

# Hermeneutics

How to Study and Interpret the Scriptures

Most of this material is based on class notes on  
Hermeneutics taught by Dr. Rolland D. McCune,  
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

Edited and augmented by Dr. Scott Williquette.

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P. O. Box 308011

Cleveland OH 44130-8011, U.S.A.

Phone: (440) 826-3930

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# Hermeneutics

## How to Study & Interpret the Scriptures

### Background to Hermeneutics

#### I. The Origin of Human Language

##### A. Human Language Originated at Creation.

Human Language is not eternal. According to Exodus 4:11 God made man's mouth. Human language came into existence on Day 6 of the Creation week when God made man. Language is probably eternal. If the divine persons of the Triune Godhead communicate with each other as rational beings, then they must have some kind of "language" system involving propositions (statements that express thoughts or opinions). Propositions are necessary for rational, personal beings to communicate with each other.

##### B. Human Language Is a Part of the Image of God.

1. Components of the image of God. Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:25-27; 1 Cor 11:7).
  - a. Personality. Personality is usually said to consist of intellect, emotion, will, self-consciousness and self-determination. Self-consciousness means that man can make himself the object of his own thought. Self-determination (often called freewill) means that man can make decisions. Even as the Godhead consists of three persons, so we, in the image of God, are persons (distinct from animals).
  - b. Rationality. This is the ability to create and process ideas, form conclusions and use logic.
  - c. Morality. This has to do with powers which inform a person of right and wrong and enable him to act accordingly.
  - d. Spirituality. This is the capacity for fellowship with God. It is the ability to understand and participate in spiritual things

and the capacity for eternal life.

2. Language requires a rational mind.
  - a. Language is a product of the mind. This is seen in Genesis 1. God thought and spoke things into existence. He then called them good. In Genesis 2 Adam named the animals and Eve. Man is a thinking, self-conscious being and therefore he is a speaking being.
  - b. Language (words) involves thought and speech. Thought is actually inward speaking, and speech is really audible thinking. Talking is the verbalizing of inward speech.
  - c. Language was used by the first man, Adam (Gen 2:19-20). Adam observed the varying “kinds” of land animals and understood the size, shape, characteristics, traits and mannerisms, of each one. He then used language to express those characteristics meaningfully. This shows the high intellectual capacities of Adam.

C. The Laws of Human Language Provide Guidance for Hermeneutics

Because human beings are in the image of God, they are languages-users. Many of the basic principles of Bible interpretation are basic laws of communication. These principles are often called “the received laws of language.” Without these laws, communication would be impossible. Some basic laws of language are:

1. Words have one meaning within the context in which they are found.
2. The meaning of a word is determined by its usage.
3. All communication should be interpreted in light of its context.
4. Different types of communication are interpreted differently. For instance, poetry is interpreted differently than narrative or parables.

**B**ecause human beings are in the image of God, they are languages users. Many of the basic principles of Bible interpretation are basic laws of communication.

## II. The Purpose of Human Language

Human language was created so that God and man could communicate with each other. It was given to man by God for the purpose of receiving a verbal revelation from God and for approaching God in prayer and worship. Human language was also created so that persons in the image of God could communicate with each other. It was created so that people could converse with other people about God and spiritual/theological matters.

## III. The Revelation of God to Man

### A. The Definition of Revelation

Revelation is a disclosure of what was previously unknown. To be known, God must reveal Himself. He cannot be discovered or known “from below.” Revelation is always from the top down. In a theological sense revelation is God’s communication of information about Himself and/or the world in the form of understandable truths.

1. God’s revelation is a disclosure of information. It gives a person an actual knowledge of God through informational channels.
2. God’s revelation is a disclosure in propositions (truth statements, ideas and concepts). The mind processes propositional truth. Even God’s revelation in nature is in the realm of propositions (not emotional or mystical).

### B. The Extent of Revelation

In one sense, everything that is not God, reveals something about Him. Every aspect of the universe bears testimony concerning God. His stamp is on everything that He has created. Theologians speak of God’s revelation as being in two forms or aspects: general and special.

1. General revelation is God’s witness of general information about Himself to all men everywhere. God bears witness of His existence and character through nature, man’s conscience, and the providential ordering of history (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:18-20; 2:14-15).

Nature and conscience communicate to every man that God exists,

that God is God, that God is holy and that God has standards of right and wrong. However, according to Romans 1:18-20, the message of general revelation is not received by man. He suppresses it and is therefore without excuse at the final judgment. The message of general revelation is never salvific. It always leads to eternal condemnation.

2. Special revelation is God's truth in a concrete form to a specific person or group (Ps 19:7-11; 1 Cor 2:6-12).
  - a. The Bible is special revelation and is therefore the object of hermeneutics. It must be understood correctly.
  - b. Not every bit of information in the Bible is technically special revelation from God. Sometimes God guided Bible writers to draw material from non-revelatory and non-inspired sources, such as public records, genealogies, collections of ballads, diaries of individuals, etc. For example:

Num 21:14; Josh 10:13	Book of the Wars of Yahweh
2 Sam 1:18	Book of Jasher
1 Chron 29:29	Diaries of prophets
Luke 1:1-4	Historical research

The Bible taken as a whole is special revelation. In its entirety it constitutes the Word of God in concrete form to specific people.

#### IV. The Inspiration of the Scriptures

##### A. The Definition of Inspiration

On page 71 of his book *Basic Theology*, Charles Ryrie defined inspiration, "God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message in the words of their original writings." God moved them to write His Word using their intellects, experiences and education. It is important for us to understand the doctrine of inspiration because it shows us the relationship between God and the human authors of Scripture. What God said, the human author wrote.

What the human author wrote, God wrote. More importantly for hermeneutics, what the human author meant, God meant. There is an identity of meaning because of the miracle of inspiration.

**B**ecause the Bible is inspired by God, it has absolute authority over us. That truth must control our study of Scripture.

B. A Description of the Doctrine of Inspiration.

1. Inspiration is a miracle of divine creation (2 Tim 3:16). It is a product of the creative activity of God (2 Pet 1:21; 1 Cor 2:13).
2. The use of human languages.
  - a. The Bible's authorship has two aspects. God is the ultimate author of the Bible, but He moved men to write It. This means that the Bible has two aspects, divine and human. The human aspect of the Bible is the human author's languages, grammar, genres, etc. The divine aspect is the message and truths.
  - b. The Biblical languages are purely human. The Hebrew of the OT is not "Heavenly Hebrew" and the Greek of the NT is not "Holy Spirit Greek." The Hebrew was one of the northwest Semitic human languages, and the Greek was common Greek.
    - (1) The biblical languages had types of literature (genres) that must be treated as they were understood in their day.
    - (2) The rules of grammar and syntax must be applied to the text today as they were applied in their day.
    - (3) The meaning gleaned today from the biblical languages must be the same as understood by the human beings to whom the Scriptures were given in their human languages.

In order to understand what God means, you must understand what the human author meant and what the original readers were expected to understand.

C. The Concept of a Closed Canon For This Age.

Revelation 22:18-19, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

These words apply directly to the readers of the book of Revelation. But by extension John’s words can refer to and be applied to the entire Bible. John almost certainly knew that he was the last apostle and the last one to write Scripture. Therefore, his words here have application to the whole canon of Scripture. John’s expressions restate similar warnings and statements in the Scriptures (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Dan 12:4, 9).

The biblical writers understood that the body of inspired writings was growing and that they were writing Scripture and adding to that body of truth (1 Cor 14:37). Thus, John’s words in Rev 22:18-19 seem to imply that the book of Revelation is the final book in the divine canon.

V. The Transmission and Preservation of the Text

A. Evidences of the Preservation of the Text

1. The indestructibility of Scripture implies preservation (Ex 17:14; Deut 31:24-26; Josh 24:25-27; 1 Sam 10:25; 2 Kings 22:8-10).

Matthew 5:18, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

This verse speaks of the Bible’s ultimate indestructibility. However, the “jots and tittles” imply something about the text itself. The “jot”

is probably the Hebrew letter *yod*, and the “tittles” probably refer to the small distinguishing marks of certain letters. Jots and tittles speak of the material that formed the words of the Bible. This tells us that God will preserve the very words of Scripture.

1 Peter 1:9-13, “for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. <sup>10</sup>Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup>It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

What the prophets wrote is part of the divine record and is authoritative and indestructible. This implies the preservation of the Scriptures.

2. The continuing authority of Scripture implies preservation (Matt 5:18; John 10:35). There is a close theological union between authority and preservation. Inspiration, authority, and preservation seem to go together theologically.
3. The warnings not to add to or subtract from the Scriptures imply preservation. These warnings apply to Scripture’s words (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19) and message (Mark 7:9, 13; 2 Cor 4:1-2; 2 Thes 3:14-15).
4. The commands to know the Scriptures imply preservation (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 1:1-2). Note also the rebukes for not knowing the Scriptures (John 3:10; Matt 22:29).
5. The existence of translations, versions, copies, and reproductions of the text implies preservation.

B. The Divine Activity in the Preservation and Transmission of the Text.

God has not chosen to miraculously preserve the text of Scripture. Instead He has worked providentially through God-fearing copyists and translators over the centuries and around the world.

VI. The Fundamental Basis of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Clarity of Scripture

A. The Meaning of the Clarity of Scripture: The Doctrine of Perspicuity

1. The Bible's central message is clear. The central message of the Bible consists of revealed truth about the person and works of God, creation, the fall into sin, the provision of redemption through Christ, and God's ultimate victory over sin and Satan (Ps 119:105, 113). There are difficult passages in the Bible (2 Pet 3:15-16). Not all of the Bible is equally clear and some parts defy interpretation to this day. But the words of Scripture were understood at the time of writing and first reading.
2. The Bible has one truth system. It is a network of divine truth that fits perfectly together and never contradicts itself.
3. The Bible possesses its own meaning. Scripture interprets itself. One can compare Scripture with Scripture and learn God's message. The central message of Scripture can be understood without supplementation from reason, tradition, or experience.

The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture. Scripture does not need supplementation from reason, tradition, or personal experience.

B. Implications For Hermeneutics

1. The Bible must be interpreted correctly. This can and must be done. Eternal issues are at stake.
2. The Bible has no contradictory meanings. It is one non-contradictory network of divine truth. Therefore, every interpretation must be consistent with the clear teachings of other

Scripture. Because this is true, we should always interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages.

**T**he Bible never contradicts itself. Interpret difficult passages in light of clear ones.

3. A person can and should interpret Scripture directly for himself. No official teaching office of the church, no clergyman, scientist, psychologist, or anyone else should come between a person and the Bible.

## Introduction to Hermeneutics

### I. The Definition of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system. It is an art because the application of those rules involves wisdom and skill.

### II. The Difference Between Hermeneutics and Other Interpretive and Communicative Skills

#### A. Exegesis.

The word “exegesis” refers to taking meaning “out of” the text. This is the opposite of “eisegesis” which means to put meaning “into” the text. To exegete a text means that we allow the text to speak for itself. We lead out of the text what it actually says. We don’t read our thoughts and perspectives into it. Hermeneutics entails the principles of interpretation. Exegesis refers to the application of those principles to the text in order to understand the meaning of the text correctly. Hermeneutics supplies the needed tools; exegesis uses them.

#### B. Application.

Interpretation and exegesis ask the question, “What does text mean? What did it mean to the original author and his readers and what therefore does it mean to me?” As we will see, there is only one true meaning of a text.

Application asks the question, “How does the text apply to me and to believers today?” Whereas, there is only one text meaning, there may be many applications and those applications may be different to believers living at different times and in different cultures. For instance, the command, “Be holy as I am holy” has one clear meaning, but will apply to believers differently.

### C. Exposition.

This is the communication of the meaning and application of the biblical text to others. Homiletics involves the principles of exposition as applied to preaching. Pedagogy involves these principles as applied to teaching. The basic difference between preaching and teaching relates to application. Preaching includes a plea for decision or action; an appeal for a proper response to the text. It entails a certain amount of persuasion that teaching normally lacks.

## III. The History of Bible Interpretation

There is value in noting something of the history of interpretation. It may come as a surprise that not all interpreters have followed the literal method of interpretation (sometimes called the grammatical-historical method). In fact, allegorism in one form or another (pure allegorism, mysticism, excessive typology, etc.) has been very common. A study of history should expose and warn us against the errors of incorrect interpretation. Hopefully, modern Bible students will not make those same mistakes. The history of interpretation runs in general eras or periods. In this sketch, some of the important or dominant characteristics of each period will be outlined.

### A. An Ancient Illustration of the Process of Hermeneutics and Exposition

Nehemiah 8:1-9, “So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. <sup>3</sup> He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and

Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

<sup>5</sup> Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. <sup>6</sup> Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

<sup>7</sup> The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. <sup>8</sup> They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

<sup>9</sup> Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.”

## B. Jewish/Rabbinical Interpretation

Here we are considering the ways the Rabbis interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures. Generally, rabbinic interpretation was allegorical. The rabbis held that since Scripture came from God: 1. multiple meanings are to be found in the text, and 2. every detail of the text was important regardless of how small or insignificant it is. Four main types of Jewish interpretation were in use at the time of Christ.

1. Literal. This was called *peshat*, a grammatical-historical method which served as a basis for other methods.
2. Midrash. This word comes from the Hebrew word *darash*, meaning to search or investigate. Midrash means “sacred study.” It was given to fanciful interpretations of an allegorical nature. Rabbi Hillel developed the basic rules of rabbinic exegesis which were a mix of allegorism and legalism.
3. Pesher. This comes from the Qumran sect. It had principles of midrash but with a heavy eschatological emphasis.

4. Allegorism. Allegorism of literature had been used widely by the Greeks and was adopted by Jews who had been influenced by Greek culture (Hellenized Jews). These Jews (particularly at Alexandria) were influenced by two traditions. Their religious heritage or tradition was Moses and the Old Testament. Their philosophical tradition came from the Greek culture and philosophy. They used allegorism to reconcile the two traditions. They interpreted Moses allegorically and brought him into conformity with Plato and other Greek Philosophers. Allegorism was able to harmonize Mosaism with Hellenism. The chief teacher of rabbinic allegorism was Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-AD 50). Philo was able to read Greek philosophy out of the Pentateuch. He taught that Greek philosophy was really plagiarism from the Old Testament.

#### C. Patristic Interpretation

The exegesis of the Church Fathers ran in schools. The school at Antioch, was founded by Lucian in the early fourth century. It taught the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation and was wholehearted against allegorism. The schools at Alexandria, Caesarea, and Edessa taught the allegorical method. Unfortunately, allegorism dominated the Church Fathers. The Fathers allegorized for several reasons:

The heretics of their day accused Christianity of wickedness because of the immorality and gross sins of some of Bible characters. The Fathers answered those charges by allegorizing those sins.

The Fathers were being attacked so viciously that they didn't have time to develop careful rules of interpretation. Allegorism was an easy way to use the Bible and served an immediate purpose.

The Fathers were not knowledgeable in the biblical languages, particularly Hebrew. This contributed to faulty hermeneutics.

The Fathers were strongly influenced by Greek philosophy and attempted to harmonize Christianity with it. This led to the adoption of allegorism. Some saw "truth" in pagan thought and attempted to harmonize Christianity with it (Clement of Alexandria especially did this).

Some of the early Fathers used allegorism or excessive typology before the full formation or acceptance of the New Testament canon. They did this to make the Old Testament an immediate witness to Christian truth (Clement of Rome especially did this).

1. Early Patristic Allegorism.

- a. The author of the Epistle of Barnabas (AD 130) allegorized passages favorable to Judaism. He allegorized the clean and unclean animals, the Song of Solomon, and many other things.
- b. Justin Martyr (AD 164) allegorized Judah's immorality with Tamar, David's adultery, and the bells on the high priest's robe (and many other biblical narratives).
- c. Both Clement of Rome and Irenaeus tried to establish church truths and practices by means of excessive typology of the Old Testament. Clement saw bishops and deacons in Isaiah 60:17. Irenaeus saw the Garden of Eden as a type of the church.

2. The Alexandrian School.

- a. Clement of Alexandria (born AD 150) saw five senses to Scripture:
  - (1) Historical: What actually took place.
  - (2) Doctrinal: Moral, religious, and theological teaching
  - (3) Prophetic: Genuine prophecies and types.
  - (4) Philosophical: Allegorizing the Bible to accommodate Greek philosophy
  - (5) Mystical: Similar to allegorism (ex. Lot's wife symbolized impiety which produces blindness of heart).
- b. Origen (AD 185-254) was an influential allegorist. He took his cue from Proverbs 22:20, 21 (LXX): "Now then, copy them for yourself three times over, for counsel and knowledge on the surface of your heart. Therefore I teach you a true word

and good knowledge to heed in order that you may answer words of truth to them who question you.” He believed Scripture had three parts like man’s constitution. The body of Scripture was the literal and external words. The soul was man’s relationship to his fellow man. The spirit was man’s relationship to God, and God’s relation to Himself, the world, and man.

3. Post-Origen Influence. Many followed Origen and his allegorical method (Ambrose, AD 397 and Eusebius, early 400s). Jerome (AD 420) was an allegorist but later was influenced by the school at Antioch toward a more literal approach. Augustine (AD 430) usually forsook sound principles of interpretation and engaged in allegorism. This caused countless misinterpretations of Scripture for over 1000 years (Augustine was followed by many). His four-fold sense of Scripture had the following ingredients:
  - a. The literal (letter as he called it)--what happened.
  - b. The allegorical--what was to be believed.
  - c. The moral--what was to be done.
  - d. The anagogical--what was to be hoped.

