

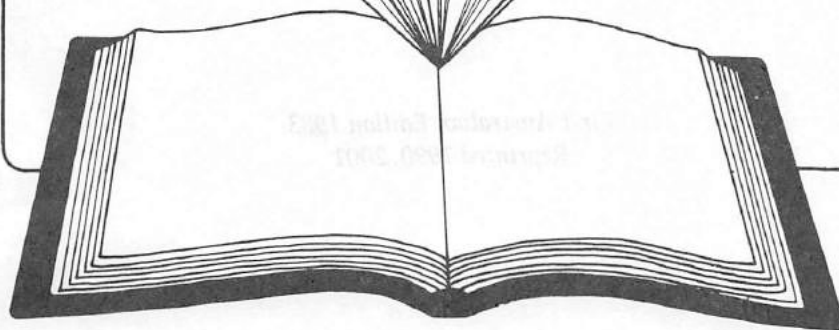
INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

A TEXTBOOK ON HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE



KEVIN J. CONNER
KEN MALMIN

INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES



A Textbook On How To Interpret The Bible

by Kevin J. Conner & Ken Malmin

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Kevin J. Conner and Ken Malmin

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ABOUT THE BOOK

"What does the Bible Mean?" The answers to this question are many and varied. Most Christians are agreed on the fact that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, given to be understood by them and assimilated into their lives. However, where they differ greatly is concerning the meaning of Scripture. The differing viewpoints are virtually countless. Since one's doctrine stems from one's interpretation of the Bible and all interpretation is guided by various rules, it seems that the Christian community should be focusing its attention more on the field of hermeneutics - the science of interpreting Scripture. It is this need that provides the basis for this textbook on hermeneutics. This book assumes that a working knowledge of hermeneutics coupled with an illuminating unction of the Holy Spirit will enable those who interpret Scripture to come to a harmonious knowledge of the truth.

Just a glance at the table of contents reveals that though this text is rather comprehensive in its treatment of the subject, its main emphasis lies in the presentation of seventeen principles of interpretation. These principles are actually rules of procedure that the interpreter will be able to use as keys to open up the truths of scripture.

Any student of the word will find this book to be a very helpful guide in his/her studies as well as a veritable gold-mine of truth.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kevin Conner and Ken Malmin come from very different backgrounds, Kevin being from Australia and Ken being from America. They first met in 1970 and then became a team in 1973, both teaching at Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. In developing a Paul/Timothy relationship they have worked together on several projects. To the work of developing this text Kevin brought his vast comprehensive Bible knowledge and many years of experience in rightly dividing the Word of truth while Ken contributed his communicative skills and several years of study in the field of Hermeneutics. Having set this common goal they then worked for two years, spending countless hours together developing and writing this material. As co-authors both regard this text as the fruit of their relationship.

This text is also used, along with its accompanying Self-Study Guide and Assignments in "The Key of Knowledge" Seminars as authored by Kevin. Both "Interpreting the Scriptures" and the "Self-Study Guide" are recommended to the serious student.

PREFACE

Every sincere Bible scholar realizes that it is absolutely essential to have Biblical keys and principles which will unlock the Scripture in order to bring forth the wisdom and knowledge that God has placed within the pages of His Word.

I am grateful for such a book as this that clearly lays out keys of interpreting the Scriptures. I believe that those readers who are interested in knowing the secrets of God which are locked up in His Word will greatly benefit by reading this text.

However, we must remember that the Word of God still requires the anointing of the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to our spirits.

We are indebted to Kevin J. Conner and Kenneth Malmin for the countless hours spent in preparing **Interpreting the Scriptures** for all those who hunger and thirst after an opened understanding of the Sacred Word, the Holy Bible.

Rev. K. R. (Dick) Iverson
Pastor — Bible Temple
President — Portland Bible College

Dedication

To our loving wives, Joyce and Glenda, who have faithfully supported us in life and particularly in the production of this text.

and

To those students of Portland Bible College with whom we have enjoyed sharing these principles.

and

To all those who have a hunger to know the meaning of Scripture.

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FOREWORD

INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

It is recognized by Christians around the world that God has spoken in His Word; the Sacred Scriptures. However, what is not so clear is what He meant by what He said. On this point the opinions are innumerable. Unfortunately these differences have been used to divide the Body of Christ into many varied factions. Seeing the evil of divisions, it is the conviction of the authors that one of the root causes of theological differences lies in the field of hermeneutics. Since all proper doctrine arises out of the interpretation of Scripture, it is logical that at the root of doctrinal differences lies hermeneutical differences. Hermeneutics and its application becomes then the central issue of doctrinal divisions. Generally speaking, Bible believing Christians are united in accepting the facts of revelation and inspiration. However, the major divisions concern interpretation and application. The problem is not over *revelation and inspiration* so much as it is over *interpretation and application*.

