning than the prophet could fully see. The scripture above shows that the prophets themselves felt their words had full meanings that they did not fully grasp.

Haggai 2:6,9. **The restored house of God: (when the scripture describes what goes beyond what the original text describes about something the NT describes in another way (Temple vs. Ecclesia) as house of God.**

**Hag. 2:6** “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

**Hag. 2:7** I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD Almighty.

**Hag. 2:8** ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.

**Hag. 2:9** ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

**Heb. 12:24** to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

**Heb. 12:25** ¶ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

**Heb. 12:26** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

**Heb. 12:27** The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

**Heb. 12:28** ¶ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

**Heb. 12:29** for our “God is a consuming fire.”

#### ADDED MEANING

**Mal. 4:5** “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

**Mal. 4:6** He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

**Luke 1:16** He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

**Luke 1:17** And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

**Key is that Paul, Peter, Zachariah can add meaning to the Logos but we cannot.... The canon is closed to that.**

### C) EARLY CHURCH FATHERS METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

Different type of literalism: Every word, number and story had hidden meaning (close to the Rabbinic method of allegory).

During the Patristic Period, the Scriptures were considered to be the unique work of the Holy Spirit carrying forth a divine message.

# To the church fathers, inspiration extended even to the phraseology of the Bible. Thus, Clement of Alexandria underscores Christ's words in Matthew 5:18 by saying that **not a jot or tittle shall pass away** because the Lord had spoken it (Protepticus, IX, 82, 1).

"Gregory Nazianzus suggests that the smallest lines in the Scriptures are due to the care of the Holy Spirit, and that we must be careful to consider every slightest shade of meaning (Orat., 2, 105).

# Justin Martyr distinguished between human and divine inspiration and spoke of the divine word that moved the writers of Scripture (Apology I, Ch. 36).

# Irenaeus thought of the Scriptures as "beyond all falsehood" (Apology, Ch. 18).

There can be little doubt that the early fathers had a very high view of inspiration, and that this view extended to the **minutia of Scripture.**

**Typology was the basic principle of interpretation.** For example:

Abraham's 318 servants represent the numerical value of the letters TIH.

The "T" stood for the cross

and the "IH" (the first two Greek letters for Jesus name) stood for Jesus. This was the mystery of Abraham's servants.

#### 1) Irenaeus, Bishop in Gaul (177-197)

Irenaeus established Christian thought for the next several centuries. He approached scripture exclusively by exposition of the Bible. His method of interpretation was

governed by the principle of inspiration. He then understood that since scripture was inspired by God, then God wrote both the OT and NT.

### Irenaeus three fold method

2) (a) From this doctrine of the unity of scripture he concluded that scripture must then interpret scripture. (b) He then urged that obscure passages be clarified by being compared with passages that were understood. (c) the foundation of interpretation was that Christ was the center of the scripture. The only way to understand the OT is in light of the Savior's coming. He believed every part of scripture had its own place and purpose.

#. Origen (185-254)

Origen was the *first systematic theologian* because he employed the entire Bible as the basis for his teaching. His interest in exegesis grew out of his concern for the text. He did more exegetical work than anyone before the reformation. Origen was a student and then the successor to Clement in the Alexandrian Bible School.

From Clement he acquired the theory of the threefold meaning of scripture.

*The body = literal meaning.*

*soul = moral teaching.*

*spirit = spiritual meaning.*

# Augustine (354-430)

His method

Augustine dominated Christian theology in the West for a millennium. Augustine was more of a theologian like Irenaeus and not interested in the means and methods of interpretation like Origen. Augustine said,

#. "The Bible was a narrative of the past,

#. a prophecy of the future,

#. and a description of the present."

Key role of Faith in interpretation

His contribution to hermeneutics was his emphasis upon faith as a necessity for understanding. Understanding and insight into scripture came as a result of faith.

D) MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATION (from Augustine until the Reformation)

During the medieval or scholastic period, the Bible became a mere source book for disputations instead of the living Word of God. As might be expected, the period was unproductive in respect to definitive statements on inspiration.

#. Much more attention was given to the status of the Bible in its relationship to other authorities within the church.

#. Although Abelard and Aquinas emphasized the human element in the transmission of God's revelation, there is no evidence to suggest that a less high doctrine of inspiration was necessitated by the mood of the Middle Ages.

Bible study was restricted almost entirely to monasteries and consisted of recitation of texts and copying manuscripts. **Illiteracy was rampant.** Rome claimed the right to interpret scripture. Any development of Hermeneutics had only one purpose – to strengthen and advance the teachings of the Roman Church.

1) Bondage to the writings of the Church Fathers.

**All interpretation had to conform to tradition** and that was the writings of the church fathers. The main writings they used were the Latin and the interpreter's job was to harmonize all the writings of the Latin-writing Fathers to form a foundation under the Roman Churches traditions. The literal meaning of the Bible was completely insignificant and unstudied.

2) Scholasticism

Around 1000 AD an **intellectual awakening** in the church occurred. The movement depended upon the principles of Greek philosophy produced a deductive religious philosophy within the confines of traditional teachings of the Roman Church.