#### D. Medieval Interpretation

Exegesis during the Middle Ages was lazy and lifeless. Instead of exegeting the biblical text, church leaders compiled the teachings of the Fathers. Tradition arose and played a key role in theology. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church was based on the allegorical interpretations of the Church Fathers not biblical exegesis. Reasons for the widespread use of medieval allegorism were:

It was a useful tool to justify the office and authority of the Pope.

There was no hunger for Bible learning. Church scholars were content with patristic traditions which were based on allegorism. The biblical languages were not taught or used so true biblical exegesis was rarely done.

The apostate condition of the established church produced extreme mysticism in most of the monasteries.

1. The Dark Ages (7th-12th Centuries).

- a. Gregory the Great (AD 604) and Venerable Bede (AD 735) were both allegorists. Gregory taught that Job's three friends were heretics who were returning to the Holy Church when they met Job. Job's 7000 sheep represented innocent thoughts. The 3000 camels were high and vain notions. The 500 oxen were virtues, and the 500 she-asses were wanton inclinations. Bede, for example, allegorized the Prodigal returning to the Father's house to mean worldly philosophy coming home to the Church to find bread.
- b. Bernard of Clairvaux (AD 1135). Mysticism arose during this time and produced some mystical allegorists of note. Bernard used allegorism to support the papacy (office and authority of the Pope). For example, the two swords of Luke 22:38 were taken to be "spiritual" and "material" respectively. The first was to be used by the church and the second by the soldiers when ordered to do so by the church. Bernard interpreted the sun and moon of Genesis to be the papacy and the secular rulers.

2. The Scholastic Period (13-15th Centuries).

The leading light here was Thomas Aquinas (AD 1274). He basically held to the four-fold sense of Scripture, dwelling mostly on the non-literal aspect. With Aquinas and the scholastics came a divorce between theology and exegesis and a marriage between theology and philosophy.

E. The Reformation Era

The Reformation brought an end to allegorism and a return to the study of the biblical languages and the use of sound hermeneutics. The Reformers and pre-Reformation leaders were grammatical-historical interpreters. With the translation of the Bible into numerous languages came a new interest in biblical interpretation. The early reformers, Luther and Melancthon, normally interpreted the Bible literally. Calvin interpretive method was free from allegorism and mysticism. His great principle was "Scripture interprets Scripture."

F. The Post-Reformation and Modern Eras

1. Protestant Scholasticism/Confessionalism.

In response to post-Reformation Catholic decrees and dogmas, the Protestants developed a creedal approach to theology. Appeal was made to creeds and confessions for authority and exegesis in many quarters turned cold and sterile. A literal approach to hermeneutics was replaced with the study of “dogmatics.” Proof-texting in its worst sense often prevailed. Proof-texting involves the use of Bible verses to prove theological ideas without a consideration of their context or intended meaning. This method resulted in the misunderstanding and misuse of the Bible passages. This method is common today.

2. Pietism.

Many rejected the confessionalism of the Protestant Scholastics. They desired something warm and practical for their everyday lives and walk with God. Thus pietism arose. In one aspect Pietism was a return to the Scriptures but Pietists often disregarded the grammatical-historical method in favor of an “inner light” type of interpretation. Philipp Spener (AD 1635-1705) was the leader of pietism which arose mainly out of German Lutheranism and spread nearly everywhere.

3. Rationalism/Biblical Criticism.

Rationalism promoted human reason as the only method of finding truth. Biblical revelation was discounted as rigid, authoritarian, and culture-bound. This was the main product of the Enlightenment for biblical studies. (The Enlightenment was a 17th and 18th century overthrow of dogma, tradition, and revelation, and an elevation of human intellectual autonomy.)

4. Liberalism.

Liberalism was merely an extension or natural outcome of the hermeneutics of rationalism. In this system, the inspiration of Scripture is denied and the authorship and composition dates of Old

Testament books are radically altered. The idea of the supernatural is also denied, and the Bible is interpreted as mere history with no present authority or application.

5. Neo-orthodoxy.

This is in one sense a non-rational, emotional approach to Scripture and in another sense only a variation of the rationalism of the liberal approach. Neo-orthodoxy teaches the autonomy of the human intellect but also teaches that a person's "encounter" with God is above normal human thinking processes. Neo-orthodoxy stresses revelation as event and personal, and not propositional. God reveals Himself in His presence and not in words. Therefore He is encountered in a person's experience and "revelation" comes to the individual in a manner that bypasses the intellect. The Bible is treated by the neo-orthodox in the same manner as the liberals.

IV. The Need for Biblical Hermeneutics

We need to interpret the Bible accurately so that we understand God's message, form a correct theology, and preach and apply God's Word to His people correctly.

A. Generally, All Bible Reading Requires Interpretation.

Every Bible reader is a Bible interpreter (even if he interprets incorrectly). It is simplistic to say, "You don't need to interpret the Bible; just read it and do what it says." While the Bible is essentially clear, the plain meaning is not always plain to all people, and the Bible is not equally plain in all its parts.

B. Specifically, Hermeneutics is Required to Bridge the "Gaps."

We must labor to interpret the Bible accurately because of the differences that exist between the historical and cultural situations described in the biblical text and our present situations today. The greater the historical, cultural and geographical distance between the biblical writer and his readers and us today, the greater opportunity there is for misunderstanding. In order to interpret the Scriptures correctly we must understand the gaps that separate us from the original writers and their world.

W<sup>e</sup> must bridge the gaps as we interpret  
and explain the biblical text.

1. Historical Gap. A knowledge of the historical context of the Bible writer and his writing is essential. This is why we call our method the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Examples:
  - a. It helps if we understand the history of the Ancient Near East.
  - b. A knowledge of Assyria is essential to understand Jonah and Nineveh.
  - c. It helps if we understand the changes in dominion of the Fertile Crescent.
  - d. A knowledge of the Roman world will give us needed background of the life of Christ and the travels of Paul.
2. Cultural Gap. Here are some examples:
  - a. Boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Ex 34:26)
  - b. The use of a covering garment to encourage a marriage proposal (Ruth 3.7-9)
  - c. Baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15:29)
  - d. Feet washing (John 13)
  - e. The holy kiss (1 Thes 5:26)
  - f. Women's head covering (1 Cor 11)
  - g. Ancient Near Eastern treaties/covenants as models of Old Testament biblical covenants.
3. Geographical Gap. Geography consists of climate, land and water formations, and trade routes. Examples:
  - a. "Mountain" and "hill country" (Josh 14:12)
  - b. The site of the crossing of the Red Sea and the route of the Exodus
  - c. Terms like "wilderness" or "negev" (Gen 12:9); "Lowlands" (Josh 11:16, 17); "Gibeath-haaraloth" (Josh 5:3); "Lehi" (Judges 15:19) and "Level ground" (Ps 43:10)
4. Linguistic Gap. The Bible was written in three ancient languages:

Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. A working knowledge of these languages is an advantage to those studying the Scriptures. However, those who possess one or more accurate Bible translations can interpret and proclaim God's truth effectively. Knowing and using proper hermeneutical principles is the key to exegeting God's Word.

The task of hermeneutics is twofold. First, we seek to understand what the biblical author meant in the text you are studying (what it meant to his first hearers or readers). Second, we seek to understand how that meaning applies to modern readers.

**W**hat did the biblical author mean? How did his readers understand him?

## V. The Divisions or Categories of Hermeneutics

### A. General Hermeneutics

General hermeneutics refers to those rules that pertain to the interpretation of all writings including the Bible. They are basically the received laws of communication. General hermeneutics usually includes the study of the following:

1. Context
2. Language: word meanings and sentence and paragraph structure
3. History
4. Culture
5. Theology

### B. Special Hermeneutics

Special hermeneutics deal with principles that make it easier to interpret special literary forms found in normal speech and in the Scriptures. Special hermeneutics is needed for the study of the following:

1. Parables
2. Allegories
3. Types

4. Poetry
5. Prophecy
6. Epistle
7. Proverb
8. Narrative

VI. The Relationship of Hermeneutics to Other Areas of Pastoral Ministry (in the proper order)

- A. Observation (What does the text say?)
- B. Hermeneutics (What are the rules for understanding the text? These rules are founded upon the laws of language.)
- C. Exegesis (Am I using the rules of hermeneutics consistently in my study of the text?)
- D. Systematic Theology (What does the entire Bible teach about major topics?)
- E. Homiletics (How do I structure the sermon so that it is effective?)
- F. Exposition (How can I exhort my audience correctly & effectively?)
- G. Application/Edification/Spiritual Growth (How does the text apply to me and my audience? How should we change in light of the text?)

VII. The Basic Equipment of Bible Study & Hermeneutics

- A. Bible atlases & Bible geographies; Bible concordances; Old Testament and New Testament backgrounds; Bible dictionaries; Bible encyclopedias; Hebrew and Greek language tools.
- B. Bible Commentaries Written By God-Fearing Believers
  1. Exegetical commentaries help us understand historical, cultural and theological context and provide thorough discussions of difficult texts. Such commentaries are exegetical in nature and are often very detailed.
  2. Homiletical & devotional commentaries are based on strong Bible exegesis but are less scholarly and more pastoral in nature. They consider the text's application for today.
  3. The best commentaries: reflect a strong view of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, are based on the original languages, are exegetical, consider the text's historical and cultural background, evaluate the

possible interpretations of the text, and aid in application.

C. A Good Translation.

It is probably best to use one main translation for preaching and teaching, but to use several good translations for study if possible. The use of multiple translations for study will usually show where there are interpretive questions. Always seek to use translations produced by scholars who love and fear the Lord. Theologically liberal translations will lead you and your people away from the Lord.

VIII. The Spiritual Qualifications of the Interpreter

- A. He must be born again (Rom 8:5-7; 1 Cor 2:14). These passages indicate that an unsaved person is not qualified to interpret the Scriptures. An unsaved person can sometimes understand the basic meaning of a text, but he will never be able to grasp the Bible's significance and true application.
- B. He must have a deep reverence for God (Prov 1:7). He must have a keen appreciation of the Creator-creature distinction. The interpreter of Scripture must realize that ultimately God, and thus His Word, are incomprehensible. This produces humility when studying God's Word.
- C. He must have a desire to know and obey the Word of God (1 Cor 3:1-3; Heb 5:11-14). The Bible student must have a teachable spirit and a desire to obey and please the Lord. We study, not simply to increase our knowledge of the Word, but to grow spiritually and change into the likeness of Christ. A worldly or disobedient Christian is liable to make inaccurate interpretations because he is not in harmony with the Holy Spirit who gave the Scriptures. Included in this matter is common sense and a right use of reason and logic.

The believer who desires to know and obey the Word may sometimes become impatient, wondering why he can't understand everything in the Scriptures more quickly. We need to remember that we grow "in layers." For instance, we may study a book of the Bible or a biblical doctrine and then decide to study it again a few years later. If we have been growing and gaining a deeper understanding of God and His truth, our second study will yield a deeper understanding and application of His Word. Why? The Bible hasn't changed. We've changed. We've matured. The more we

grow spiritually, the more life-changing and beautiful the words of Scripture become to us.

**W**e study, not simply to increase our knowledge of the Word, but to grow spiritually and become like Christ. Let the Word change you.

- D. He must approach the text without unbiblical preconceived ideas and perspectives. Each one of us has a past and if we aren't careful that past can influence our interpretation. Our culture, upbringing, education, and personal experiences are part of who we are. We must not allow those things to determine our understanding of the text. We cannot read our ideas or opinions into the text. We must, instead, allow the text to speak for itself and then obey it.

**W**e cannot read our ideas or opinions into the text. We must allow the text to speak for itself and then obey it. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture, not Scripture in light of personal experience.

## IX. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics: Illumination

### A. The Meaning of Illumination

Illumination is an operation of the Holy Spirit on the mind. It is essentially the regeneration of the human intellect.

### B. The Need For Illumination

The human mind is depraved. It cannot of itself process spiritual things correctly. It has a inborn hostility against God and the things of God (Rom 8:5-7). Thus proper interpretation is impossible without the Holy Spirit's illuminating work (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 4:17-18). The Holy Spirit operates on the mind of the Christian interpreter. He illumines or enlightens the person not the Bible. He does not explain the meaning of Scripture as such, but quickens the human mind so that it can handle Scripture properly and grasp its significance and application (Ps 119:17-18).

Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in grasping the text's significance and application.

### C. The Aspects of Illumination

1. The initial aspect of illumination is the new birth (Eph 1:15-18; 1 Thes 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27). Anyone can understand the meaning of most passages of Scripture by using the received laws of language previously discussed. However, a mere intellectual understanding of the gospel and the Bible does not save (John 8:30-31; James 2:14-19). The sinner must exercise committed, repentant, faith in Jesus Christ as his sin-bearer. This necessitates a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must give spiritual life (regeneration—John 3:1-8) to those the Father has chosen to draw to Himself and save (John 6:36-44). At that point, the Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-13) and enables him to understand the significance of the gospel. The sinner realizes his wretched spiritual state and understands that only Christ can save him. This initial illumination removes the unbeliever's hostility to the truths of Scripture and makes him certain of its authority over him.
2. There is also a continuing aspect for believers. The Holy Spirit continually enables the Christian to grasp the significance of Scripture (1 Cor 2:14-15; 1 John 3:20, 27). It must be noted that obedience is still a vital factor (1 Cor 3:1-3).
3. Clarification
  - a. No new revelation is given. The illumination of the believer is always in association with the Word of God. It does not give something in addition to the Word. Illumination enables one to grasp the significance of the Word.
  - b. Diligent study is required. The believer, the Holy Spirit, and the Word are in an "organic" relationship. In his paper, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutical Process," Fred Klooster states, "Just as the biblical writer used his own talents and investigation, so the biblical interpreter must read

and study and struggle to understand the biblical text. The more self-consciously active the interpreter is in that process, the more likely is the Spirit's illumination" (p. 12-13).

**S**aving faith, the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination and diligent study are all necessary if we are going to correctly understand and apply the biblical text.

## Elements of General Hermeneutics

### I. Purpose in Writing

In his book *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Milton Terry states, ". . . the meaning of particular parts of a book may be fully understood only when we have mastered the general purpose and design of the whole book" (p. 210). How do we determine an author's purpose in writing?

**W**e begin by trying to determine the human author's reason(s) for writing.

#### A. The Author's Statements

Sometimes the author will clearly state his purpose in writing (Eccl. 12:13-14; Lk 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 1 John 1:1-4 & 5:13).

#### B. The Author's Exhortations (note the many "let us" passages in the book of Hebrews)

#### C. The Author's Selection and Arrangement of Material

1. 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize David and the Davidic kings. It centers on the temple and its rituals. "Good" kings are given detail. Faults are largely omitted. God's covenant promises are in view. Chronicles is not just "history." Its purpose was to encourage the post-exilic Jews to remain faithful to God and His institutions in order that God's blessings and favor would be on them. Chronicles shows the Jews their ties to the Davidic promises. By contrast the books of Kings are almost the opposite, although both Kings and

Chronicles cover the same basic history. Kings emphasize the sins of Israel, their failures and disobedience. These sins caused the division of the monarchy and the eventual captivities to Assyria and Babylon. It was written in the Exile and basically answers the question, “Why are we here?”

2. The book of Esther does not mention God, prayer, Jerusalem, the temple, or the covenant. The Jews were content to settle down in Persia. Some were concealing their identity and none of them showed interest in what was going on in the Restoration community in Judea. The Jews almost met extermination. The purposes of the Book of Esther seem two-fold. First, to show God’s displeasure with this unspiritual attitude by His chastening of the Jews. And, second, to show the ultimate hope of the nation in their preservation from extinction. We should not think of Esther and the others as spiritual giants or great examples for Christians today.
3. The book of Matthew emphasizes the kingship of Jesus. This kingdom theme is clear from the topics Matthew considers: Jesus as the promised Davidic King, the Kingdom offered to Israel and Israel’s negative response to Jesus and His offer of the Kingdom. Matthew’s purpose in writing indicates to us that its primary application is not for the church. This book was written primarily for the Jews who rejected and crucified their king. The Kingdom is now future (after the church age). We must then be careful how we apply it to the church today. Remember that the church is not mentioned until 16:18, about one year before the cross, and it is a prophecy.
4. The book of Philippians encourages believers to be unified and to serve with one mind. This is clear when you consider three things. First, many of the commands in Philippians are directly related to unity and harmony within the church (1:27; 2:1-3; 2:5; 2:14-15; 3:17-18; 4:2-3). Second, Paul uses four terms in Philippians that he never uses elsewhere. Each of these terms has reference to Christian unity in the church and is a compound word beginning with the Greek preposition meaning “together with.” Each one denotes a close, intimate personal relationship (1.27; 2.2; 3.17; 4.3). Third, when Paul mentions other people in this epistle, it is usually in reference to their unity and harmony with other believers, or their

divisiveness (1.3-5; 2.1-11; 2.19-24; 2.25-30; 4.2-3).

Our first task is to understand the overall purpose of the book we are studying. We do that by reading the book many times noting what themes the author is highlighting. Does the author tell us why he wrote his book? Do his exhortations provide us with hints as to his theme? Are certain topics or themes repeated showing us his purpose for writing?

In order to grasp the author's purpose in writing, begin by reading the entire book numerous times (15-20). Read it aloud and take note of repeated words and ideas. Note also the connective terms.