The authors of this text do not regard themselves as infallible hermeneuticians. The Lord Jesus Christ alone is that. But, at the same time, it is evident that the Lord Jesus gave to the early apostles definite "keys" of interpretation, which they used in interpreting the Old Testament in writing infallible Scripture. It is with a burning desire to rediscover what might be called "Apostolic Hermeneutics" that this book is written.

The foundational proposition upon which this text is built may be stated as; "The *literary methods* used in *writing the Scriptures* give rise to the *principles of interpreting the Scriptures*." In other words, the way a thing is put together indicates the way it can be taken apart. Hence, the way the Bible was written indicates the way it should be interpreted. The universe is maintained by the laws of God. Man does not make these laws; he only discovers them. As long as he does not violate these laws, he can use them to find blessing. So it is in the field of hermeneutics. There are Divine laws, principles of interpretation, hidden in the Scriptures. As the interpreter discovers these, he will be able to use them to discover the meaning of Scripture. On the other hand, a violation of these principles will bring misunderstanding and confusion. According to Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but it is the honour of kings to search out a matter."

This comprehensive textbook presents a unique approach in several of its areas, particularly in its evaluation of history, its definition of the foundational elements in interpretation and its presentation of hermeneutical principles.

We have purposely designed this text to reach the levels of both teacher and student. It is our prayer that the reader will find this book helpful and will experience as much joy as using these principles as we have found in presenting them. Any correspondence concerning this text will be welcomed. May the Spirit of Truth guide us all in rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

The Authors

Kevin J. Conner
Ken Malmin

Chapter 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

I. THE DEFINITION OF HERMENEUTICS

A. Literal Definition

Webster's dictionary defines hermeneutics as, "The science of interpretation, or of finding the meaning of an author's words and phrases, and of explaining it to others; exegesis; particularly applied to the interpretation of the Scriptures."

Modern theologians define hermeneutics as both "the science and the art of Biblical interpretation." It is (1) a *science* because it is concerned with principles within an ordered system. It is meant to derive and classify the principles necessary for the proper interpretation of Scripture. It is also (2) an *art* because it is concerned with applying the principles derived. The application of these principles cannot be mechanical, but must involve the skill of the interpreter.

B. Classical Definition

The classical background of the word "hermeneutics" is found in Greek and Roman mythology. Hermes (Greek), or Mercury (Roman), was the god of science, speech, writing, invention and art. He was the messenger and interpreter for the gods, conveying their communications to mortals. Mercury is referred to in Acts 14:8-18, where the men of Lystra, ignorantly assuming Paul and Barnabas to be gods, referred to Paul as Mercury, "because he was the chief speaker," and called Barnabas Jupiter, the father of Mercury. In Greek culture every interpreter (HERMENEUS) supposedly inherited some of the mystic qualities of Hermes, the god of literature and patron of eloquence.

C. Scriptural Definition

The heart of hermeneutics is centered in the word "interpretation." This word is used in both the Old and New Testaments as follows:

1. Old Testament Hebrew and Chaldee

- a. PATHAR — TO OPEN UP: (fig.) interpret; explain (a dream).
Translated: interpret, interpreted, interpreter, interpretation. Genesis 40:8, 16, 22; 41:8, 12, 13, 15.
- b. PITHRON — interpretation; explanation.
Translated: interpretation. Genesis 40:5, 8, 12, 18.
- c. MELIY TSAH — an aphorism; also a satire, interpretation.
Translated: interpretation. Proverbs 1:6
taunting (proverb). Habakkuk 2:6.
- d. LUWTS — to make mouths at; to scoff; hence (from the effort to pronounce a foreign language), to interpret or (gen.) to intercede; to treat as a scorner or foreigner.
Translated: Generally — scorner, mocker.
Figuratively — interpreter (Genesis 42:23; Job 33:23), ambassadors (II Chronicles 32:31), teachers (Isaiah 43:27).

- e. **SHEBER** — a fracture; a breaking; a solution (of a dream).
Translated: Generally — to break, broken.
Figuratively — interpretation Judges 7:15.
- f. **PESHAR** (Chaldee) — interpretation; explanation.
Translated: interpret, interpreting, interpretation.
Daniel 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 16, 24, 25, 26, 30, 36, 45;
4:6, 7, 9, 18, 19, 24; 5:7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 26;
7:16; Ecclesiastes 8:1 (Hebrew).
- g. **TIRGAM** — to throw over; transfer; translate.
Translated: interpreted Ezra 4:7.