**# Scholasticism depended almost exclusively upon the allegorical method of interpretation, which further perverted the truth of Scripture.**

**# There was no regard for the original languages of Biblical texts. The interpreter's job was to support the teachings of the Roman Church.** Thomas Aquinas was a leader in this movement

**3) Mysticism.** In reaction to the bondage and scholasticism of the day the hunger for a relationship with God surfaced. But, since the written revelation was not available to feed and guide people in their pursuit of God extreme mysticism developed. Mysticism taught that an individual could get all they needed from God by direct communion with him and did not need the traditions or historical revelation (scriptures). Of course, devotional study of scripture was emphasized with allegory as the main method of interpretation. Bernard of Clairvaux was a leader.

Today there is similar teachings in popular theology because of bible ignorance today and waning church attendance – the general population is selecting what they want to

believe.

#### 4) Medieval Quad-rig-a

Up until the days of Martin Luther the method of interpretation through the medieval times was the Quadriga. **The Quadriga was a *fourfold method of interpretation* that had began in the early church (Clement and Origen of Alexandria) and was completely developed by the Middle Ages. This method examined the text for four meanings: literal, moral, allegorical, anagogical.**

- a) **Literal** – the plain and evident meaning. (Jerusalem was the capital of Judea w/ temple)
- b) **Moral** – instructed people on how to behave. (Jerusalem is the soul of man, his sanctuary)
- c) **Allegorical** – revealed the hidden meaning giving doctrinal content. (Jerusalem is the church)
- d) **Anagogical or Eschatological**– expressed future hope. (Jerusalem is heaven, the future hope). (Heb.12:18-21)

For example, Jerusalem could mean four different things. To go up to Jerusalem could mean:

(1) they went to the real earthly city,

(2) their souls went to a place of moral excellence, they should be going to church,

(3) or they have the hope of heaven in the future. With this method the biblical exegetes can develop all types of strange discoveries in scripture

#### 5) Medieval Literal Interpretation

Western Europe cultivated literal interpretation in several cities and monasteries. This often occurred under the influence of the Rabbis who studied Hebrew in the tradition of Jerome.

Nicolas of Lyra (1100's AD), a great Christian Hebrew scholar **stressed the primacy of the literal sense.** Martin Luther was highly influenced by Nicolas and called him "a fine soul, a good Hebraist and a true Christian."

#### E) REFORMATION INTERPRETATION

The reformers, in a search for authority, readily accepted the doctrine of inspiration and, **by implication, the doctrine of inerrancy.** Zwingli appealed consistently to the Old Testament and New Testament in his defense of pure Christian doctrine. Calvin described the Scriptures as the "only record in which God has been pleased to consign His truth to perpetual remembrance, until we have a perfect conviction that God is its Author" (Institutes, I, 7, 2, 4). Luther argued for



a high view of inspiration, once the question of canonicity was settled, and thought of the Scriptures as being above error. While the reformers did not devote a decisive part of their theology to the subject of inspiration, it is conclusive that they accepted the full authority of the Scriptures.

During the Reformation there was a rebellion against the **Roman Church's method of interpretation**. It was replaced with a movement to enthrone the Scriptures in the thought and life of Christianity. Three men established the pattern of hermeneutics that continues until today: **Luther, Melancthon, Calvin**.

### 1) Luther

Luther broke with Roman traditionalism but remained under the influence of the Early Church Fathers like Augustine. Luther did not establish the significance of the historical setting of the text for interpretation but he moved interpretation in that direction. The literal sense of Scripture was important to Luther and he did escape the trap of the allegory. Luther rejected the Quadrige (fourfold interpretation), but this did not restrict his application of scripture to many levels. He believed in one interpretation, many applications. Sola Scriptura. Sola Gratia. Sola Fide. Sola Gloria Deo.

### 2) Melancthon

Melancthon was a student of Luther. **He failed**, as did Luther, to distinguish the doctrinal distinction of the OT from the NT and freely used OT material as support for Christian doctrine. He did say that NT revelation was complete and final and **went beyond the OT revelation**. Humanism's view of reason was placed along side revelation in his study of scriptural interpretation.

### 3) Calvin

**John Calvin influenced Protestantism more than any other Reformer**. He left the allegorical method completely and he used extreme literalism. The importance of history was obvious to Calvin although his resources were limited. He was too dogmatic and disregarded all other interpreters and so limited his own insight and progress. He gave no place for progressive revelation (even from the OT into the NT) and tried to find a complete systematic theology in the teachings of the apostles.

F) MODERN INTERPRETATION. (The Hight of **rationalism** and professed being honest with what if truth and reality). **Rationality** became what scripture was measured by)

#. Protestantism developed its own traditionalism based on the principle of verbal inspiration of Scripture and the original confessions of faith of the Reformers.