## II. Historical/Cultural Background

We could define the word "culture" as the common beliefs, social forms, and traits of a racial, religious, or social group." In his excellent book *Basic Bible Interpretation*, Roy Zuck states, "culture includes what people think and believe, say, do, and make." He goes on to group culture into eleven categories: political, religious, economic, legal, agricultural, architectural, clothing, domestic, geographical, military, and social (p. 79-90).

### A. The Importance of Historical-Cultural Information

1. It provides the necessary setting for the biblical material. God's revelation is rooted and grounded in historical fact. It came to us through certain cultural forms because both the Bible writers and their readers were products of their cultures. Note how often the historical-cultural setting is mentioned in the Scriptures (Is 1:1; Jer 1:1-3; Hos 1:1; Matt 2:1; Lk 1:5). You should seek to understand as much about the text's historical and cultural situation as possible.

Remember that God's revelation is rooted and grounded in historical fact. Therefore, you should seek to understand as much about the text's historical and cultural situation as possible.

2. It may provide the occasion for writing. Certain books owe their

occasion for writing to historical-cultural events or similar factors. Joel references a locust plague. Ezra and Chronicles describe Israel's return from exile and the needs of the new community in Judea. The New Testament epistles were written to meet specific needs in local churches.

3. It provides understanding of biblical teaching. Proverbs 22:28 mentions "the ancient landmark." This was a boundary stone that could be moved if a person wanted to gain more land. Proverbs 22:28 is a command against stealing another's property. The headings of many Psalms, while not inspired, have great historical value. They provide significant background material (see: Ps 3, 18, 30, 34, 51). To properly interpret the parable of the soils (Matt 13; Mark 4) a person needs to understand that ancient fields were not squared off with neat fences and there were no implements to drill into soil for planting. Seed was scattered by hand and thus would land on various types of soil and terrain.

**S**ince Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in the light of biblical history.

## B. The Determination of Cultural Pertinence

Some cultural expressions found in Scripture have application to believers today, some do not. Note some principles for determining cultural pertinence:

1. Determine the cultural items. What topics in the text pertain specifically to an ancient culture?
2. Determine what is inherently moral and what is not. A cultural practice or command is relevant for believers of every age if it is based upon the unchanging nature of God or if it is founded upon an eternal truth.
  - a. Capital punishment is based on the image of God in man (Gen 9:6).
  - b. The subordination of women to men in the home and local church is grounded in the Economic Trinity (1 Cor 11:3).

- c. Women preachers are prohibited on the basis of creation and fall (1 Tim 2:12-14).
- d. Paul's "vice lists" contain no culture bound items (Rom 1:29-32; 13:13; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). These sins are inherently wrong.

**W**hen a cultural practice or command is based upon the unchanging nature of God or is founded upon an eternal truth, it is relevant for believers of every age.

Sometimes things that are not inherently moral take on moral proportions. For instance, Sabbath worship in the OT was based on God's creation pattern (Gen 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11). Also, Sunday worship seems to have been instituted for the church because Christ was raised on Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). Many of the commands given to Israel were not based upon God's eternal moral law but were given in order to distinguish her from the pagan nations (dietary laws—Lev 11 & Deut 14; tasseled garments—Num 15:38-40; grain harvesting—Lev 23:5-20).

- 3. Distinguish between a cultural form and its truth content. First, determine what is descriptive and what is prescriptive. Some passages describe to us an historical situation or narrative. Other passages prescribe to us. They command us.
  - a. Baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15:29) seems merely descriptive. It apparently was a religious rite that was meaningful at the time (maybe only in Corinth). But it is not prescribed for us by the apostles.
  - b. The hour of prayer (Acts 3:1). This was the 9th hour of the day (3:00 pm), the time of Israel's evening sacrifice. It was part of the serial offerings for the nation. This is descriptive.
  - c. Churches meeting in houses (Col 4:15; Acts 20:20). The principle is that of Heb 10:25 ("not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together").

**R**emember the difference between descriptive and prescriptive revelation. The first, describes something that has happened but

may not have application for us. The second prescribes or commands. When the command is for God's people in every age or those in the church age, it applies to us.

Second, distinguish between a principle and its illustration. James mentions the rich sitting on the floor during a church service (James 2:1-7). Is James teaching that rich people should sit on the floor? No, he is illustrating his teaching on partiality.

Third, distinguish between a principle and its specific application. Sometimes the Bible teaches a normative (applicable) principle but does not make the application normative. For instance, the Bible reflects various postures for prayer (standing, kneeling, prostration, upraised hands, downcast eyes). But does that mean that the modern practice of holding hands in prayer is prohibited? The normative principle is that we must be people of prayer. But the application is not normative. God is not concerned with our posture when we pray. Also, 1 Timothy 2:9-10 speaks of female hair and dress styles but the normative principle is modesty and humility.

Additional examples of this are foot washing (John 13:12-16) and greeting a fellow believer with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20). The first, is a cultural expression that communicates humility and a servant's spirit but is not normative for us today. The second, is a cultural expression of Christian fellowship and friendship similar to handshakes in many cultures today.

4. Distinguish between a principle and its historical-cultural occasion. Notice Paul's teaching about eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10). Apparently there is a distinction between buying such meat in the market and eating it at home (10:27), and going into the pagan temple "restaurant" to eat it (8:7-10). The principle is to give no offense to a weak brother and also to give no support or credibility to idolatry in any form. Also, consider Paul's words about separation from a Christian brother (2 Thes 3:6). The principle of such separation is occasioned by those Christians who wouldn't work. But laziness is not the real issue here. Disobedience to apostolic teaching is the primary issue (vv. 6, 14). They had Paul's previous admonition on the matter (1 Thes 4:11, 12; 5:14), his previous

instruction (2 Thes 2:15; 3:10), and his personal example (2 Thes 3:7-9) and yet they were lazy busybodies.

C. Note Where the Bible Has A Consistent Witness.

The Bible uniformly witnesses against homosexuality in all forms, deviant sex of any kind, adultery, drunkenness, theft, murder, hatred, and many others. It always promotes love, mercy, fidelity, doing good, etc. Christian ethics and morality are never cultural. They are based upon God's unchanging and holy nature.

D. Determine the Modern Application.

1. Option 1: retain both the principle and its biblical cultural expression. In this case, the wealthy must sit on the floor during worship and we must greet each other with kisses on the cheek. But it is unlikely that these are intended for today.
2. Option 2: retain the principle but update the cultural expression. For example, substitute the holy kiss with a hug or handshake. Also note that 1 Cor 5 upholds the sanctity of marriage and human sexuality. But stoning for mother-son incest was replaced with excommunication.
3. Option 3: assume both the principle and its biblical cultural expression are culture bound and therefore have no application to us today. If that is true, texts with cultural elements have little or no value or application for us today. This option must therefore be rejected.

III. Literary Context

A. The Importance of Context

Words, phrases and statements have no meaning apart from their context. Thoughts are expressed in a series or flow of connected ideas. Therefore, we must first examine the author's line of thought. Biblical authors wrote with an argument in view. (Poetry sometimes defies this principle which can make its interpretation challenging.)

Sometimes we may be tempted to ignore the context and the flow of argument and divide the text into isolated words and phrases. Unfortunately this will often lead us away from the author's intended meaning (which is God's meaning). This is a consistent characteristic of false teachers. We must never take words, phrases or statements out of their context. Those who do, will misinterpret and misapply God's Word. Instead of proclaiming God's message, they will proclaim their own.

**W**e must never take words, phrases or statements out of their context. Those who do, will misinterpret and misapply the Word.

## B. Varieties of Context

### 1. Book Context and Purpose in Writing

Read the book you are studying over and over in order to understand its theme and purpose. Note repeated words, ideas and commands as well as connective terms like "and," "but," "then," "because," "for," and "therefore." Strive to understand the movement of the author's argument and ultimately his reasons for writing.

**W**hy did the author write this book? What was the main message he was communicating to his readers?

### 2. Section Context

This deals with the major blocks of material in a book formed by its paragraphs. As you read the book, attempt to understand the sections or divisions within it. Use those divisions to produce an outline of the book.

**H**ow do the book's divisions fit into its purpose and move its argument forward?

## EXAMPLES:

### a. The Major Divisions of Romans

- (1) Condemnation (1:1-3:20)
- (2) Salvation (3:21-8:39)
- (3) Vindication of God's ways with Israel (9-11)
- (4) Application (12-16)

### b. The Major Divisions of Revelation (1:19)

- (1) The Things Which You Have Seen (1— the vision of Christ)
- (2) The Things Which Are (2-3— the churches)
- (3) The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter (4-22)
  - (a) The Tribulation Period (4-19)
  - (b) The Millennium (20)
  - (c) The Eternal Kingdom (21-22)

## 3. Immediate Context

This is the general flow of subject matter at hand. Words make up sentences. Sentences make up paragraphs. Paragraphs form the main points of the author's argument. Word meaning is determined by an understanding of the paragraph in which that word is found.

**H**ow does the content of this paragraph help you understand the meaning of its words & sentences?

This is probably the most important of the “varieties” of context and in a sense is the final authority of meaning. There is no guarantee that an author will always use a word in the same way in his writings. Every word has a certain range of meaning (semantic range), but context nearly always narrows the possibilities down to the meaning intended by the author.

**E**very word has a certain range of meaning, but context nearly always narrows the possibilities down to the meaning intended by the author.

## EXAMPLES:

- a. Matthew 5:37 speaks of “letting your “yes” be “yes,” etc. The context is a prohibition against oath taking, not profanity or even slang language. Our communication should be “yes” or “no” backed by character and consistent living, not by an oath.
- b. Luke 17:21 mentions the kingdom “within” you. The context is Jesus and the Pharisees and the Pharisee’s refusal to believe Jesus’ offer of the Kingdom. “In your midst” is a better translation than “within” because the Kingdom certainly was not “within” the Pharisees. Jesus is saying that instead of looking for signs of the Kingdom the Jews should have been looking to Him. He personified the fact that the Kingdom was in their midst.
- c. The context of Hebrews 13:5b (“I will never leave you nor forsake you”) addresses the fact that God will provide for our needs so that we don’t have to covet money.

## 4. Parallel Passages

There is a difference between verbal and actual parallels.

- a. A verbal parallel is one in which the words are the same in both contexts but the meaning is different due to each context. The technical ideas may be similar but the situations are not truly parallel. The meaning of one does not automatically agree with the meaning to the other. For instance, in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 we find the words “binding” and “loosing.” The context of Matthew 16 is the government of the Kingdom while the context of Matthew 18 is the local church. The thought of prohibiting and allowing is the same in both but the Kingdom is not the church. The parallel is verbal not actual.
- b. Real parallels refer to the same idea or event and thus can

help with interpretation. Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37 mention “hating” family members. Matthew interprets Luke’s “hate” as loving family “more than me.” Matthew 24:40, 41 and Luke 17:37 speak of those “taken” at the Second Coming. Luke asks the question, “Where?” Where are these taken? They are taken “where the vultures gather.” They are taken to judgement. They are taken in death and destruction. According to Matt 24:39 those who were “taken” in 24:40 were not taken in the rapture, but were taken to judgement. The flood of Noah took the sinners away in judgmental death.

The Bible interprets itself; Scripture  
best explains Scripture.

#### IV. Language and Grammar

##### A. Word Meaning: Lexicography

The best tool for word study is a lexicon because it defines words and discusses their semantic range.

##### 1. General Principles of Word Meanings

- a. Words have a range of meaning (semantic range). Semantic range refers to how a word was used at the time of writing, not what it came to mean later. Words can mean different things in different contexts. However, most words have a fairly stable semantic core so that they can’t mean just anything anytime. In determining the semantic range, a lexicon is the best tool.
- b. Language is univocal (one voice). Words can only mean one thing at one time. Puritan William Ames (1576-1633) recognized this. He wrote:

There is only one meaning for every place in Scripture. Otherwise the meaning of Scripture would not only be unclear and uncertain, but there would also be no meaning at all--for a word which does not mean one

thing surely means nothing.

Words mean one thing at one time.

A denial of the univocal nature of language renders communication impossible. This is a self-evident truth. A person has to assume it to be true in order to disprove it as true. The only exception to this rule are puns and figures of speech, which are a play on the univocal meaning for some kind of emphasis. However, no language system can consist only of puns and figures of speech. Communication would be impossible.

- c. Words have meaning in association with other words. Words do not have automatic meaning. They assigned meaning by their usage. The basic unit of language is not the word but the sentence, which then extends to the paragraph and, in the case of the Bible, the section and eventually the book. In his book, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Grant Osborne wrote, " . . . the meaning of a word depends not on what it is in itself but on its relation to other words and to other sentences which form its context" (p. 76).

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paragraph and, in the case of the Bible  
the section and eventually the book.

- d. Words derive meaning from the author who wrote them not from themselves. Our goal is to ascertain what the writer wanted to communicate through the terms he chose. Proper biblical hermeneutics determines the author's intended meaning and conveys that same meaning and message today.

What was the human author communicating to his audience? What he originally meant is what God meant.

## 2. Factors in Determining Word Meanings

- a. Etymology is of limited value. Etymology is the attempt to trace the history of a word back to its original meaning. Most people who focus on etymological study, assume that words have inherent meaning and that they never lose their original meaning. Sometimes it may be helpful to understand the original meaning of a word or of the parts of a compound word, but this approach has many problems. First, word meanings often change. This is true of all human language, including the biblical languages. Second, it is dangerous to overload words. A word cannot be made to bear the whole freight of its etymological history. Third, language users are ignorant of word etymology. No writer/speaker is conscious of the etymological background of his words. If language users don't think in etymologies, neither should interpreters.
- b. Usage is the key to understanding word meaning. A word's usage in the author's day is the biggest factor in word studies. The aim of word studies should be to determine how the author could have used a given word in his day.

Word usage determines meaning. How were the words you are studying used in the author's day and in the passage you are studying?

You figure out a word's usage by answering three questions.

- (1) What is the immediate context? This is probably the most valuable source for finding word meaning. Context has a determinative function. It virtually makes meaning. It has often been said, "Context is king."

Context has a determinative function. It virtually makes meaning. Context is king.

- (2) How does the author use this word in the book you are studying? This is very helpful but not conclusive since an author may choose another usage within a word's semantic range in the same book.
- (3) How does the author use this word in his other writings? This also is a valuable tool but subject to the same limitation just mentioned. As an example note that Paul's use of "mystery" in Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3; and Colossians 1 and 2 seem to have the same meaning. It seems to consistently mean revelation kept hidden in God's mind and revealed at a later time (to the church).

- c. Synonyms should be handled carefully. Sometimes synonymous terms have different nuances, but often the distinction between them is slight. Sometimes the author intends no distinction at all. This seems to be the case in Genesis 1:26, 27 regarding the words "image" and "likeness." While some have labored to find a distinction between these two terms, it seems likely that they bear the same meaning. Note also the four Hebrew words translated "create" in Genesis 1 and 2. They are: *Bara* ("to create" 1:1, 27); *Asah* ("to make" 1:26); *Yatsar* ("to form" 2:7) and *Banah* ("to fashion, to build" 2:22). Each word possesses its own nuance but in the context of these two chapters they seem to communicate the same meaning.

Sometimes an author will even place synonyms together in a sentence or verse in order to stress one idea very strongly. He will stack or bunch synonyms together so his readers will understand his meaning clearly. In light of all this, the interpreter should be careful not to draw too strong a distinction between synonyms and should never build a theology upon such distinctions.

**B**e careful not to draw too strong a distinction between synonyms and never build a theology upon such distinctions.

## B. Paragraphs and Larger Blocks

Words form sentences and sentences form paragraphs. Paragraphs are units of thought. They consider topics or themes. Your goal as you study words, phrases and sentences is to understand the meaning of the unit of thought – the paragraph.

**Y**our goal as you study words, phrases and sentences is to understand the meaning of the unit of thought – the paragraph.

1. Find the theme of the paragraph by asking specific questions. What's the point of this paragraph? What does the author say in this paragraph? What are the key words in this paragraph and what are their meanings? How does this paragraph fit into the paragraphs around it to advance the author's reason for writing?
2. Note the connecting words in the paragraph in order to understand the flow of the argument within the paragraph and from one paragraph to another. The most common connective terms are:

<u>Connective Terms/Phrases</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
and	list or movement of narrative (Jonah 4:1-5; 1 Pet 2:1)
then, so	list or movement of narrative (Gen 1:26; 2:7; Rom 3:1)
but	contrast (Gen 2:17; Prov 23-24; Matt 22:29; Eph 4:29)
just as, in the same way	comparison (Gen 26:29; Num 28:24; Eph 5:28; Gal 2:7)
because, for	reason (Gen 2:3; Ps 38:3-4; Is

53:2; 2 Thes 1:10; Tit 3:5)

therefore, then

reason or result (Gen 2:24; 11:9;  
Ps 100:23; Rom 12:1)

so that, in order to

reason or purpose (Gen 11:7; Matt  
26:4; Acts 9:24; Rom 9:23)

**N**ote the connecting words in the paragraph in order to understand the flow of the argument within the paragraph and from one paragraph to another.

3. Avoid *sensus plenior* interpretations. The words *sensus plenior* literally mean “fuller sense.” The usual understanding is that there is meaning to Scripture that is deeper than, or in addition to, what the human author wrote or intended. This fuller sense is not based on the biblical text, but looks deeper to find a fuller, spiritual meaning not intended by the human author.