Together, these words show interpretation to be an opening up, a breaking, explanation, solution, and a translation. They are used predominantly in reference to the interpretation of dreams, although they are also used in relation to visions, proverbs, foreign languages and various symbols.

2. New Testament Greek

- a. **HERMENEUO** — to interpret; explain in words; expound; translate.
Translated: being interpreted, by interpretation, being by interpretation John 1:38, 41, 42, 43; 9:7; Hebrews 7:2.
- b. **HERMENEIA** — interpretation; explanation (of obscure utterances), metonymically — the power or faculty of interpreting).
Translated: interpretation I Corinthians 12:10 (some mss. — **DIERMENEIA**); 14:26.
- c. **DIERMENEUO** — to interpret or explain thoroughly; to interpret fully; to unfold the meaning of what is said; explain; expound; to translate into one's native language.
Translated: expounded, Luke 24:27; by interpretation, Acts 9:36; interpret, I Corinthians 12:30; 14:5, 13, 27.
- d. **DIERMENEUTES** — a thorough interpreter; one who interprets or explains fully.
Translated: interpreter I Corinthians 14:28 (some mss. — **HERMENEUTES**).
- e. **DUSERMENEUTOS** — hard to interpret; difficult to be explained; hard to be understood.
Translated: hard to be uttered Hebrews 5:11.
- f. **METHERMENEUO** — to translate into the language of one with whom communication is desired; to interpret.
Translated: being interpreted, by interpretation Matthew 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:42; Acts 4:36; 13:8.

g. EPILUSIS — a loosing; a solution; an explanation; (metaphorically, interpretation).

Translated: interpretation II Peter 1:20.

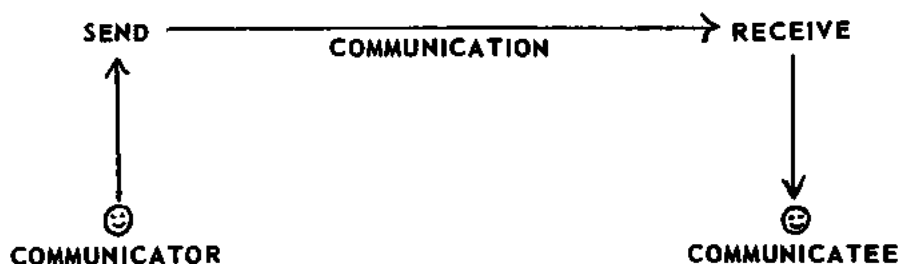
Together, these words show interpretation to be an explanation of obscure utterances, a translation into one's own language, an expounding, an interpreting or explaining thoroughly, a loosing, and a solving. These words are used (1) of Christ's thorough *exposition* to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus the things concerning Himself in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets (the whole of the Old Testament); (2) of the *translation* of names and phrases from Hebrew and Aramaic to Greek; and (3) of the *interpretation* of unknown languages.

II THE SCIENCE OF HERMENEUTICS

We have defined hermeneutics as the science and art of interpretation. It is a *science* because it can reduce interpretation, within limits, to a set of rules. It is an *art* in that the application of the rules remains complex, requiring a skilled interpreter. Hermeneutics is the pivotal point of all science because it is the bridge of communication. We will now consider the necessity and importance of hermeneutics under the following two headings: *General Hermeneutics*, including all forms of communication; and *Biblical Hermeneutics*, dealing with God's communication to man.