#. **Historical Criticism** challenged the inspiration of the Bible. This began in England with **Deism** and Germany with **Enlightenment in the 1700's**. They taught the gospels contained only a hint of the original Jesus. Leader in this was Albert Schweitzer

### 1) **Liberal View**

The Bible is a record about human concepts about God, in particular, the Hebrew view. The writers were inspired in the same way that Shakespeare or Plato were.

### 2) **Neoorthodox View (how we chose to hear it)**

The Bible becomes the Word of God when it is read and the message affects the reader personally. The mythological elements of the Bible must be removed.

### 3) **Orthodox View (the overall emphasis but writer and word choices are not necessarily divine)**

God used the persons and the personalities of the writers in such a way as to provide the message He wanted. The message is inspired (God breathed) not the writers.

# There is diversity among this view as to whether the Bible is inerrant in all its details (without errors).

Popular in modern theological camps today

# Or inerrant in all that it claims to teach regarding salvation and God's dealings with humanity. The latter position would allow for some historical, geographical, scientific or numerical errors.

### **Orthodoxy appealed to rationalization.**

#. They argued that since the Bible is without error, it is thereby inspired. This does not mean that we should accept a lower view of inspiration, nor that we should reject the doctrine of inerrancy; it only suggests that our appeal must arise from the claims of Scripture alone.

# The Scriptures are inerrant because they are inspired of God-not inspired because they are inerrant.

The **first** approach is biblical and leads to a correct view of inspiration and errancy;

The **second** approach is rationalistic and opens the door to human speculations.

Today's basic foundation of interpretation.

**Karl Barth** challenged Historical Criticism purely scientific approach to scripture. He said Historical Criticism was simply useful in establishing the facts to be interpreted, not to give the final explanation. *He returned to the Reformers idea of scripture interpreting scripture.* He said Historical Criticism had the first word for the interpreter but revelation had the last word.

J.A. Bengel's words: (Encounters in the NT, a historical and theological survey, pg.162)

### Three focuses of interpreting and Studying scripture

"Apply yourself wholly to the text and apply the text wholly to yourself (your condition).

There must be a Doxological aim: it should lead to the worship of God and personal communion with him.

It must include a missiological aim of passing on to others what scripture has disclosed to us."

The Historical Method is good in that it gives us tools that can help us achieve a more solid historical factual foundation for the original writings.

But where it makes a mistake is in the assumption the bible is a historical document in purpose. It is not. It is.

Message to the life and spirit of mankind. It speaks of a life outside the realm of the natural that is supernatural (beyond our laws of nature).

And it is a moral message of how the creator (outside of this reality) intended for us to know how to live this life in gaining understanding of the life to come (that is outside this reality).

Above all it must be approached as a message of broken hearted and redeeming love for mankind and its lost and broken condition but hope and directions for recovery.

R.C. Sproul's "**Practical Rules**" from Knowing Scriptures (Downers Grove: Intervarsity 1977, pgs.63-99.

1. **Read the Bible like any other book**– follow normal rules of literary interpretation.

2. **Read the Bible existentially**– try to walk around in the shoes of the people you read about, it can help understand the passage better (NOTE: no, this is not suggesting we can completely understand their headspace, but it is assuming that the human race is a unity, and so we may be able to catch some valuable insights.)
3. **Interpret the Historical Narratives by the Didactic**– Stories don't always tell you what you should think about what happens in them. So, we need didactic (teaching) parts of Scripture to help us make sense of the narrative (story) parts of Scripture. In the OT, this would be the Law, Psalms, Prophets. In the NT, we need the epistles, and also teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.
4. **Interpret the Implicit by the Explicit**– We can draw too many implications from a passage, so keep your 'implication search' controlled by the explicit teaching of Scripture.
5. **Determine Carefully the Meaning of Words**– consult a concordance or dictionary.
6. **Note the Presence of Parallelisms**– read Hebrew poetry as poetry and not as atomistic prose (regular writings for information).
7. **Note the Difference between Proverb and Law**– Individual proverbs are situation specific, but laws are always binding (though, [note this nuance from Dave VanDrunen](#)).
8. **Observe the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter of the Law**-Individual commands may have broader application (the spirit of the law) than just what they explicitly say (the letter of the law).
9. **Be Careful with Parables**– Not everything in a parable is 'something,' if you get my drift.
10. **Be Careful with Predictive Prophecy**– Some prophecies have a symbolic character, rather being understood in a woodenly literalistic way (see Mal. 4:5-6).
11. **Interpret the Bible with a Spirit of Humility**– Such humility means being open to the possibility that you could be sincere in your understanding of a passage, yet sincerely *wrong*.

I think these are solid guidelines, I would just add two more:

12. **Read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament**– This is what Jesus taught the disciples to do (See Luke 24:26-27; 24:44-46).
13. **Be Careful with Old Testament Law**– Paul says we are not “under Law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14-15). This means we are not under the Sinaitic covenant, but under the New Covenant. This, then, means we cannot read Old Testament Laws (in Exodus, Levitics, Numbers, or Deuteronomy) and assume that they directly apply to us and our situation today (see WCF chapter 19 on how to parse that out).