There are three reasons we should not seek a fuller or deeper sense as we interpret biblical texts. First, in all communication, words have only one meaning at one time. The Bible is not an exception to this basic rule of communication. God wrote it using human beings, in human languages, to human beings. It must therefore be interpreted in the same way that other human communication is interpreted. Second, according to the doctrine of divine inspiration, Scripture has divine and human aspects. Thus what the human author intended and wrote is exactly what the divine author intended and caused to be written. Therefore, the true meaning of the text will be clear from the text. God’s intended meaning is in the actual words of the text. If that is not true, why did He give it to us? A good question to pose is: “Could God intend a meaning, sense, or truth separate and different from what was consciously conceived and intended by the human author?” The answer is, “No.” A text cannot mean what it never meant. The third reason we should not seek a deeper sense is that to do so abandons the text. It abandons God’s Word. How does one arrive at the fuller sense of a passage if it is not drawn from the biblical text? What is its source? Some may claim, “I understood the deeper sense of the text as the Spirit led

me?” But the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who moved holy men along to write Scripture (2 Pet 1:21). Why would He add to His Word? If He intended to lead us without His Word why did He move men to write it in the first place? Ultimately, seeking a fuller sense leads to the allegorization of Scripture and the denial of biblical authority. Men become the authority.

The text cannot mean what it never meant.

We must remember something important here. Biblical texts mean what the human author meant. They do not possess some fuller, deeper, spiritual sense not indicated by the text itself. However we must remember that no human author or speaker is ever aware of all of the implications of his words. Sometimes what biblical authors wrote had implications and applications that they did not foresee. However, those implications still flow from the text itself. They are still textually based. *Sensus plenior* is not textually based. The fuller sense is not found in the words of the text.

## V. The Analogy of Faith (Theology)

### A. The Meaning of the Analogy of Faith

The “analogy of faith” is a hermeneutical principle which states that, since all scriptures are harmoniously united with no contradictions, every proposed interpretation of any passage must be compared with what the other parts of the Bible teach. In other words, the “faith,” or the body of doctrine which the Scriptures as a whole proclaim will not be contradicted in any way by any passage. Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of other scriptures must be rejected.

The analogy of faith principle should encourage us to understand church history and the interpretations of faithful Christians and theologians of the past (primarily since the Reformation). We serve the Lord on their shoulders and can learn from them. The Christian creeds and confessions are great condensations of biblical truth and can be helpful to us. They are not our authority but they can be helpful.

## B. The Application of the Analogy of Faith<sup>1</sup>

Because of the analogy of faith, established teaching cannot be contradicted by a single statement or an obscure passage. For instance, 1 John 3:6 does not contradict 1 John 1:8-2:1. Therefore, obscure texts must be interpreted in light of the clear texts.

**D**ifficult and obscure texts must be interpreted in light of clear texts and established doctrines.

Remember also that “doing theology” involves comparing and correlating Scripture and that sometimes we derive our theology from scriptural indications and implications. For instance, nowhere does the Bible state that God is triune (three distinct persons in one essence), but the implications of Scripture clearly teach it.

1. The baptism of Jesus Christ (Matt 3:16-17).
2. The announcement to Mary (Luke 1:32,35)
3. The allusions in the temptation episode (Matt 4)
4. The formula of Christian Baptism (Matt 28:19)
5. The apostolic benediction (2 Cor 13:14)
6. The personal distinctions in the Godhead (John 3:16; 5:26; 14:16-17; 15:26; Gal 4:4; Eph 2:18; 4:4-6; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thes 2:13; Heb 9:14; Jude 20-21)

## C. Cautions and Limitations of the Analogy of Faith

1. Avoid the danger of being too restrictive. The analogy of faith does not mean that a statement of Scripture is only authoritative when it has support from other texts. One positive declaration of God’s

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<sup>1</sup>LET’S LEARN TOGETHER: Compare Hebrews 2:1; 3:12; 4:11; 12:25; 6:4-6 with John 6:37-40 and 10:28-29. The two passages in John clearly establish the eternal security of the believer (see also: Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 1:8-9; Phil 1:6; 1 Thes 5:23-24; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 7:25; 1 Pet 1:3-5; 1 John 5:18; Jude 24-25). What should one make of the warning passages in Hebrews. They seem to threaten the believer with loss of salvation? If the believer cannot lose his salvation, are not such passages pointless? Not at all. Such passages motivate the believer to keep persevering in his faith. Such warning passages are tools to encourage true believers to continue in the faith and to keep them from falling away from Christ.

Word (that does not contradict other passages) is sufficient to establish either a fact or a doctrine.

2. Avoid the danger of imposing a faulty theological grid. If a person's theological system is faulty, or if he has interpreted other verses incorrectly, he may misunderstand the text he is studying. Theologians often speak of the hermeneutical spiral, meaning that each of the areas of context must be considered again and again when interpreting a text. The text must be allowed to say what it says (by considering historical-cultural and literary context) and what it says will inform and establish our theology. Our theology then becomes another aspect of context which we consider as we interpret texts in the future.

**A**llow the text to say what it says and what it says will inform and establish your theology. As your theology is established, it becomes another aspect of context which you must consider as you interpret other texts.

3. Avoid the danger of ignoring progressive revelation. God's revelation was unfolded or parceled out over many centuries, culminating in the New Testament. Sometimes the analogy of faith is used, for example, to justify extrapolating New Testament truth back into the Old Testament. This is called "illegitimate totality transfer." Remember to interpret passages in the context of THEIR historical situation. Don't assume that believers possess truth that had not been revealed to them.

## Principles of Special Hermeneutics

The Bible contains numerous types of literature (genres), and they must be properly interpreted. Biblical languages, as other languages, contain numerous types of literature: prose, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, narrative, epistle, gospel, parable, etc. These genres are cultural conventions (inventions) which the biblical writers used in ways consistent with how they were used in their day.

## I. Figurative Language

### A. Introductory Matters

1. Figurative language is defined as those times when a word is used in a way other than its normal, literal meaning. It is used in a way that is unnatural or absurd. Zuck states, “Generally an expression is figurative when it is out of character with the subject discussed, or is contrary to fact, experience, or observation” (p. 145).
2. Figurative language can be determined by noting four things. First, look for the normal or plain sense of the word. If the word can be taken normally or if its plain sense makes is logical, take it literally (see the animals in Isaiah 11:6-8). Second, note contradictions, impossibilities, or absurdities in the literal interpretation of the text. Do the trees in Isaiah 55:12 have literal hands? Does the physical earth mentioned in Micah 1:2 possess ears that are able to hear? Was Jesus’ human body literal bread that could be eaten (Matt 26:26)? Are James, Cephas and John literal “pillars” (Gal 2:9)? Next, note the context. Does the context allow for and/or demand a figurative meaning? Sometimes an explanation of the figure is near at hand in the context. For example 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 speaks of believers being “asleep” but verse 16 defines “asleep” as “dead.” Finally, note what genre the author is using. Some genres tend to have more figurative language, such as prophecy and poetry.

**A**lways look for the normal or plain sense of a word before considering the possibility of a figurative usage. Does the context demand a figurative meaning?

3. It is essential that we understand that figurative language yields literal or normal meaning. The human authors of Scripture sometimes use figurative language. When they do, they are communicating literal truth.

**F**igurative language yields literal or normal meaning. Figures are intended to convey literal meaning.

4. Biblical authors use figurative language to add power, beauty and vividness to their communication. Doing so also helps readers remember the author's teaching. In Psalm 18:2, David calls God his "rock," "fortress," "refuge," "shield" and "stronghold." This beautifully describes God's strong and unending protection. Moses makes a similar point in Deuteronomy 33:27 when he described God as "your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." What a beautiful and graphic way of stating that God will take care of His children.

## B. Figures Emphasizing Comparison

### 1. Definitions

- a. Simile. A simile is an expressed or formal comparison using words such as "like" or "as." "Is not my word like a hammer" (Jer 23:29)? "As the deer pants for the streams of water, so pants my soul for you, O God" (Ps 42:1). "All flesh are like grass" (1 Pet 1:24).
- b. Metaphor. A metaphor is an unexpressed or implied comparison describing one thing in terms of something else. "Who is a rock, except our God" (Ps 18:31). "All flesh is grass" (Is 40:6 ). "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps 23:1). The disciples are a "little flock" (Lk 12:32 ). Jesus is "the door" (John 10:9).

### 2. Hermeneutical Principles

Always look for the single, author intended meaning in the comparison, chiefly by noting context. The meaning may involve more than one factor or comparison, but must always be textually based. The meaning must be based on the actual words of the text. For example, the phrase "like a tree" in Psalm 1:3 is explained in the rest of the verse "that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." One should not press every detail about a tree onto the believer's life. A tree has limbs, bark, and sap. Does the figure of speech in the Psalm extend to these things? (The limbs are the believer's arms for service; the bark is similar to the shield of faith in Ephesians 6 and the sap is the Holy

Spirit within giving us spiritual strength.) The author of Psalm 1 does not extend the figure of speech to those things and we are guilty of false teaching if we do.

**T**he meaning of similes and metaphors is based on the actual words of the text. If we extend our interpretation and application beyond the actual words of the text, we cease preaching God's Word.

## C. Figures Involving Association or Substitution

### 1. Definitions

- a. Metonymy is the substitution of one word or thing for another, usually because of a close mental association. One very clear illustration of this type of figurative speech is the use of the word "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" to refer to Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:27-30).
- b. Synecdoche is the substitution of a part for the whole or the whole for the part, usually because of the natures of the things associated. Micah 4:3 and Isaiah 2:4 use the phrase "beating swords into plowshares" to refer to total disarmament and the end of war.
- c. Merism is the substitution of two contrasting or opposite parts to reference the whole. The words "sit down" and "rise up" in Psalm 139:2 refer to David's daily activity. In Romans 1:14-16, Paul divides the peoples of the world into three categories using three merisms (opposites that denote the whole). "Greeks and barbarians" refer to cultured and uncultured people. "The wise and to the foolish" refer to educated and uneducated people. "The Jew first and also the Greek" refer to people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Paul uses these three merisms to graphically speak of all the peoples of the world regardless of their social, economic, racial or religious situation.
- d. Hendiadys is the use of two coordinate terms to communicate

a single idea. “Ministry and apostleship” in Acts 1:25 means apostolic ministry. “Sacrifice and service of your faith” in Philippians 2:17 means sacrificial service.

#### Special Figures Regarding God

- e. Anthropomorphism is attributing human bodily parts to God. “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth” (2 Chron 16:9). The heavens are the work of God’s fingers (Ps 8:3). David asked God, “incline your ear to me” (Ps 31:2 ).
- f. Anthropopathism is attributing human emotions to God. God is said to be jealous (Zech 8:2) and to laugh (Ps 2:4).
- g. Zoomorphism is attributing animal parts and characteristics to God. In Psalm 91:4, God is described as having wings and feathers.

#### D. Figures Involving a Personal Dimension

##### 1. Definitions

- a. Personification is the ascribing of human characteristics or actions to inanimate objects, ideas or animals. According to Psalm 114:3, “The sea looked and fled.” Numbers 16:34 states that, “The earth opened her mouth and swallowed Korah.” According to Isaiah 35:1, “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice”
- b. Apostrophe is addressing a non-personal item as a person. Psalm 114:5-6 asks, “What ails you, O sea?” In Jeremiah 47:6, the “sword of the Lord” is addressed directly.

#### E. Other Figures

- 1. Figures Involving Omission: Ellipsis is an omission of a word or words that must be supplied to complete the sentence. “The twelve” in 1 Corinthians 15:5 refers to the twelve apostles.

2. Figures Involving Overstatement: Hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration in order to add emphasis. “The cities are great and fortified up to heaven” (Deut 1:28).
  3. Figures Involving Understatement: Litotes is an understatement or negative statement that affirms something. “Paul replied, ‘I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city.’” (Acts 21:3). The words “no obscure city” are an understatement that actually mean that Tarsus was a significant city.
  4. Figures Involving Reversal of Meaning: Irony is a kind of ridicule expressed indirectly in the form of a compliment. “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!” (1 Cor 4:8). “For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!” (2 Cor 11:19).
  5. Figures Involving Interrogation: A Rhetorical Question is a question that doesn’t seek a verbal response, but instead states truth. “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen 18:14). “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
- F. One governing hermeneutical principle must be observed when interpreting figurative language: look for the meaning intended by the association. Each of these figures of speech have literal meaning. Ask, “How is the human author using this figure of speech? What truth is he trying to communicate through this figure of speech?”

**H**ow is the human author using this figure of speech? What truth is he trying to communicate through this figure of speech?

## II. Types and Symbols

- A. Type. A type is a historical (basically Old Testament) person, event, or thing that anticipates and foreshadows a future (basically New Testament) person, event, or thing. It is a God-ordained, author-intended, textually-understood correspondence between persons, events, or institutions. A type carries an image of its corresponding fulfillment and is always future in fulfillment. It is prefigurative and inherently prophetic. The antitype is

always superior to the type.

1. The main ingredients of a biblical type:
  - a. A genuine resemblance between the type and the antitype (the fulfillment) is evident. The resemblance is not necessarily just in looks or outward features but in substance and function.
  - b. The resemblance is intended by God.
  - c. Biblical evidence demonstrates that a typical relationship exists. Certain resemblances may be used as illustrations and analogies but they do not thereby constitute true biblical types.

Roy Zuck explains that there are six ingredients of a type: 1. The type and antitype must have a natural correspondence or resemblance. 2. The type must have a historical reality (the antitype depends on the literal meaning). 3. The type must prefigure or foreshadow the antitype. In other words, it looks ahead. 4. The type is “fulfilled” or “completed” by the antitype. The antitype is greater than and superior to the type. 5. The type must be divinely designed. 6. The type and antitype must be designated as such in the New Testament (p. 178).

The main classifications of types are persons (Melchizedek—Heb 7; Jonah—Matt 12:40); events (wilderness sojourn—1 Cor 10:1-11); institutions (Passover—1 Cor 5:7; lamb—1 Pet 1:19); actions (bronze serpent—John 3:14-15); offices (high priest—Heb 4:14; 9:12; prophet—Deut 18:18).

**A** true type in the Scriptures is a God-ordained, author-intended, textually-understood correspondence between persons, events, or institutions. A type carries an image of its corresponding fulfillment and is always future in fulfillment.

2. The hermeneutical principles that apply to types
  - a. Find the divine intent. How has God communicated the fact

that something is a type of something else? What constitutes “biblical evidence” that a typical relationship exists?

Sometimes the Bible clearly states that something is a type of something else. For example, Romans 5:14 states that Adam was a type of Christ. Other times the Bible uses simile or metaphor to indicate a typological relationship. In 1 Corinthians, Christ is called “our Passover lamb.” The Passover Lamb was a type of Christ. John 3:14 uses metaphoric language to indicate that the serpent “lifted up” in Numbers 21:5-9 was a type of Christ lifted up on the cross. Other times the New Testament makes a clear allusion of a typological relationship. Clearly, Melchizedek was a type of Christ (Heb 6:20-7:17) and the Old Testament sacrifices that burned outside the camp were types of Christ’s suffering (Heb 13:11-12).

NOTE: If evidence of divine intent is lacking, the interpreter may be engaging in a form of allegorism. If the Bible doesn’t indicate that there is a typological relationship, there is none. For instance, even though there are similarities between Joseph and Jesus, and Moses and Jesus, nowhere does the Bible indicate that either is a type of Christ.

**I**f the Bible doesn’t indicate that there is a typological relationship, there is none.

- b. Allow the antitype (the fulfillment) to determine your understanding. A typological relationship is determined by New Testament revelation. This is where the similarities and applications can be discerned. It is highly unlikely that the Old Testament author knew he was recording a type.

**A** typological relationship is determined by NT revelation. This is where the similarities and applications can be discerned.

- c. Find the clear point(s) of correspondence between the type and the antitype. The type and antitype in Romans 5:14 are Adam and Christ (Adam was a type of Christ in his headship

of the human race). The type and antitype in John 3:14-16 is the serpent in the wilderness and Jesus. Both are objects of faith which would bring life.

- d. Be aware of dispensational and other theological factors. For instance, if the church is a “mystery,” (not revealed in the Old Testament but disclosed to Paul—Eph 3:2-9), then there are no true types of the church in the Old Testament. Yet many falsely claim to find them. For example:
  - (1) The two loaves of the Feast of Pentecost are said to typify Jews and Gentiles in the church.
  - (2) Noah and his family in the ark before the flood is held by some to be a type of the pretribulation rapture of the church.
  - (3) Abraham’s servant finding a bride for Isaac is said to be a type of the Holy Spirit seeking and saving believers for the church, the bride of Christ.

**B**ecause the church was a mystery in the OT, nothing in the OT corresponds to it. There are no types of the church in the OT.

- B. Symbol and Symbolic Act. A symbol is an object or some kind of action that conveys a teaching. It is basically illustrative and may represent something past, present, or future. It does not necessarily resemble the thing represented (it need not be similar, but may be so). The meaning is not in an inherent correspondence but must be assigned to the symbol. For example, water baptism resembles its teaching. It signifies the fact that at salvation the believer being baptized was immersed into Christ and shares His resurrection life (Rom 6:3-8). The bread and the cup symbolize the substitutionary death of Christ. Partaking in them memorializes the fact that the believer has partaken of Christ, has close fellowship with Him and should follow His Lord by living a holy life (1 Cor 11:23-30).
  - 1. There are three hermeneutical principles that govern the interpretation of symbols and symbolic acts.
    - a. Note the historical and literary contexts. If the purpose of the symbol can be discerned from its setting, the point will

usually be clear. Ezekiel 37:1-14 (the valley of the dry bones) deals with Israel's captivity and dispersion. The symbol speaks of Israel's regeneration and regathering in the end times. It does not teach a second blessing or an experience of sanctification after salvation. The institution of the Lord's Supper had an historical context. It was instituted on the night of Christ's betrayal and on the threshold of His death (Matt 26:26-28). The correspondence (symbolism) between the bread and cup and Jesus' substitutionary death is clear.