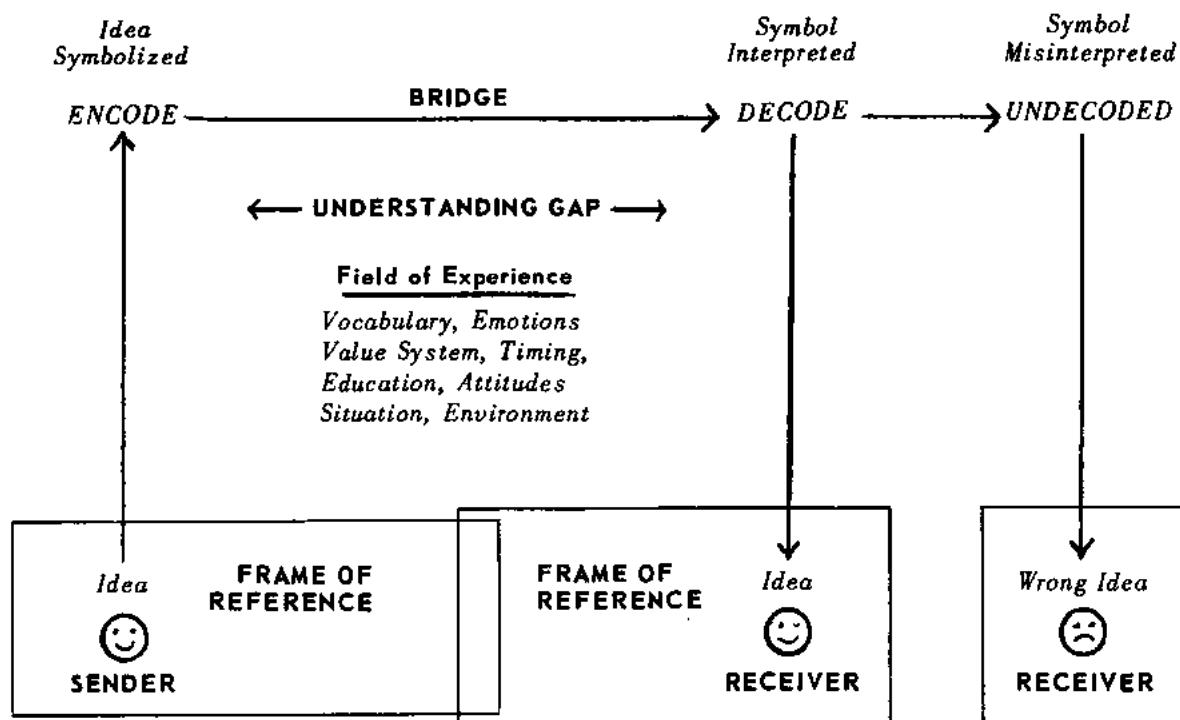
A. General Hermeneutics

General hermeneutics refers to the various sets of rules which are used in the interpretation of the materials presented through the many forms of communication. Communication is the transmission and reception of thoughts and feelings in a medium common to both sender and receiver. All forms of communication, including speech,



literature, and the arts, present subject matter which need interpretation by the proper application of the rules of general hermeneutics. When something hinders clear understanding in the process of communication, there arises the need for interpretation.

Whenever communication is to take place, it must be recognized that a gap in understanding may exist between the communicator and the receiver. For communication to be successful, there must be a common medium between the two in order that this gap may be bridged. The rules of interpretation supply us with the materials with which the bridge can be built. Between the sender and receiver there lies a vast field of experience which may contain differences that cause understanding gaps. In other words, both sender and receiver has his own frame of reference around the message being relayed. The following is an illustration of the field of experience, consisting of the frames of reference of both the sender and receiver, in relation to communication:



Whenever man communicates, the exercising of interpretation becomes necessary. Whether it is art, music, law, history, poetry, or philosophical and religious literature; all these forms of communication require interpretation.

1. **Art** — Modern art, whether painting or sculpture leaves the untrained observer bewildered as to its significance. Thus arises the need for art experts.
2. **Music** — Many compositions of the great composers of past days require the interpretative skill of a music expert.
3. **Law** — In the United States, the Legislative branch of government makes the laws while the Judicial branch interprets them. It is the sole duty of the Supreme Court to interpret the Constitution, thus showing the need for law experts.
4. **History** — Every person interprets history in the light of his own philosophical and theological predispositions. Before history can be interpreted, all the facts must be gathered by the history expert.
5. **Poetry** — The unique nature and structure of poetic language demands knowledgeable interpretation by the poetry expert.
6. **Literature** — The profoundly abstract nature of most philosophical and religious literature calls for the ability of an enlightened interpreter. The prominence of sacred books such as the Veda, the Buddhist Canon, the Egyptian book of the Dead, and the Koran, has given birth to their respective schools of interpretation. Hence, the need for the literature expert.

The above illustrations point out the necessity and importance of General Hermeneutics. If experts are needed in all these areas in order to make each form of communication effective, how much more so is there a need for Biblical Hermeneutics.

B. Biblical Hermeneutics

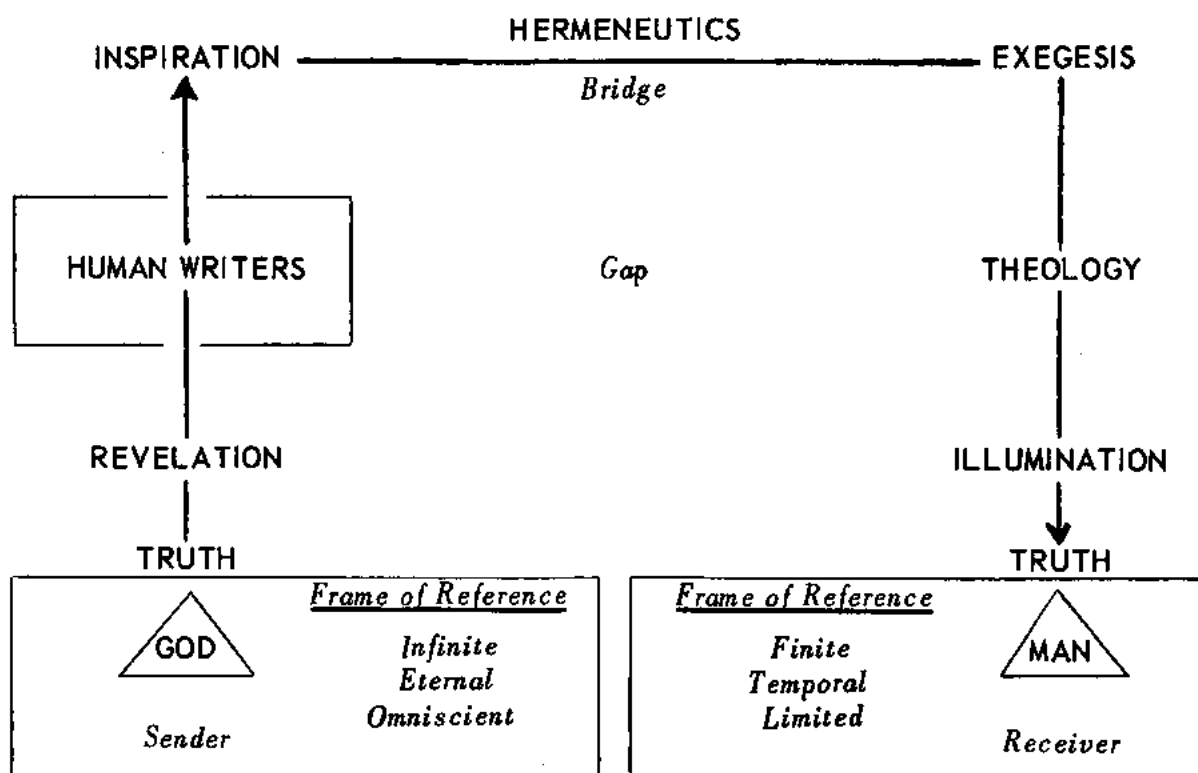
General Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the communication of man to man. Biblical Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the communication of God to man. This Divine communication has come to man in the form of sacred literature — the Bible.

It is certain that God has spoken to man in His Word: Jesus—the Living Word; and the Bible—the Written Word. But what has He said? The primary purpose of Biblical Hermeneutics is to ascertain what God has said in the Scriptures and to determine its meaning. We derive no benefit from the fact that God has spoken unless we understand what is meant by what He said.

As previously noted, there is an understanding gap between the minds of the communicator and receiver which must be bridged in order for an effective transfer of ideas to take place. If this is true concerning man to man communication, how much more it applies to communication from the infinite God, who is omniscient, to the mind of finite man, whose frame of reference is limited.

It must also be recognized that God communicated His truth through human writers utilizing their frames of reference. This serves to doubly necessitate the proper interpretation of Scripture. (Both God to man; and God through man, to man).

THE COMMUNICATION OF SCRIPTURE



It is necessary and important to interpret Scripture because it is communication from Divinity to Humanity. In addition, it is necessary because the Scriptures were written, under inspiration, by approximately 35 different authors from all walks of life, over a period of about 1600 years (from Moses to John), and in three different languages. These facts make the Bible unique in its need for interpretation.

Another factor which makes interpretation necessary is the variety of methods by which God has spoken to and through man.

"In many *separate* revelations — each of which set forth a *portion* of the Truth — and in *different ways* God *spoke* of old to (our) forefathers in and by the prophets." Hebrews 1:1 Amplified New Testament.

"God, who at *sundry times* and in *divers manners spake* in times past unto the fathers by the prophets." Hebrews 1:1 King James Version.

"In *many parts* and in *many ways* . . ." Hebrews 1:1 Berry Interlinear.