- b. Find the point(s) of teaching between the symbol and what is represented. The bread and the cup in Matthew 26:26-28 for example, are the symbols and Christ's death is what they represent.
- c. Compare with similar or the same symbols in Scripture. Leaven usually connotes something negative when used as a symbol. The number seven often seems to indicate completion or perfection when used symbolically.

### III. Parable and Allegory: Extended Comparisons

- A. Parable: A parable is an extended simile where the story and its application are usually kept separate. It is a true-to-life, but fictional, story that teaches or illustrates a particular truth. Note five hermeneutical principles that apply to parables.
  - 1. Parables have one central point or teaching. Parables teach one central point (though they often consist of subordinate points that contribute to the central point). Jesus' parables for instance have simple plots that focus on one main point. Note the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:1-9. This parable illustrates the responses to the preaching of the Word during the absence of the King and the postponement/delay of the kingdom. Other secondary ideas are also here, such as Satan hindering the Word and the lack of perseverance as an evidence of an unregenerate heart.

**W**hat is the central point of the parable and how do the subordinate points support that central point?

2. Don't expect every detail of the parable to convey spiritual truth. Details of a parable have significance only in relation to the central point and those that don't relate to the central point should not be considered. The phraseology "yielded a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" in Matthew 13:8, for instance, is not stressing the difference in fruitbearing. What is important is the positive response to the Word, represented by the good soil. The fruitbearing is evidence of a positive, believing response to the Word. Note also the phrase "while men were sleeping" in Matthew 13:25. There is nothing significant about the men sleeping. It happens routinely. Night is usually when an enemy would do this kind of thing. "While men were sleeping" simply means "at nighttime." No blame is attached to sleeping.

**P**arables have one central point or teaching and its details are significant only in relation to that central point.

3. Doctrine should not be based primarily on parables. Parables may support or illustrate doctrinal truths expounded in other texts. However, they are not designed to establish doctrinal truth.

**W**hat biblical doctrine or teaching does the parable support or illustrate?

4. Note the historical and literary context of the parable. The parable's context usually indicates its main thrust. The setting of the parable includes the original audience. A parable's setting will normally provide the reason the parable or series of parables was given. For example, the kingdom parables in Matthew 13 came right after the incident of the unpardonable sin, about 1 ½ years before the cross. Before this time, Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom. From this time forward, He uses parables to instruct His disciples about the mysteries of the future Kingdom.

**W**hat is the problem, question or situation that prompted the parable?

5. Relate the Gospel parables to Jesus's kingdom teaching. Every one of Jesus' 35 parables refers in some way to the kingdom of God. Most of Jesus' parables were addressed to the crowds and/or the unsaved religious leaders of Israel. According to Matthew 13:10-13, Jesus' parabolic method of teaching had a two-fold purpose: to reveal truth to His followers and to conceal truth from hardened unbelievers. The incident of the unpardonable sin caused a switch to the parabolic method, provoking the question in 13:10. It is important to remember that the parables describe the future kingdom program, not life in the church age. The fate of the kingdom, not its form, is uppermost in the parables. They were designed chiefly to explain some facet of the kingdom program, usually pertaining to the kingdom's postponement and the prevailing conditions during the absence of the King.

Jesus taught in parables in order to reveal truth to His followers and to conceal truth from hardened unbelievers.

While describing the content of Jesus' parables, Zuck divides them under seven headings (p. 209):

- a. Progress in the kingdom
- b. Conflict between Jesus' concept of the kingdom and that of the Pharisees
- c. Grace and sinners in the kingdom
- d. Characteristics of those in the kingdom
- e. Rejection of the King and His kingdom
- f. Judgment of those who reject the King and/or reward for those who accept Him
- g. Alertness at, and preparedness for, the King's coming

It is important to remember that Jesus' parables refer in some way to the kingdom of God, not to life in the church age.

- B. Allegory: An allegory is a narrative or word picture that points symbolically to spiritual truth. It is designed to teach spiritual truth by comparison. Approach them with three hermeneutical principles in mind.

1. Note the historical setting and literary context of the allegory. When studying the allegory found in Isaiah 5:1-6 for instance, remember that this is part of the introduction to the Book of Isaiah. It is part of an indictment of the nation for its sin (beginning chapter 1).
2. Find the points of comparison. From the context of Isaiah 5:1-6, it is clear that Israel is the vineyard. The wild grapes are evidences of her rebellious and unregenerate heart, and her neglect and destruction are part of God's judgement. The interpretation of allegorical passages is always bound to the words of the biblical text. The allegory's context will inform its interpretation.

**T**he interpretation of allegorical passages is always bound to the words of the biblical text. The allegory's context will inform its interpretation.

3. Remember that the points of comparison in the allegory explain or interpret the passage. In the allegory in John 10:1-16, Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. Although He never clearly states that the sheep are believers, He implies so when He says that they know Him and that "I lay down my life for the sheep" (10:15). He also indicates that the thieves and robbers are false Messiahs when he calls them "all who came before me" (10:8).

**T**he points of comparison in the allegory explain or interpret the passage. Don't attempt to interpret those details that are not explained.

#### IV. Proverbs

##### A. Definition

A proverb is a short, pithy saying that expresses wise, general, practical truth concerning life. A biblical proverb differs from a normal proverb in that its author has been moved by the Holy Spirit to write it, and he views life and its situations through the filter of other biblical revelation (typically the Law of Moses). Therefore, biblical proverbs are not just good advice from another human being. They are inspired, wise and authoritative counsel from the one who created us. Proverbs belong to the genre of wisdom literature which apply divine truth to every day life.

## B. Characteristics of Biblical Proverbs

1. Proverbs are concise, memorable and sometimes even humorous (Prov 26:13-15). Because this is true, proverbs sometimes overstate or oversimplify in order to make the intended point. In a proverb there is no space for a list of all the possible exceptions.
2. Proverbs are simple yet profound. Proverbs 21:2 makes the simple point that in spite of man's self-deception, God has a truly accurate understanding of his heart. This proverb is also quite profound. It states that God knows what is in a man's heart better than the man does (an aspect of God's omniscience). See also: Proverbs 16:1,9; 21:1.
3. Proverbs are specific yet general. For instance, Proverbs 26:27 teaches that a person who lays a trap for another will often fall into it. It also generally testifies to the fact that one reaps what he sows.

## C. Types of Biblical Proverbs

There are two basic types of biblical proverbs: the wisdom sentence and the admonition or instruction. The wisdom sentence is an observation based on experience. A truth is generally stated but it does not necessarily persuade or exhort. There is usually little or no context. Each sentence is its own entity. In Proverbs 16:8-10 for instance, we find three wisdom sentences communicating three different truths. This type of proverb occurs primarily in 10:1-22:16 and chapters 25-29. The admonition is a command which provides reasons or motivations as to why it should be obeyed. The reason or motivation is usually introduced with the words "for" or "because" (note Prov 1:15-16). This type of proverb occurs primarily in chapters 1-9 and 22:17-24:22.

## D. Parallelism Found In Biblical Proverbs

Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism. Parallelism is essentially a repetition of thought in a second line of poetry. There are eight different types of parallelism found in the OT. The book of Proverbs is dominated by three types: that which contrasts, that which compares, and that which restates.

1. Contrastive (or antithetical) proverbs contrast the right way from the wrong way and emphasize the importance of choosing correctly to avoid the fate of the fool (3:33; 10:4; 12:5).
2. Comparison proverbs essentially state that “A is like B.” A comparison is made between two lines in such a way that it forms a simile. Whereas a contrastive proverb often contains the word “but,” the comparative proverb often contains the words “like” or “as” (10:26; 25:25).
3. Synonymous proverbs are those proverbs in which the second line restates, clarifies and strengthens the point of the first line. One basic point is made, yet with more grace and clarity than if only one line had been used (1:8; 16:16; 18:6).
4. Satirical proverbs are memorable and humorous. They grab the reader’s attention and warn against foolishness, immorality and a self-destructive life (14:15; 19:24).
5. Evaluation proverbs challenge the reader to evaluate his life and direction. They point out the folly of wicked living normally using a “this way is better than that way” approach (15:16; 17:12).

#### E. Guidelines For Interpreting Biblical Proverbs

Like the historical books and the prophets, wisdom literature is founded upon, and based upon the teachings of the Mosaic Law. In the historical books, we see how the Law of Moses was obeyed and disobeyed by the people of Israel. We then see God’s blessing and punishment. In the prophets we have record of God’s spokesmen calling Israel back to obedience to the Law of Moses. In wisdom literature we have instruction as to how “wise” or in other words, “lawful” living shows itself in one’s life. A good working definition of the word “wisdom” as it appears in Proverbs and other places is “skill in godly living” or “skill in obedient living.” Wisdom is skill at living the way God has prescribed in His Word.

1. We need to approach proverbs keeping the literary context in mind. First, determine the figurative language. A proverb will often have figurative speech, such as metaphor or simile. Second, note the context of the Proverb if there is one. If a theme is being pursued,

take note of it (adultery, laziness, friendship, etc.). Next, note any parallelism. In addition to context, meaning may be found in the parallelism within the proverb itself. Finally, keep in mind that a proverb usually has a single principle. A proverb usually has one truth to convey. The single point is usually found in its context or parallelism. For instance, Proverbs 31:14 states, “She is like a merchant ship.” The parallel clause explains it, “she brings her food from afar.” This proverb teaches a single point, that a wise woman goes various places to get food; she is a good shopper.

2. We need to use specific hermeneutical principles when interpreting proverbs.
  - a. Because the Proverbs are based upon the Law of Moses, we need to be careful not to apply those parts of the Proverbs that reflect Mosaic teaching. For instance, those Proverbs that promise long life or earthly blessing have to be adjusted for us today. In the Law of Moses, God promised that obedience would bring earthly blessing and disobedience would bring earthly cursing. God has not given us those promises in the New Testament. God will indeed bless obedience and punish disobedience. However, in this dispensation we have no idea whether God will do so in physical or spiritual ways (Prov 3:9-10; 13-17).

**B**ecause the Proverbs are based upon the Law of Moses we need to be careful not to apply those parts of the Proverbs that reflect Mosaic teaching.

- b. Because each Proverb communicates general truth, two things should be remembered.<sup>2</sup> First, they will not cover all the possible exceptions. There are exceptions to each Proverb.

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<sup>2</sup>LET’S LEARN TOGETHER: Note Proverbs 15:1. Is this a legal guarantee from God that a kind answer will always dissuade another person’s anger? If you are in a dispute with an angry person, will a soft tone and kindness on your part guarantee that he won’t scream in return or physically strike you? No, Proverbs are general principles and there are exceptions. What about Proverbs 22:6? Is this a guarantee from God that children who grow up in a strong Christian home will follow the Lord when they become adults?

Second, they are not legal guarantees from God. The Proverbs are poetic guidelines for wise behavior. They are general principles of Godly living, not guarantees from God. Many misinterpretations occur because this is not understood.

**P**roverbs will not cover all the possible exceptions and they are not legal guarantees from God.

- c. Keep in mind that as general principles of life, the Proverbs will have to be “translated” into your cultural equivalent before you apply them to your life. Because our historical situation is quite different from that of the original readers of Proverbs, at times we need to “translate” given proverbs in order to appreciate and accurately apply them. Proverbs 22:11 states, “He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend.” Most Christians today do not live in a society where kings reside. How, then, does this Proverb apply to us? We need to understand that the general truth of this Proverb applies in every culture. The application for us would be something like, “the man who loves with a pure heart and has gracious speech will make a positive impression on those in leadership or authority.”

**B**ecause proverbs are general principles of life, they need to be “translated” into your cultural equivalent before you apply them.

- d. As in the case of every Bible passage, the Proverbs should be interpreted in light of their immediate context (when there is a context). Many of the Proverbs have no context. They are simply independent statements of general truth.
- e. As in the case of every Bible passage, the Proverbs must be interpreted in light of clear Bible doctrine. If your understanding of a Proverb contradicts clear Bible doctrine, you know you are interpreting that Proverb incorrectly.

If your understanding of a Proverb contradicts clear Bible doctrine, you are misinterpreting that Proverb.

## V. Parallelism

### A. The Bible's Use of Parallelism

Parallelism belongs to the genre of Hebrew poetry. We've already noted this genre in our discussion of Proverbs. In such poetry there is balance of thought in logical rhythm that gives meaning. The author will follow one statement with another idea that is in some way parallel to the first. Parallelism refers to the correspondence that occurs between the phrases of a poetic line.

### B. The Basic Forms of Parallelism

There are three primary categories of parallelism. Synonymous parallelism occurs when the second line says essentially the same as the first (Ps 103:10). Antithetic parallelism occurs when the second line contrasts with the first (Ps 37:21). The word "but" usually characterizes this type of expression. Synthetic parallelism occurs when the second line furthers, expands upon or completes the first (Ps 14:2).

## VI. Narrative

The Bible has more narrative than any other type of literature. Over 40% of the Old Testament is narrative. Some books are completely narrative. And some prophetic books have a narrative approach.

### A. What Biblical Narratives Are Not

1. Biblical narratives are not just human interest stories. The biblical stories were authored by God. God uses biblical narratives to reveal Himself and His truth to us. They are about God and what He did. In the last analysis, God is the hero of all the stories. Biblical narratives have a theological purpose. They show how God worked out His plan in human history. Generally, in the OT and Gospels, this plan concerns Israel. In the New Testament (Acts and Epistles especially), it concerns the church.

**B**iblical narratives are about God and what He did. He is the hero of all the stories. They have a theological purpose. They are the outworking of God's decreed plan. We cannot treat them simply as stories of men.

2. Biblical narratives are not allegories full of hidden meaning. They are historical accounts that focus on the pervasive presence of God in all things and in every moment of history. It may not always be apparent to the reader how God is working. However, the ultimate purpose of every narrative is to lift God up and further His perfect purposes.

**B**iblical narratives are not allegories full of hidden meaning. They are historical accounts that focus on the pervasive presence of God in all things and in every moment of history.

3. Biblical narratives are not usually directly doctrinal or didactic. Narrative most often illustrates or demonstrates truth or doctrine taught directly elsewhere. Biblical stories are not doctrinal treatises. They generally teach by implication. For example, the reader is left to imply from the David and Bathsheba narrative some of the causes and effects of adultery and deceit. The story illustrates and emphasizes the implications of the sixth commandment (murder), the seventh (adultery), the ninth (false witness), and the tenth (covetousness), among other things.

**B**iblical narratives are not usually directly doctrinal. They illustrate or demonstrate truth or doctrine taught directly elsewhere.

4. Biblical narratives are not self-contained stories, each having a moral all its own. Bible stories should never be torn away from the bigger biblical picture. The moral or teaching of a story comes from the larger context of biblical truth possessed by the readers. A dramatic retelling of a narrative with an application added on the end as some sort of moral to the story is not what God and the human author intended in the story (this is called moralism and should be avoided).

The moral or teaching of a story comes from the larger context of biblical truth possessed by the readers.

B. How Biblical Narratives Should Be Interpreted: Finding Principles

In his book, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, Henry Virkler states, “Principalizing is an attempt to discover . . . the spiritual, moral or theological principles that have relevance” for believers today (p. 212).

1. The application or principle must be consistent with authorial intent. This means that the principle must be textually based. It must be found in the words of the author to his original audience. What did the story/words mean to the author’s original audience? The purpose of good exegesis is to answer that question. A good application of faulty exegesis can be worse than no application at all.
2. The application or principle must be consistent with the author’s purpose in writing and the context of the narrative.<sup>3</sup> This has to do

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<sup>3</sup>LET’S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the story of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17. What is the application of this narrative? Is it teaching that when you are in battle you should use light weight weaponry and know your enemy’s weak spots? Is it teaching that David chose 5 stones instead of Saul’s armor and that those stones parallel our spiritual gifts for ministry? (We too must use our own spiritual gifts in the Lord’s work, not someone else’s gifts). Is it teaching that David is a type of Christ, who was victorious over Goliath, a type of Satan?

The purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel is to show the sovereignty of God and His grace toward Israel in establishing the monarchy through the divinely chosen line of David. Note the progression:

Genesis-Deuteronomy: The history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and how the tribes settled in Egypt and left again.

Joshua-Judges: The history of how the tribes entered Canaan, conquered it, and settled there.

Samuel-Kings: The history of the monarchical form of the theocracy until its collapse.

1 and 2 Samuel show the transition from the Period of the Judges to a monarchy, but more especially to the kingship of David and his line via the Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, fulfilling Hannah’s prayer (1 Sam 2:10; Deut 28:36). David is the only real king in Samuel; Saul is sort of an interim figure as far as the purpose of the author is concerned (chosen by the people with

with the book and section contexts. The question here is, “What was expected of the original audience?” That is, what in general were the first readers/hearers to understand and apply from the book as a whole or this section of the book?

**T**he application or principles found in biblical narratives must be consistent with the author’s intent and purpose in writing.

3. The application or principle can be identified from the applicable aspects of the narrative.<sup>4</sup> “Principles” are actually transfers from the historical situation in the narrative to the present. There is a parallel between the situation then and our situation today. We must take into consideration the whole story and identify its main elements.
4. The application or principle must be taught elsewhere in Scripture. A narrative should not serve as the sole basis of a teaching or doctrine. This is true because narratives are not usually directly doctrinal or didactic. For instance, the Samson narrative (Judges 13-16) cannot be used to teach that a sinful life is excusable as long as one commits great acts of service in the Lord’s name.