Ways God Has Spoken

- a. **DREAM** — A succession of images, thoughts, or emotions passing through the mind during sleep. (Numbers 12:6; Joel 2:28; Matthew 1:20)
- b. **VISION** — Something presented to the mind through other than natural means of sight while awake; seeing with the eyes open in the spiritual world; a supernatural appearance that conveys a revelation. (Numbers 12:6; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Acts 9:10, 12).
- c. **ANGEL OF THE LORD** — Generally spoken of as a theophany, which is a manifestation and revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ before his incarnation; a manifestation or appearance of God to man. (Genesis 18; Exodus 3; Judges 6 and 13).
- d. **SIMILITUDE** — A shape, form of, model or pattern; a resemblance or likeness similar to the real; a person or thing resembling a counterpart. (Deuteronomy 4:12, 15, 16; Daniel 10:16; Hosea 12:10; Romans 5:14; Hebrews 7:15).
- e. **FIGURE** — A form or shape as determined by outlines; the external shape or outline of something; to represent or express by figure of speech; emblematic of the real. (Romans 5:14; Hebrews 9:9, 24; 11:19; 1 Peter 3:21).
- f. **TYPE** — A thing embodying qualities characteristic of a particular person; the mark or impression of something, a figure or representation of something to come; a prophetic representation, foreshadowing, prefiguring. (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).
- g. **SHADOW** — A faint and imperfect representation; an imitation of something having form without substance; a dark figure or image cast on a surface by a body intercepting the light; a foreshadowing. (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5, 10:1).
- h. **EXAMPLE** — A part of something, taken to show the character of the whole, a pattern or model, as of something to be imitated or avoided; an instance, sample, or specimen serving for illustration. (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Hebrews 4:11; 8:5; 11 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).
- i. **PATTERN** — An original or model considered for, or deserving of imitation; anything designed as a model; the first thing or being of its kind; the original model from which a thing is made. (Exodus 25:9; 1 Chronicles 28:11, 12, 19; 1 Timothy 1:16; Hebrews 8:5).
- j. **SIGN** — A token used in place of that which it represents; a signal to draw attention to something; a mark or a symbol having a specific meaning. (Exodus 3:12; Isaiah 7:11, 14; Matthew 12:39; John 20:30).

- k. **SIGNIFYING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** — To indicate by a mark; to speak by sign-language; to represent the real with a symbol. (John 12:33; 18:32; 21:19; Acts 11:28; Revelation 1:1).
- l. **ALLEGORY** — A comparison sustained through numerous details; a symbolic narrative presenting an abstract or spiritual meaning using material forms; a story in which people, things, and happenings have another meaning, usually a moral lesson. (Galatians 4:24).
- m. **MYSTERY** — That which is secret and can be known only to the initiated; truth which can be known only by revelation. (Ephesians 1:9; 5:32; I Timothy 3:16; Revelation 1:20).
- n. **DARK SAYING** — A hidden saying, the meaning of which must be discovered; a knot of speech which must be unraveled; an obscure utterance which must be clarified. (Numbers 12:8; Psalms 49:4; 78:2; Proverbs 1:6; Daniel 8:23).
- o. **RIDDLE** — A puzzling question framed so as to require ingenuity in answering it; an enigma needing solution. (Judges 14:12; Ezekiel 17:2).
- p. **PROVERB** — A short didactic saying embodying a truth; A sentence briefly and forcibly expressing some practical truth. (Proverbs 1:6; Luke 4:23; II Peter 2:22).
- q. **PARABLE** — A short story conveying some truth or lesson by a comparison; an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. (Matthew 13:3, 10, 13, 34, 35; Mark 3:23; Luke 8:10).
- r. **VOICE OF WORDS** — The audible voice of the Lord in actual words; audible communication, utterance. (Genesis 3:8; Numbers 7:89; Deuteronomy 5:22-28; I Kings 19:12, 13; Psalms 103:20; Daniel 10:6, 9).
- s. **PROPHECY** — To speak under inspiration concerning the present (forth-telling) or concerning the future (foretelling); to either proclaim or predict. (Numbers 12:6-8; I Peter 1:10-12; II Peter 1:20, 21).
- t. **WRITING** — To communicate through inscriptions; to use letters for characters as visible symbols of ideas and words. (Exodus 31:18; 32:16; I Chronicles 28:19; II Chronicles 35:4; Daniel 5:5).

Even a cursory glance at the above list will serve to underscore the need for interpretation of the Word of God. In addition, there are many other factors which lead to the conclusion that the interpretation of Scripture is of utmost importance. These fall into two main groupings:

- u. **SYMBOLIC GROUP** — This includes areas such as interpretation of names, significance of numbers, and all other symbols. These require special interpretation, and will be dealt with later.
- v. **FIGURES OF SPEECH GROUP** — Included here are metaphors, similes, hyperboles, idioms and others. Refer to Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used In The Bible*.

III. HERMENEUTICS AND OTHER BIBLICAL SCIENCES

It is necessary that the Bible scholar have an understanding of the inter-relatedness of the various Biblical sciences. Hermeneutics is not to be viewed as a solitary science, but rather as a link in a chain of related sciences. The major Bible sciences are the study of the Canon (Canonology), Historical Criticism, Textual Criticism, Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Biblical Theology.

A. Canonology — The word “canon” simply means “a rod, rule, or measuring stick.” This science has to do with determining which sacred books measure up to the standard of Divine inspiration. By Divine inspiration we mean that God inspired the very thoughts and words of Scripture, utilizing the writer’s frame of reference yet without corrupting the communication.

The books which measure up to this standard are to be recognized as “God-breathed” — the very Word of God (II Timothy 3:16). These would include the sixty-six books of the Authorized Version of the Bible. The Apocrypha is excluded.

B. Historical Criticism — The word “criticism” is not used here, nor in the following section, in the negative destructive sense. Rather it is used to connote discernment. This science deals with the authorship, date, historical circumstances, authenticity of contents, and literary unity of the books.

C. Textual Criticism — The word “textual” refers to the actual wording of a book. This science does not attempt to undermine the inspiration of Scripture but rather to determine as accurately as possible the original wording of the inspired text. This process is complicated by the fact that the original manuscripts no longer exist. Those copies which do exist are many and vary in quality. This requires keen discernment on the part of the textual critic.

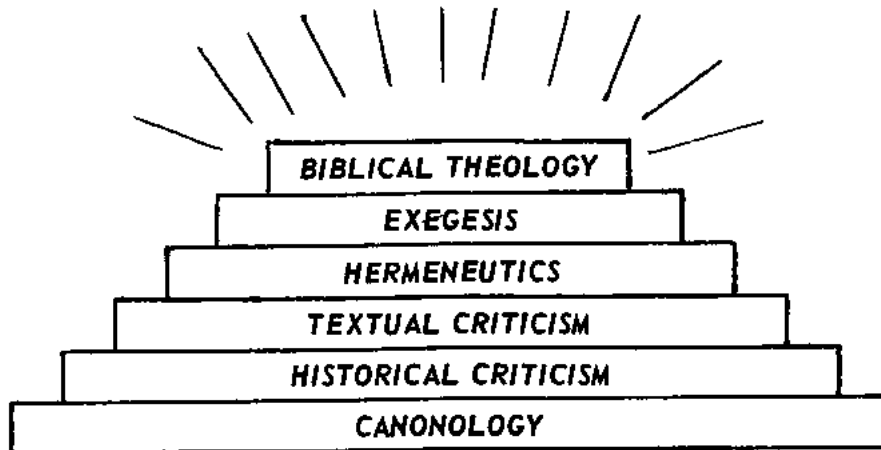
D. Hermeneutics — This science is not concerned with inspiration (Canonology), background (Historical Criticism), or the wording of the books (Textual Criticism), but instead is concerned with determining the principles by which the books may be interpreted.

E. Exegesis — The word “exegesis” comes from a Greek word (*exhegesisthai*) meaning “to guide or lead out.” It refers to bringing out the meaning of any writing which might otherwise be difficult to understand. This science involves the *application* of the rules of hermeneutics. While hermeneutics provides us with the tools, exegesis refers to the actual *use* of these tools; hermeneutics supplies the *principles* of interpretation, while exegesis is the *process* of interpretation. Exegesis, then, can be thought of as applied hermeneutics.

F. Biblical Theology — The word “theology” comes from two Greek words (*theos* = God and *logos* = word), and means literally, “the study and discourse of God.” The science of Biblical theology involves the compilation, categorization, and summarization of Biblical doctrines. It formulates conclusions on a Biblical subject by considering all the Scripture relative to that subject.

A definite progression can be seen in these six related Bible sciences. As noted by Ramm (p. 10):

1. The study of the canon determines the inspired books.
2. The study of historical criticism gives us the framework of the books.
3. The study of textual criticism determines the wording of the books.
4. Hermeneutics gives us the rules for the interpretation of the books.
5. Exegesis is the application of these rules to the books.
6. Biblical theology is the result.



These six sciences can be easily divided into two groups of three: the first group deals with the infallible materials the Bible student has available; the second group is concerned with his use of these materials. Both groups are units; three-fold cords which should not be broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Canonology, historical criticism, and textual criticism are bound together and provide the Bible student with a solid basis upon which he can build. These three are then completed by the second group. Hermeneutics provides the guidelines for exegesis, which in turn sets the stage for Biblical theology.



Proper application of God's Word is dependent upon proper interpretation of it. All exposition, preaching, and teaching must, therefore, be based on the appropriate exercise of the principles of hermeneutics, exegesis, and Biblical theology.

IV. HERMENEUTICS AND CHURCH DIVISIONS

It is important to recognize that many of the divisions within Christianity have arisen, not only out of carnality or sectarianism, but also because of differences in the field of hermeneutics. It must be understood that one's theological viewpoint is determined primarily by his hermeneutics. Thus a difference in hermeneutics will most likely lead to a difference in doctrine.

The issue debated in Christendom is not so much whether God has spoken (though many skeptics argue this point); nor is it so much the specific books in which He has spoken. It concerns, rather, the question of what God meant by what He said. The problems that arise, in other words, are not over *inspiration* as much as they concern *interpretation and application*.