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sinful motives—1 Sam 8:5-22). 1 Samuel 16 through 2 Samuel 1 shows how God was grooming David to be king in the place of Saul who had no loyalty to God or the Covenant. The Goliath incident showed David’s great faith and Saul’s utter lack of it. It also shows how this contributed to David’s popularity and demonstrated that he had the “theocratic anointing” which Saul had forfeited because of unbelief and disobedience (1 Sam 16:13-14).

<sup>4</sup>LET’S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the moving of the Ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6:1-11. What are the prominent features of the narrative—the new cart, the songs sung, the instruments played, the stumbling oxen? The thrust of the story is the judgment of God on Uzzah for holding the ark to keep it from falling off the cart. Why the drastic judgment from God? David had failed to follow God’s instructions in the Mosaic Law for transporting the ark (Ex 25:14; Num 4:14, 15; 7:9). The priests were to put poles through the loops on the sides of the ark, not put the ark on a cart. This failure reflected the nation’s attitude toward sacred things since the days of the apostasy of Eli and his wicked sons (1 Sam 2:12-36). The ark had become nothing more than an idol under Eli’s administration. The Jews understood it the same way the Philistines did and therefore transported it the same way they did (1 Sam 4:1-7:2). The drastic judgment on Uzzah was God’s commentary on this unspiritual and unbiblical attitude that had gone on for over 60 years. The law had generally been disregarded since the days of Eli, and the Uzzah incident was symptomatic of it.

5. The application or principle must not contradict other Scripture. This is the analogy of faith principle of hermeneutics. The narrative principle must be consistent with the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>
6. The application or principle may be normative or non-normative.<sup>6</sup> It is not always stated if the activity in a story is good or bad, right or wrong, or whether a lesson or principle is always binding or not. Sometimes the narrative simply states what happened (it's descriptive), not necessarily what should have happened. In light of

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<sup>5</sup>LET'S LEARN TOGETHER: Note David's plea in Psalm 51:11. Does this text teach that a true believer can lose his salvation? According to 1 Samuel 16:13-14, David saw God take the theocratic anointing from Saul and give it to him. He then saw the Lord send upon Saul a spirit of calamity (in judgement). This anointing of the Spirit initially came upon Saul to enable him to rule God's kingdom. It was not the indwelling ministry of the Spirit to believers. In Psalm 51, David was begging God not to do to him what He had done to Saul, "Please don't take from me the Spirit's enabling ministry or the throne of Israel."

<sup>6</sup>LET'S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the story of Gideon's fleece in Judges 6:36-40. We are not told directly if the practice of putting out the fleece is good or bad in this narrative. In fact, it is difficult to determine what the intent of the author is in this incident. But the narrative does not serve as a norm for finding the will of God for one's life today because that was not the point of the incident in the first place. Gideon already knew what God's will was for him (6:14). The fleece episode could legitimately be interpreted as an evidence of Gideon's doubt and basic unbelief in asking for a sign at all. God had already granted him one miraculous sign (6:17, 21). It would appear to have been wrong for him to ask for a second sign, and certainly wrong for him to ask for a second fleece sign, in effect a third miraculous sign (6:39). Perhaps we can at least say that God condescended to Gideon's weak and immature faith and gave him some reassurance of His presence.

Consider also the dispute of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41. This could be understood in a positive light instead of the usual negative way. This was an honest disagreement that resulted in two missionary parties, more souls saved, and more churches started. The narrative doesn't say that sin occurred (carnality or petty selfishness).

Also consider the impact that Acts 2:41-42 may have on church polity. Does this early church pattern indicate something to us about how people join churches today? Should church membership work this way: first regeneration, then baptism, then church membership and then the Lord's Supper can be taken? Acts is of such a crucial and foundational nature for the church that some of its narratives may have doctrinal and practical value for us today. The primary questions are: what is the author's intent and is it in agreement with other Scriptures?

this, don't assume that commands and promises given to some of God's people necessarily apply to you. Remember to consider the author's intent and dispensational factors.

**D**on't assume that commands and promises given to some of God's people necessarily apply to you. Remember to consider the author's intent and dispensational factors.

### C. Cautions in Interpreting Narratives

1. Allegorism. Allegorizing is when one searches for hidden or secret meanings that are not clear from a normal reading of the text. Those who adopt this approach understand the literal meaning as superficial and the allegorical meaning as the true, God-intended, meaning.<sup>7</sup>

There are allegories in Scripture but the narratives are not allegories, and when the Bible contains allegory the authors inform us (Gal 4:24-26) or identify the points of comparison (see previous discussion of John 10:1-16). Narrative and allegory are two different genres. The "allegorization" of narrative is an ancient practice but it violates biblical hermeneutics. The temptation today is to find a deeper spiritual truth or a principle for daily Christian living in the details of a biblical story. We must resist that temptation.

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<sup>7</sup>LET'S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16. Some have allegorized this passage by assigning specific spiritual meanings to each of Samson's locks of hair. They teach that Samson's compromise and loss of spiritual power is similar to the sins that some fall into today. The first lock symbolizes Samson's love for God. The second lock, his sanctification; the third his rejection of God's truth; the fourth, his separation from the ungodly, and so on. Does the text tell us that it should be interpreted allegorically? Is there any indication from the text that the author meant the locks of hair to represent spiritual truths? Does the Bible teach that anywhere? Would the original readers have understood the text this way? This is a narrative passage. Was it designed by the author to describe or prescribe? If a pastor preaches this text in this way, whose message is being preached, God's or his? Whose message is not being preached? What did the locks of hair signify?

**A**llegorizing is when one searches for hidden or secret meanings that are not clear from a normal reading of the text. Unless the human author so informs us, the text should not be interpreted allegorically.

2. Decontextualization. Decontextualization is the practice that concentrates on a small unit of a story, or lifts a story out of the author's flow of thought. It tends to ignore the historical and literary contexts. This is a common practice of some pastors and preachers and results in the misinterpretation and misapplication of the text. When this is done man's words are heard and God's words are not!
3. Selectivity. Selectivity is when one chooses specific words or phrases in a narrative and invests them with special meaning. That meaning fits a present day situation and promotes the speaker's agenda. The interpretation and preaching of biblical narrative tends to run in extremes.
  - a. Some see too little in narrative passages because they are overcautious. Rather than risk a mistake in interpretation, they avoid narrative altogether and simply stick to the didactic portions of Scripture.
  - b. Some see too much in narrative passages. They may want the whole Bible to speak directly to individual lives today. They may be desperate for ready-made answers. They may be impatient and want a "blessing" from every Scripture immediately. Or, they simply don't know how to handle biblical narratives.

## VII. Prophecy

### A. General Principles of Interpretation

1. Follow the normal or plain sense meaning of the passage. Follow the normal rules of human language and sentence structure. Interpret the words of the prophets in their literal and historic sense unless the context clearly indicates a figurative or symbolic meaning. In light of this principle, remember that the term "Israel" always has racial

and ethnic overtones as well as political factors. “Israel” always refers to ethnic Israel, never to the Church as covenant theologians teach. These overtones and factors do not change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The terms “Israel” and “church” are not interchangeable terms. They do not refer to the same entities. They refer to two different entities (1 Cor 10:32).

**I**nterpret the words of the prophets in their literal and historic sense unless the context clearly indicates a figurative or symbolic meaning.

**R**emember that the terms “Israel” and “church” are not interchangeable. They do not refer to the same entities. They refer to two different entities.

2. Discern any figurative language. The principles for handling figurative language apply. Remember that figurative language always conveys literal or normal meaning. Figurative and symbolic language are used extensively in prophetic literature, but that doesn’t mean that every element of such passages is figurative or symbolic. For instance, the animals in the kingdom prophecy of Isaiah 11:4-9, speak of literal animals. When speaking of the Millennium, Isaiah wrote that many people will live well beyond 100 years of age and build houses and vineyards (Is 65:20-21). There is no reason why this shouldn’t be taken literally.

**R**emember that not every element of a prophetic passage is figurative or symbolic and that figurative language always conveys literal or normal meaning.

3. Understand the historical-cultural setting of the prophecy. Many times historical situations and geography gave rise to prophecies. For instance, the rebuilding of the Second Temple by Zerubbabel gave rise to the prophecies of the Millennial Temple by Haggai in Haggai 2. The locust plague described in Joel 1 moves into or takes on the eschatological context of the Day of the Lord in Joel 2. Paul wrote the prophecy of the Rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, in order to encourage believers who wondered about their

deceased loved ones.

4. Note literary context. The literary context will usually indicate if the fulfillment will be in the eschaton or in the time of the author. The authors sometimes use specific phrases to signal that they are speaking prophetically. Examples are phrases like: “Day of the Lord,” “in that day,” “at that time,” “the latter days,” and “the time of the end.” Note that the prophecy in Daniel 11 sweeps from the intertestamental period to the Great Tribulation. Daniel 11:2-35 looks forward to the near fulfillment of the Persian Kingdom (530-330 BC) and the reign of Greece through Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BC). The phrases “the time of the end” and “appointed time” in verse 35 and “the time of the end” in verse 40 signal that Daniel’s prophecy has now skipped ahead to the time of the Antichrist.
5. Remember that biblical prophecy focuses primarily on the Messiah and His future/eternal reign. The purpose of prophecy is to testify of Jesus Christ and bring Him glory (Rev 19:10). History is moving forward. It is moving according to God’s sovereign plan which will culminate in the Messiah’s return and eternal reign.
6. Keep in mind that prophecy is always fulfilled literally, never spiritually. Those prophecies that have already been fulfilled have been fulfilled literally (note the prophecies of Jesus’ birth, death and crucifixion). Therefore we know that those prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled will also be fulfilled literally (not figuratively or spiritually).

Unfulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled literally,  
never figuratively or spiritually.

7. Always compare parallel passages. Since all prophecy focuses on the Messiah, prophetic passages will focus on the same truths and will never contradict each other. Revelation 13 should be studied along with Daniel 9 and the closing verses of Joel 2 with Revelation 19. Passages that address the Millennium should be studied together (Is 9; 24; Joel 2; Zech 14; Rev 20:1-0).
8. Look for built-in interpretations of the prophecy. Sometimes

prophetic passages include their own interpretation. Daniel's "head of gold" is Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:36-38). The silver arms and chest represent the Medo-Persian empire which followed the Babylonian empire (vs 39). The bronze represents the next kingdom, Greece (vs 39). The rock cut out of a mountain represents God's kingdom (vs 44-45). The seven stars and seven golden lampstands of Revelation 1:20 are messengers of the churches and the churches of Asia Minor. The golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8). The great dragon is Satan (Rev 12:9).

9. Keep in mind that the prophets often speak of future things in the past tense (Is 53) or in the present tense (Is 9:6). Writing in this fashion communicated certainty. These future events are so certain and so established in the plan of God, that it is as if they have already occurred or are occurring now (in the prophet's day).
10. Remember that literal fulfillment of prophecy takes different forms. One often hears of the "double fulfillment" of prophecy. This is really an extension of the idea of *sensus plenior* in the realm of prophecy. Can prophecy have more than one literal or normal fulfillment? No. But we need to recognize that literal fulfillment takes different forms.
  - a. Sometimes telescopic fulfillment occurs.<sup>8</sup> This refers more to the perspective of the prophet than to the actual fulfillment of the prophecy. This is where "gaps" occur in fulfillment, gaps unforeseen by the prophet. Sometimes this is described as the "mountain peak" nature of the prophet's perspective. For instance, the prophets envisioned the two advents of Christ as two mountain peaks with a valley (of time) in between. Jesus understood the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 in this way when He quoted it in Luke 4:16-21.

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<sup>8</sup>LET'S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the prophecies in Isaiah 9:6-7 and Zechariah 9:9-15. To what are these referring? Isaiah 9:6 prophecies the birth of Christ but the remainder of the text speaks of His kingdom reign. Zechariah 9:9 speaks of Jesus' triumphal entry, but 9:10-15 speaks of a time when the nations are at peace, war ends and Jesus rules the entire earth (the kingdom). The events of these prophecies don't occur at the same time. In each case, the first prophecy was literally fulfilled in the past and the second will be literally fulfilled in the future. The prophets saw these events, not realizing the gap of time between them.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (Is 61:12).

When our Lord read this passage in the synagogue, He left off the words “and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Jesus did not fulfill these words in His first coming, but He will in His second coming when He will judge His enemies and establish His 1000 year kingdom. Isaiah saw Jesus’ two advents in one prophecy not realizing the gap of time between them.

- b. Sometimes prophecies are partially fulfilled. A particular facet of a prophecy may be fulfilled at one point with the remaining aspects to be fulfilled later, perhaps in the eschaton. Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:14-21 probably fall into this category. Luke quoted the entire passage to remind his readers that what was happening had been prophesied. But, even though he quotes the entire passage, it was only partially fulfilled. The Spirit filled the believers enabling them to speak in tongues, fulfilling Joel 2:28-29. But what about the wonders in the heavens, the blood, the columns of smoke, the sun turned to darkness and so on? These events are future (compare these words with Revelation 19).
- c. Sometimes principal fulfillment occurs. For instance, a principle of an Old Testament prophecy may be applied to the church without the church literally fulfilling that prophecy. A good example of this is Isaiah 49:6 fulfilled in Acts 13:46-47. These texts speak of the evangelization of Gentiles. Isaiah 49:6 prophesies that the Gentiles during the Kingdom age will respond to the gospel of the kingdom and be saved. This principle, of the salvation of the Gentiles, was applied by the apostles to first century missionary activity among Gentiles in the church age. The principle of Gentiles hearing and

responding to the good news of Christ is stressed. This does not mean that Isaiah had the church in mind or that the church is the kingdom.

Roy Zuck states that the Old Testament is often cited or referenced in the New Testament to confirm that a New Testament idea is in “agreement” with an Old Testament principle. Sometimes this is done in order to illustrate a point being made in the New Testament (pp. 261-65).

The OT is often cited or referenced in the NT to confirm that a NT idea is in “agreement” with an OT principle or to illustrate a point being made in the NT.

## Dispensationalism: An Aspect of Hermeneutics

No consideration of hermeneutics would be complete without a discussion of dispensationalism. Indeed, a biblical approach to interpreting the Bible can correctly be called “a dispensational hermeneutic.”

### I. Definition of Dispensationalism

The word “dispensation” (*oikonomia*) is biblical. It means “economy” and refers to the management of something. Paul mentions two dispensations and implies a third. In Ephesians 1:10 he speaks of “the dispensation of the fullness of times” referring to the millennial kingdom. Ephesians 3:2 mentions “the dispensation of the grace of God” which refers to the church age. In Colossians 1:25-26 Paul implies a preceding dispensation in which the mystery of Christ in the believer was not known. This was the dispensation of the Law.

Various forms of this word are used 20 times in the New Testament, including the three above. This term speaks stewardship, management or administration. Theologically, the word refers to God’s administration of time. It describes the manner in which God administers His plan for time. The human aspect of the term deals with man’s stewardship responsibilities. Thus, it describes God’s progressive revelation and man’s responsibilities before Him. A dispensation is a stewardship arrangement between God and man based upon progressive revelation. As God reveals more information to man, man’s responsibilities

change.

## II. Things True of a Dispensation/Dispensationalism

- A. A dispensation implies a stewardship responsibility.
- B. A dispensation may end at a certain point.
- C. Future dispensations may be unrevealed to those in previous dispensations. Biblically, a “mystery” is revelation kept in the mind and plan of God and revealed at a later time. The church was a mystery (an unrevealed idea) to the Old Testament saints. They had no idea that an organization composed of both Jews and Gentiles would arise (Rom 16:25-26; Eph 3; Col 1 and 2).
- D. The backbone of dispensationalism is progressive revelation. God’s revelation was not given all at once. It was unfolded or parceled out progressively as God willed and as man was able to receive it (see Heb 1:1). A good example of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Old Testament hints at this truth (Gen 1:26), but only in the New Testament is the doctrine fully revealed. Old Testament believers were strict monotheists who had little or no understanding of the triune nature of God.
- E. Dispensationalism recognizes that some principles from one dispensation continue on to succeeding dispensations. There is both unity (continuing relationships and requirements) and diversity (changes based on new revelation) in the outworking of God’s plan. For example, the requirement of capital punishment for murder was revealed under the dispensation of Civil Government (Gen 9:6), but it continued through the Law and the Church, and will even continue in the Kingdom. A continuing principle may carry on intact (capital punishment) or be adjusted (Sabbath worship adjusted to church worship).
- F. Dispensationalism is a philosophy of history. It seeks to offer a systematic interpretation of history, covering the whole scope of history from beginning to end. The ultimate goal or purpose of history is the glory of God and the establishment of His eternal Kingdom. God glorifies himself through demonstrating that He alone is the sovereign God. The sovereign rule of God is the unifying principle of history in dispensationalism.

### III. Things Not True of Dispensations/Dispensationalism

- A. A dispensation is not primarily a period of time. A dispensation has time elements (start and stop). But the emphasis is not on the time period but on the revelation and responsibilities given during that stewardship arrangement.
- B. Dispensationalism does not teach two (or more) ways of salvation. Dispensationalism argues that throughout the ages men have always been saved by grace through faith. However, Dispensationalists believe that the content of saving faith has changed over time due to the progressive nature of revelation. Old Testament saints trusted in God who revealed Himself to them, made a covenant with them and who would one day send a Messiah. They, however, did not know that the Messiah would be Jesus of Nazareth who would die on a cross. Old Testament saints knew more as God revealed more. For instance, the Prophet Isaiah knew more than Adam, Abraham, Moses or David (Is 53). New Testament saints trust in God who has revealed Himself to them, has made promises to them, and has sent a Messiah to live and die for them. Thus the content of saving faith is different based on how much information God has revealed, but salvation is and has always been by God's grace and faith. Dispensationalists also believe that people of all ages are saved by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection. Old Testament saints were saved on credit based upon what Jesus would do on the cross. They received forgiveness in their day even though the payment would not be made until Jesus died for the sins of the human race.

### IV. The Primary Distinctions of Dispensationalism

- A. Israel is distinct from the church. This is the most basic theological test of whether or not someone is a dispensationalist. The word "Israel" always denotes the ethnic people of Israel, the Jews. The church is not spiritual Israel nor has the church taken Israel's place. God has a future program for the nation of Israel that has yet to be fulfilled. Covenant theologians insist on a singular people of God, all of whom are covered by the so-called covenant of grace. To them, the church inherits (in a spiritual sense) all of the blessings God promised to Abraham and Israel. They see no essential difference between Israel and the church.
- B. Dispensationalists consistently employ a literal interpretation of the Bible.

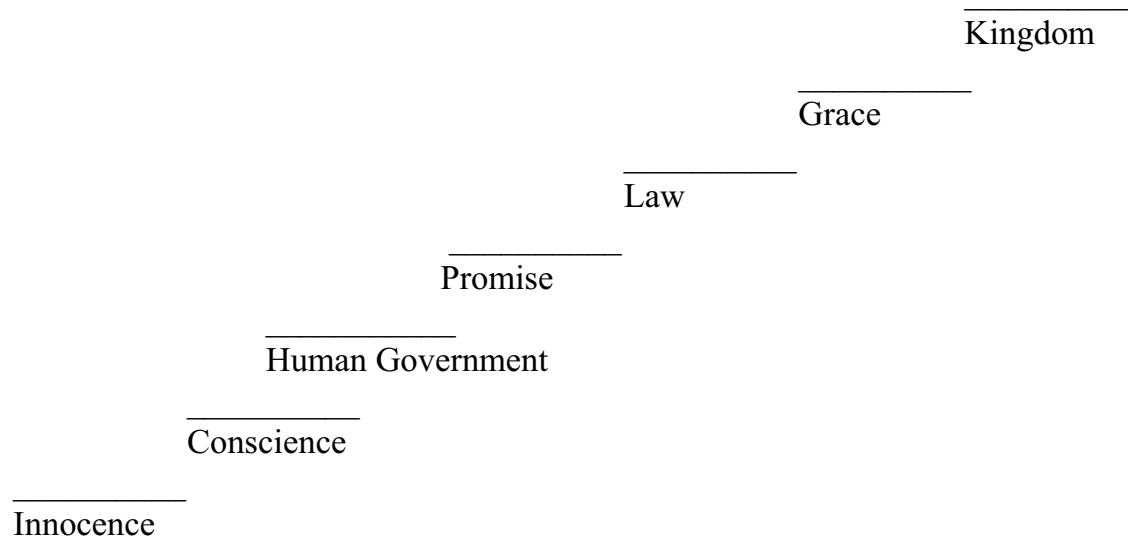
Dispensationalists interpret the Bible based on literal, historical, and grammatical considerations. Other theological systems are sometimes guilty of spiritualizing or allegorizing portions of the Scripture, especially prophecy. For example, covenant theology asserts that the promises God gave to Israel (land, prosperity, a kingdom) are fulfilled by the church today in a spiritual sense.

- C. The underlying purpose of God in the world is His own glory. Every thing and every event in creation will ultimately bring glory to God. This purpose encompasses all events, persons and things. Covenant theology asserts that the ultimate purpose of God is redemption. But there are elements that don't fit into this purpose (the devil, hell, angels, etc.).

## V. The Seven Dispensations: An Overview

1. Innocence-creation to the fall (Gen 1:28-3:6)
2. Conscience-the fall to the flood (Gen 4:1-8:14)
3. Civil government-flood to the call of Abraham (Gen 8:15-11:9)
4. Promise-call of Abram to giving of the Law (Gen 11:10-Ex 18:27)
5. Law-Sinai to the Day of Pentecost (Ex 19:1-Mark 15:37) (1445 BC - AD 33)
6. Grace/Church-Day of Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 2:1-Rev 19:21)
7. The Kingdom of God-Second Coming to Eternal State (Rev 20:1-15)

The dispensations build on one another. Each adds more revelation onto those before it. Sometimes new revelation nullifies what was revealed previously. Sometimes principles from previous dispensations continue in those that follow.



## VI. The Seven Dispensations: A Thorough Consideration

Dispensationalism is a way of organizing biblical history. It is based on a series of stewardship arrangements between God and man. As God gives out revelation, the requirements that God expects change. New information demands a new set of requirements from man. A dispensation focuses on the revelation and the requirements, not on the time period. The following are the seven dispensations that dispensationalists generally recognize.

### A. Innocence: creation to the fall (Gen 1:28-3:6).

This is an arrangement from the time of Adam and Eve's creation until their sin. God dealt with them differently before the Fall than He did after it. The word "innocent" is somewhat misleading, because Adam and Eve were not morally neutral beings. They were created with a positive moral condition, although that state was untested and limited. God gave man this character. Adam did not choose it for himself. This holy disposition was the ruling factor at this time. Adam and Eve had a holy nature but not a holy character because they were untested. It seems that they underwent a probationary testing the result of which would either confirm them in a state of holiness or in a state of sin. Adam's fall confirmed him (and the human race) in sin. How long did this arrangement last? The Bible doesn't say. It was probably not a very long time because God would likely not extend

such a state for too long, and because the biblical record seems to indicate a relatively short period.

1. The revelation/responsibilities:
  - a. Fill the earth (Gen 1:28).
  - b. Subdue the earth (Gen 1:28). “Subdue” means “to subject.” This speaks of the effort needed to discover and use the earth’s treasures for the enrichment of people.
  - c. Rule over creatures (Gen 1:28). Man had a natural command over the animal world and the animals were apparently docile.
  - d. Cultivate the garden (Gen 2:15). God apparently gave man all the knowledge needed to care for the garden.
  - e. Eat a vegetable diet (Gen 1:29-30). God ordained man to eat herbs, nuts, berries, fruits, etc. Man didn’t become a meat-eater until after the flood.
  - f. Abstain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). God had described good and evil to Adam and Eve so they were not intellectually ignorant of it. But they had no experiential knowledge of good or evil. God gave them the opportunity to learn good by obeying, or learn evil by disobeying. Obedience likely would have confirmed and continued their holy character.
2. Results
  - a. Man ate of the forbidden fruit (probably not an apple), thus rebelling against God and learning evil for the first time (Gen 3:14-19).
  - b. God cursed man, woman, the serpent, and the earth. Man died spiritually thus losing the favorable relationship he had with God.
  - c. Sin, death, disease, accidents, etc. entered the world (Rom 5:12). Childbearing became painful for women, and men had to toil to make the ground produce.
3. Continuing Principles:
  - a. Fill the earth and subdue it.
  - b. Eat a vegetable diet.

B. Conscience: the fall to the flood (Gen 4:1-8:14).

This stage could also be called Moral Responsibility. God's rule in this economy was apparently through man's conscience (see Gen 6:3). God said His spirit would not always "strive" with man. The word "strive" means "to rule, to sit in judgment." This indicates that God's rule during this economy was internal, with no apparent external restraints (no law, no police, no prisons, no governors, no state, etc.). This is why Cain was worried someone would kill him (there were no civil authorities to keep him safe).

1. The revelation/responsibilities:

- a. God promised: first, a divinely-placed hatred between the woman and Satan and between the woman's children and Satan's children. Second, He promised the final triumph of the woman's child (Christ) over Satan (Gen 3:15).
- b. The necessity and purpose of blood sacrifice (Gen 4:4-5). God must have communicated some information about how sacrifices rid one of sin and guilt. Adam and Eve learned the theological significance of the death of an innocent animal to satisfy the wrath of the offended God.
- c. Man was responsible to obey the promptings of his conscience, bring an acceptable blood sacrifice before the Lord, and believe the promise of Gen 3:15.

2. Results:

Cain failed to bring the right offering (Gen 4:3, 7). He murdered his brother Abel (4:8). Godless civilization arose (4:17-24), and the earth was filled with wickedness and violence (6:5-11). God sent the flood as judgment.

3. Continuing principles:

- a. Conscience is still operating (Rom 2:14-15).
- b. Blood atonement carried on. Faith was the key, but the animal sacrifice was necessary. Sacrifices offered in faith brought forgiveness.

C. Civil Government: flood to the call of Abraham (Gen 8:15-11:9).

In civil government God introduced external, judicial restraints.

1. Revelation/responsibilities:
    - a. Fear of man placed on animals (Gen 9:2)
    - b. Eating meat was permissible (Gen 9:3-4)
    - c. Institution of capital punishment (Gen 9:6)
    - d. Capital punishment requires a government agency to administer the execution. When God ordained capital punishment, he instituted human government as a further restraint against the lawless rebellion of mankind.
    - e. Promise of no more world-wide floods (Gen 9:8-17)
    - f. Man was to rule for God and believe the Noahic Covenant. He was to protect the sanctity of human life by orderly rule and encourage righteousness to prevail on the earth.
  2. Results:
    - a. Noah became drunk, thus failing to govern (Gen 9:21).
    - b. Man attempted to build a one-world system instead of scattering and ruling for God (Gen 11:1-9).
    - c. God confused the languages at the Tower of Babel which forced men to scatter.
  3. Continuing Principles: Man was responsible to maintain human government, including capital punishment. Man can eat meat.
- D. Promise: call of Abram to giving of the Law (Gen 11:10-Ex 18:27).

The name comes from the promise God gave to Abraham (Heb 6:15; Gal 3:17). From this point on, God is dealing with a specific man and his family rather than humanity as a whole. See Gal 3:15-22 and Heb 6:13-15.

#### 1. Revelation/responsibilities

God instituted the Abrahamic Covenant, which included the promise of a seed (posterity), land with definite boundaries, and personal and universal blessings (Gen 12). Man was responsible to believe the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:6), receive the right of circumcision (Gen 17:10-14, 23), separate from the other nations (Gen 24:44, 27:46, 28:1-4), and remain in the land of promise (Gen 26:1-5).

2. Results:  
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all made sinful choices. The family went to Egypt where the Israelites become apostate (Deut 32:16). Egyptian bondage was the judgment for this failure.
3. Continuing Principles:  
The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant continue and will be fulfilled in the future. Paul states that the giving of the Law did not cancel the promise (Gal 3:17). Abraham did not receive the fulfillment of the promises. Fulfillment is still future.

E. The Mosaic Law: Mt. Sinai to the Day of Pentecost (Ex 19:1-Mark 15:37) (1445 BC – AD 32/33).

The Law of Moses was the governing instrument or constitution of God's Kingdom which was established at Sinai (Ex 19:6). The Law was the way of life for Israel. While the Law could not save in itself, it was God's revelation to Israel. It taught Israel how to live a God-pleasing life. Obedience to the Law did not save but true faith was always expressed in obedience to the Law. Levitical rituals always stood between man and God (1 Sam 26:19).

1. Revelation/responsibilities: The Israelites were expected to keep the Mosaic Code (Lev 18:5). The Law covered every aspect of life: moral, civil, and ceremonial.
2. Results: Israel did not keep the Law. The Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were God's judgment on Israel for disobeying the Law. The temple and the city were destroyed and the Jews dispersed. Eventually, Israel rejected her Messiah and crucified Him.
3. Continuing Principles: Some of the moral principles of the Law continue because they are part of the eternal moral law of God. Those commands that are repeated in the New Testament apply to us today.

Note: The Law of Moses is an indivisible unit. While there are civil, ceremonial, and moral aspects, it is one system (Gal 3:23-25; 5:3; James 2:10). It is illegitimate to enforce any part of the Law in the Age of Grace. New Testament believers are not under the Mosaic

Law (Matt 5:17-18; Rom 6:14-15; 7:1-4; 10:4; 1 Cor 9:20-21; Gal 3:23-25). We are under the jurisdiction of the Law of Christ, the New Testament.

F. Grace (or the Church Age): Day of Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 2:1-Rev 19:21).

The name for this dispensation is taken from John 1:17: “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” and from Eph 3:2: “the stewardship of God’s grace.” The word “grace” literally means “to stoop or bend,” suggesting God’s condescension to man. The dispensation of grace is an economy that is especially characterized by the grace that came with the life and death of Jesus Christ. It does not suggest that there was no grace previously. There are plenty of examples of God’s grace in the Old Testament. Grace is a ruling factor which exercises discipline over the life of the believer in this present age (Titus 2:11-12). The Age of Grace will end with Christ’s Second Coming.

1. Revelation/responsibilities:

- a. The new revelation consists of the new provisions and commands that resulted from the life and death of Jesus. All “church truth” applies to those living in this dispensation. God is no longer dealing exclusively with the Jews. He is dealing with all mankind. The church is to maintain a pure membership, discipline unruly members, prevent false teaching, and contend for the true Christian faith.
- b. Receive the gift of eternal life by putting faith in Jesus (Acts 16:31). Upon salvation, one is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the universal church, the body of Christ.
- c. Become aligned with a local church (Acts 2:41-2; Heb 10:24-25). This includes being obedient in baptism, partaking of the Lord’s supper and faithfully attending services.
- d. Propagate the Gospel around the world (Matt 28:18-29).

2. Results:

The church is assured of final success (Matt 16:18) but the majority of people reject Christ. This leads to great apostasy. God ends this dispensation by the tribulation judgment.

3. Continuing Principles:  
The preaching of the Gospel message will extend into the Kingdom and men will be redeemed through that message. Note that church life and ministry will cease at the rapture.

G. The Kingdom: Second Coming to Eternal State (Rev 20:1-15).

This dispensation is called “The Kingdom” because Christ will rule the earth as its King. He will sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem for 1,000 literal years. Satan will be bound, righteousness will prevail, and disobedience will be punished quickly. God will finally fulfill all the promises He made to Abraham. Society will be characterized by peace, prosperity, and justice. Christ will continue reigning after the Millennium in the eternal state (sometimes called “the Eternal Kingdom”).

1. Revelation/responsibilities:
  - a. New revelation will come from Christ as He reigns as king. Old Testament prophecy concerning the Millennium will also be fulfilled/applied (Isa 2:3; Joel 2:28; Jer 31:31-34).
  - b. Man will be responsible to obey God. He will receive the blessings of the New Covenant. These responsibilities are for those still living natural lives on the earth during the Millennium. Glorified saints will also be on earth during this stage, but they won’t share these responsibilities.
2. Results:  
At the end of the Millennium, a great multitude will rebel against the King (Rev 20:8). God will destroy the rebels and shortly thereafter end earth history. The Eternal State will then arrive, probably maintaining some of the millennial conditions.

An explanation of the the three millennial views. The word “millennium” is derived from the Latin word for “thousand.” The Greek word is chiliasm, and millennialists are sometimes called chiliasts.

- a. Premillennialism: Christ will return and establish a 1,000-year reign on earth. This view was popular in the early church but fell from favor in medieval times. It was revived in the seventeenth century. Dispensationalists are usually premillennial. This view is characterized by a literal

interpretation of Scripture. It teaches that the Kingdom is a literal fulfillment of Old Testament kingdom prophecies. It lasts for 1000 years and will usher in Christ's Eternal Kingdom (heaven).

- b. Postmillennialism: Christ will return after the church brings in the Millennial Kingdom. The millennium is not a thousand-year period of time. The one-thousand years are interpreted figuratively. According to this view, this present age will gradually give way to the Millennium as Christians preach the gospel, and sinners are converted. Christ will return at the conclusion of the Millennium. At Christ's Second Coming the dead will be resurrected and the last judgment will occur.
- c. Amillennialism: no literal millennial reign will take place. All millennial promises are interpreted figuratively as describing the success of the church. The kingdom is now present as Christ reigns as head of the church. Christ will return to establish the eternal state, not an earthly kingdom.

## VII. Hermeneutical Principles in Light of an Understanding of Dispensationalism

### A. Things to Remember

1. The Old Testament is the foundation of New Testament.<sup>9</sup> The Old

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<sup>9</sup>LET'S LEARN TOGETHER: Note the offer of the kingdom by John the Baptist and Jesus in the gospels (Matt 3:1-2; 4:17-23; Mark 1:15; Lk 4:42). What kingdom is this? Note 1 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14; 1 Kings 2:12; 3:6; 8:20 and Luke 1:32-33. Does this kingdom exist today? Note Acts 1:6-8.

The OT defines the Davidic Kingdom as an eternal kingdom that involves a literal king exercising actual reign over a literal realm (people and a physical kingdom). No OT text defines or describes the Davidic Kingdom as something figurative or spiritual. Jesus began His public ministry by announcing Himself as Israel's king in the line of David. Nowhere did He or John the Baptist redefine the OT concept of the Kingdom. Even after the Jews rejected Jesus as their King, the kingdom was not redefined. In fact, in Acts 1:6 the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" This was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to redefine the OT concept of the Kingdom, but He did not. Instead, He spoke of it as something future and commanded them to focus on their evangelistic responsibilities (Acts 1:7-8). Clearly we are not in the Kingdom today and Kingdom truth does not apply to us.

Testament informs our understanding of the New Testament. This is clear from a study of the book of Hebrews. One cannot understand Hebrews without an understanding of Old Testament truth. Therefore, we don't reinterpret the Old Testament based upon New Testament truth. We interpret the New Testament based upon Old Testament truth. When a concept is introduced in one dispensation we allow that information to inform our understanding of that concept in future dispensations unless biblical writers redefine that concept.

The OT is the foundation of the NT. The OT informs our understanding of the NT. Therefore, we don't reinterpret the OT based upon NT truth. We interpret the NT based upon OT truth.

2. The last two dispensations have short transitional periods between them. During the days of the early church (recorded in the book of Acts) there was a transition from the Dispensation of Law to the Dispensation of Grace (or the Church). The Great Tribulation will be the transition from the Dispensation of Grace to the Dispensation of the Kingdom.

## The Pastoral Use of Hermeneutics

We will end this material by summarizing what we've learned and outlining the study/interpretation process for preaching and teaching. There are four phases for preparation for preaching and teaching. We will consider the first two phases.

Phase One: Determine context of the biblical passage.

Phase Two: Identify and explain the meaning of the biblical passage.

Phase Three: Shape the form of the biblical sermon.

Phase Four: Deliver the biblical sermon.

- I. Phase One: Determine the Context of the Biblical Passage.
  - A. Collect materials for the study and review the background of the book. Read the book multiple times (15-20 times over a period of a few weeks). It is best to read it in a single sitting each time. Occasionally, read it aloud.

Seek to answer the following questions:

1. Who wrote the book?
2. To whom was the book written?
3. What circumstances prompted the author to write the book?
4. What is the theme of the book and its key topics?
5. What is the structure of the book?

Through the disciplined practice of reading and rereading the book, you will achieve three crucial goals. You will gain a thorough understanding of the structure of the book. You will become familiar with the vocabulary of the book. You will identify major themes within the book.

B. Summarize the book's contribution to the biblical narrative. You should develop an understanding of the scriptural storyline. Your goal is to grasp the relationship that exists between all the books of the Bible. When preparing to preach through a book of the Bible, you must ask, "What contribution does this book make to the biblical story?" Answering this question is essential to both sound hermeneutics and sound homiletics.

1. It is essential to sound hermeneutics. People make hermeneutical errors because they fail to locate passages in the biblical narrative. Example one: Some people attempt to apply Old Testament dietary restrictions today. This error ignores the contribution of later revelation, especially Acts 10. Example two: Some justify preaching a gospel of health and wealth by citing God's promises to give material blessing to Abraham. This also is an error that attempts to make God's promises in a specific setting normative for every age.
2. It is essential to sound homiletics. Understanding the biblical storyline is essential to sound homiletics because it paves the way to clear communication. Every time the preacher steps into the pulpit he is responsible to proclaim the point of the text and demonstrate how he arrived at his understanding. To do this, he must be able to explain how his message plays a role in the larger biblical story. As an example, a preacher preparing sermons from Proverbs must help his people see the connection between the book and the larger biblical story. Otherwise, his sermons will most likely become empty moralism (do this and don't do that). Several elements of the historical context help shape a summary of the book: 1. The author's

of Proverbs provided a manual to train the covenant people how to live. 2. They showed how God's law applied to the details of their lives. 3. The foundation of this wise guidance was "the fear of the Lord" (1:7), which is Old Testament terminology for saving faith. 4. Therefore, the principles in Proverbs apply to those who fear the Lord today. The preacher may summarize the book's message this way: Those who fear the Lord live wisely and skillfully. Their life choices are guided by an understanding of God's truth.

C. Outline the book. The outlining process builds upon the summary statement that captures the message of the book. Without it, attempts to outline the book will likely produce a collection of unconnected ideas. However, a good outline explains the unity of the book's message. A good outline accomplishes two related objectives.

1. A good outline correctly identifies the structure of the book. A book's structure reveals the way the author develops the message (or point) of the book. For example, Paul's letters typically fall into two sections: theological and applicational. Romans 12:1 and Ephesians 4:1 are clear examples of this. Proverbs presents another example. The first nine chapters of the book are an extended introduction. Solomon's introductory lectures are marked off by the recurring appeals to his son (1:8, 10; 2:1; 3:1; 3:11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32).
2. A good outline identifies individual units of thought appropriate for a sermon. The goal at this stage of study is to identify complete ideas in the structure of the book (not simply words or phrases). Their size should be sufficiently manageable. This typically means identifying paragraphs that can be handled appropriately in a single sermon.

## II. Phase Two: Identify and Explain the Meaning of the Biblical Passage

This phase reviews principles of sound interpretation and applies those principles to the interpretation of a familiar passage of Scripture.

A. Remember the Essential Elements of Interpretation.

1. Language---what do the specific words mean? Words are the

building blocks of communication. To understand the text, you must define the words.

2. Grammar---how do the words function together? Since God has communicated in propositions (truth statements), we need to understand how sentences are formed. This requires paying careful attention to the parts of speech and connecting terms.
3. Literary Genre—to what type of literature does the text belong?
4. Historical/Cultural Setting—to whom was the book/letter written? Placing a book within its historical setting is valuable for both interpreting and communicating its content. It is also helpful to explore cultural practices so you can understand the text correctly.
5. Larger Biblical Context—how does the message of the book fit into the message of the Bible (the biblical storyline)? This was discussed previously.
6. Theology. Two questions help the interpreter think theologically. First, “What does the whole Bible say about a topic?” When you encounter a topic in a passage, you should compare Scripture with Scripture to arrive at a proper interpretation. You must do this with caution because words often have a variety of meanings differentiated only by context. It is inappropriate to impose all of the possible meanings a term may carry when it appears in a single passage. Second, “How have the believers in previous generations understood this topic (or passage)?” Past opinions do not determine the way you interpret a text. However, you should only diverge from interpretations held by those in the past if you have very good reasons derived from the Scriptures. Throughout church history God’s people have labored to understand doctrinal issues and arrive at orthodox expressions of the Christian faith. Their conclusions are preserved in the historic creeds and confessions of faith and should be given due consideration when you interpret a biblical text.

B. Remember Three Primary Principles of Interpretation

An interpreter must keep three ideas in mind.

1. Words have only one meaning in one context (language is univocal). Throughout church history allegorical theories of interpretation have multiplied in an attempt to discover hidden meanings in Scripture. All such interpretations violate the nature of language. Sometimes later revelation clarifies or expands on an earlier text. But later revelation never teaches hidden meanings. The biblical text does not have hidden meanings beneath it.
2. The text's meaning is the author's intended meaning (it can never mean what it never meant).
3. Scripture interprets Scripture (the Bible speaks with a unified voice). All Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16) and never contradicts itself. Therefore, interpret unclear texts in light of clear ones.

C. Determine the Structure of the Text.

It helps to visualize the flow of thought in a passage by arranging the elements (key words, phrases) into their logical relationships. Here is an illustration using John 3:16.

For  
God loved the world  
so that  
He gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him  
shall not perish  
but  
have eternal life.

The structure demonstrates connections between the parts of the sentence that make up the verse.

D. Evaluate the Sentence Structure (Syntax) of the Text.

A close look at John 3:16 reveals important relationships expressed in the words of the text. The words "so that" connect the two main statements in the verse. It describes the manner in which God loved the world. He gave. The last part of the verse indicates God's purpose in giving his Son, "that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

E. Identify and Study Key Words/Ideas In the Text.

Several words that occur in John 3:16 are worthy of further study. Among them are: “love,” “world,” and “one and only.” Ask questions about the key words and then compare this passage with the rest of Scripture. For example: In what sense does God love the world? What does it mean to “believe in him?” What is eternal life?

F. Write Out an Exegetical Outline of the Passage.

The basic idea of the word “exegesis” as you may remember is “to lead out” or “to reveal” the meaning. The goal of an exegetical outline is to explain accurately the structure of the passage. It explains how the various elements of the text fit together. Here is an example from John 3:16:

Summary: The climax of Jesus’ mission (“lifted up” in 3:14) is grounded in God’s love. The verse explains this idea.

God’s motive for Jesus’ mission: He loved

The subject: God

The action: love

The object: the world

The manner in which God expressed his love: He gave

What God gave: His unique Son

The purpose of his giving:

That those who believe in Him will not perish

That those who believe in Him will have everlasting life

Note: This outline explains the verse, but is not yet a sermon outline.

G. Summarize the contribution the passage makes to the argument of the book. The Gospel of John contains a purpose statement (20:30-21). John’s goal in writing was that his readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ and thus have life. John 3:16 calls men and women to trust Christ, both his person (who he is) and his work (what he did) because he is the gift of God’s love.

## Keep In Mind What We've Learned

### The Laws of Human Language Provide Guidance for Hermeneutics

- 1 Because human beings are in the image of God, they are languages-users. Many of the basic principles of Bible interpretation are basic laws of communication.

### The Inspiration of the Scriptures

- 2 Because the Bible is inspired by God, it has absolute authority over us. That truth must control our study of Scripture.
- 3 In order to understand what God means, you must understand what the human author meant and what the original readers were expected to understand.

### The Fundamental Basis of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Clarity of Scripture

- 4 The Bible interprets itself. Scripture best explains Scripture. Scripture does not need supplementation from reason, tradition, or personal experience.
- 5 The Bible never contradicts itself. Interpret difficult passages in light of clear ones.

### Hermeneutics is Required to Bridge the "Gaps."

- 6 We must bridge the gaps as we interpret and explain the biblical text.
- 7 What did the biblical author mean? How did his readers understand him?

The Spiritual Qualifications of the Interpreter  
He must approach the text without unbiblical,  
preconceived ideas and perspectives.

- 8 We study, not simply to increase our knowledge of the Word, but to grow spiritually and become like Christ. Let the Word change you.
- 9 We cannot read our ideas or opinions into the text. We must allow the text to speak for itself and then obey it. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture, not Scripture in light of personal experience.

The Role of the Holy Spirit  
in Hermeneutics: Illumination

- 10 Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in grasping the text's significance and application.
- 11 Saving faith, the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination, and diligent study are all necessary if we are going to correctly understand and apply the biblical text.

Elements of General Hermeneutics

- 12 We begin by trying to determine the human author's reason(s) for writing.
- 13 In order to grasp the author's purpose in writing, begin by reading the entire book numerous times (15-20). Read it aloud and take note of repeated words and ideas. Note also the connective terms.
- 14 Remember that God's revelation is rooted and grounded in historical fact. Therefore, you should seek to understand as much about the text's historical and cultural situation as possible.
- 15 Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in the light of biblical history.
- 16 When a cultural practice or command is based upon the unchanging nature of God or is founded upon an eternal truth, it is relevant for believers of every age.
- 17 Remember the difference between descriptive and prescriptive revelation. The

first, describes something that has happened but may not have application for us. The second prescribes or commands. When the command is for God's people in every age or those in the church age, it applies to us.

- 18 We must never take words, phrases or statements out of their context. Those who do, will misinterpret and misapply the Word.
- 19 Why did the author write this book? What was the main message he was communicating to his readers?
- 20 How do the book's divisions fit into its purpose and move its argument forward?
- 21 How does the content of this paragraph help you understand the meaning of its words & sentences?
- 22 Every word has a certain range of meaning (semantic range), but context nearly always narrows the possibilities down to the meaning intended by the author.
- 23 The Bible interprets itself. Scripture best explains Scripture.
- 24 Words mean one thing at one time.
- 25 The basic unit of language is not the word but the sentence, which then extends to the paragraph and, in the case of the Bible the section and eventually the book.
- 26 Words do not have automatic meaning. Words have meaning in association with other words.
- 27 What was the human author communicating to his audience? What he originally meant is what God meant.
- 28 Word usage determines meaning. How were the words you are studying used in the author's day and in the passage you are studying?
- 29 Context has a determinative function. It virtually makes meaning. Context is king.
- 30 Be careful not to draw too strong a distinction between synonyms and never build a theology upon such distinctions.

- 31 Your goal as you study words, phrases and sentences is to understand the meaning of the unit of thought (the paragraph).
- 32 Note the connecting words in the paragraph in order to understand the flow of the argument within the paragraph and from one paragraph to another.
- 33 The text cannot mean what it never meant.
- 34 Difficult and obscure texts must be interpreted in light of clear texts and established doctrines.
- 35 Allow the text to say what it says and what it says will inform and establish you're theology. As your theology is established, it becomes another aspect of context which you must consider as you interpret other texts.

### Principles of Special Hermeneutics Figurative Language

- 36 Always look for the normal or plain sense of a word before considering the possibility of a figurative usage. Does the context demand a figurative meaning?
- 37 Figurative language yields literal or normal meaning. Figures are intended to convey literal meaning.
- 38 The meaning of similes and metaphors is based on the actual words of the text. If we extend our interpretation and application beyond the actual words of the text, we cease preaching God's Word.
- 39 How is the human author using this figure of speech? What truth is he trying to communicate through this figure of speech?

### Types and Symbols

- 40 A true type in the Scriptures is a God-ordained, author-intended, textually-understood relationship between persons, events, or institutions. A type carries an image of its corresponding fulfillment and is always future in fulfillment.
- 41 A typological relationship is determined by NT revelation. This is where the

similarities and applications can be discerned.

- 42 Because the church was a mystery in the OT, nothing in the OT corresponds to it. There are no types of the church in the OT.

### Parable and Allegory

- 43 What is the central point of the parable and how do the subordinate points support that central point?
- 44 Parables have one central point or teaching and its details are significant only in relation to that central point.
- 45 What biblical doctrine or teaching does the parable support or illustrate?
- 46 What is the problem, question, or situation that prompted the parable?
- 47 Jesus taught in parables in order to reveal truth to His followers and to conceal truth from hardened unbelievers.
- 48 It is important to remember that Jesus' parables refer in some way to the Kingdom of God not to life in the church age.
- 49 The interpretation of allegorical passages is always bound to the words of the biblical text. The allegory's context will inform its interpretation.
- 50 The points of comparison in the allegory explain or interpret the passage. Don't attempt to interpret those details that are not explained.

### Proverbs

- 51 Because the Proverbs are based upon the Law of Moses we need to be careful not to apply those parts of the Proverbs that reflect Mosaic teaching.
- 52 Proverbs will not cover all the possible exceptions and they are not legal guarantees from God.
- 53 Because proverbs are general principles of life, they need to be "translated" into

your cultural equivalent before you apply them.

- 54 If your understanding of a Proverb contradicts clear Bible doctrine, you are misinterpreting that Proverb.

### Narrative

- 55 Biblical narratives are about God and what He did. He is the hero of all the stories. They have a theological purpose. They are the outworking of God's decreed plan. We cannot treat them simply as stories of men.
- 56 Biblical narratives are not allegories full of hidden meaning. They are historical accounts that focus on the pervasive presence of God in all things and in every moment of history.
- 57 Biblical narratives are not usually directly doctrinal. They illustrate or demonstrate truth or doctrine taught directly elsewhere.
- 58 The moral or teaching of a story comes from the larger context of biblical truth possessed by the readers.
- 59 The application or principles found in biblical narratives must be consistent with the author's intent and purpose in writing.
- 60 Don't assume that commands and promises given to some of God's people necessarily apply to you. Remember to consider the author's intent and dispensational factors.
- 61 Allegorizing is when one searches for hidden or secret meanings that are not clear from a normal reading of the text. Unless the human author so informs us, the text should not be interpreted allegorically.

### Prophecy

- 62 Interpret the words of the prophets in their literal and historic sense unless the context clearly indicates a figurative or symbolic meaning.
- 63 Remember that the terms "Israel" and "church" are not interchangeable. They do

not refer to the same entities. They refer to two different entities.

- 64 Remember that not every element of a prophetic passage is figurative or symbolic and that figurative language always conveys literal or normal meaning.
- 65 Unfulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled literally, never figuratively or spiritually
- 66 The OT is often cited or referenced in the NT to confirm that a NT idea is in “agreement” with an OT principle or to illustrate a point being made in the NT.
- 67 The OT is the foundation of the NT. The OT informs our understanding of the NT. Therefore, we don’t reinterpret the OT based upon NT truth. We interpret the NT based upon OT truth.

## Two Summary Charts to Use For Teaching

### BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

1. Each word or text has only one meaning in a given passage (language is univocal). The context informs you of a word's meaning.
2. The text's meaning is the author's intended meaning (it can never mean what it never meant). The human author's meaning is God's meaning. Interpret words in harmony with what those words meant in the time of the author. Interpret a word, sentence or paragraph in light of its context.
3. Scripture interprets Scripture (the Bible speaks with a unified voice). The Bible interprets itself.
4. The Bible should be taken literally. Literal interpretation takes into account the presence of figures of speech. Figures of speech have literal meanings.
5. Normally, biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by biblical command.
6. The promises found in a biblical text are not necessarily for every believer. The dispensation and context of the promise must be taken into account.
7. Historical facts or events are symbols of spiritual truth only when the Bible states this to be so.
8. Personal experiences should be interpreted in light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience. If Scripture and personal experience contradict each other, our authority is Scripture.

### FOUR ESSENTIAL PARTS OF ANY BIBLE STUDY

OBSERVATION: "What do I see?"

INTERPRETATION: "What does it mean?" The answer to this question is determined by asking many questions of the text, such as: "What did the human author mean in this text?" "What did this text mean to the original audience?" "Why did the author say this?" "What problems or issues was the author addressing?" "What does this text teach about God, man, sin, the Christian life, etc.?"

CORRELATION: "How does the truth of this passage relate to all other biblical teaching?" Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, it will contain no genuine contradictions.

APPLICATION: "How does this text apply to me?" "How should it change me?"