It should be noted, however, that it is possible to adhere to the same system of hermeneutics and still reach differing doctrinal conclusions as a result of a difference in exegetical approach.

It can be concluded, then, that one of the most logical and effective means of solving the problem of divisions within Christianity would be to first settle the differences that exist in the principles and application of hermeneutics. If the principles used in the interpretation of Scripture were applied uniformly, there would be a basic agreement in the resultant theology. This, in turn, would eliminate or minimize many of the doctrinal differences which now divide the Body of Christ.

Chapter 2

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN INTERPRETER

I. INTERPRETERS

It has already been noted that hermeneutics is both a *science* and an *art*. Having defined the *science* of hermeneutics, it is fundamental that the *art* be considered as well, particularly as it relates to the hermeneutician. Interpretation necessitates the involvement of a person — the interpreter. The *art* of hermeneutics has to do with the applied skill of that interpreter.

The *science* of hermeneutics has suffered much because of the lack of *art* on the part of the interpreter. A mere knowledge of the rules of hermeneutics does not necessarily make the student a good interpreter, just as knowing the rules of a game does not always make one a good player. There are certain qualifications which every interpreter of the Word must have. Otherwise, hermeneutics becomes a source of confusion rather than order. False cults have developed systems of hermeneutics by which the Word of God is misinterpreted, heresy is forced out of truth, and darkness is presented as light.

Interpreters are spoken of in the Scriptures under three categories: legal interpreters, false interpreters, and true interpreters.

A. Legal Interpreters

In Acts 13:27 we read, "For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him" (see also John 18:28). Generally speaking, the rulers referred to here were the priests, scribes, and Pharisees in the days of Christ. The scribes were the official interpreters of the Old Testament Scriptures. Because of letterism and legalism they misinterpreted the voices of the prophets, and finally crucified Christ with their legal interpretation. This shows that it is possible, sadly enough, to know the letter of the Scriptures, but because of legalistic interpretation, miss Him of whom the Scriptures speak (John 5:39, 40).

B. False Interpreters

The Scriptures also refer to another group of interpreters who are clearly revealed as false.

In II Corinthians 4:2, Paul refers to those who are guilty of "handling the Word of God deceitfully" (Amplified — "adulterate or handle dishonestly the Word of God").

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul speaks of those who, in relation to doctrine, use "sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Amplified — "the cunning and cleverness of unscrupulous men, gamblers engaged in every shifting form of trickery in inventing errors to mislead").

In II Peter 3:16, Peter also refers to these men as those who are unlearned and unstable and wrest (torture on the rack) the Scriptures unto their own destruction (Amplified — "they twist, misconstrue, distort and misinterpret the Scriptures to their own destruction").

These references point out that there are those who willfully and deliberately interpret the Scriptures falsely, thus damning their own souls and the souls of those who follow them. These are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7).

C. True Interpreters

In Luke 24, Jesus is revealed to us as the perfect interpreter. Verse 27 says, "He expounded (Greek — interpreted) unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." He is THE Interpreter; one among a thousand (Job 33:23). Every true interpreter must be patterned after Him. The exhortation of Scripture to the true interpreter is, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15).

The above categories show clearly that there must be a qualified interpreter; one who has the faculty of interpreting and explaining fully the meaning of the Word of God. These bring us to a consideration of those spiritual and mental qualifications needed by any interpreter of the Holy Scriptures.

II. QUALIFICATIONS

A. The Interpreter Must be Born of the Spirit and the Word

John 3:1-12; I Peter 1:23

Although Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel, he still needed to be born "from above." It is impossible for anyone to see or understand the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God and the plan of redemption unless he is born of the Spirit. How can one who is not born of the Spirit and the Word comprehend or interpret the Word which was produced by the Spirit? As interpreters of the Word we must be guided in our interpretation by the same Spirit that inspired those who wrote it.

B. The Interpreter Must Have a Passionate Hunger for the Word of God

If one has been truly born again, the first evidence of that birth is hunger. This refers to an intense desire for that which is highly valued. Knowing God through His Word must be of primary importance to the interpreter. Job exemplified this as he spoke of his hunger and love for the Word of God: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). David said, "and I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psalms 119:47). Jeremiah expressed the same longing for the Word: "Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). (See also: Psalms 19:7-10; Ezekiel 3:1-3; Matthew 4:4; Revelation 10:8-10.) A highly valuable practice for the interpreter is the rapid reading of the whole Bible. This helps give him a thorough acquaintance with the Word as a whole.

C. The Interpreter Must Possess an Attitude of Humility

The attitude of humility is a quality essential to spiritual insight. Pride and arrogance bring spiritual blindness, making the discovery of the true meaning of God's Word impossible. The religious leaders of Christ's day were haughty and proud. Though holding the Scriptures in their hands, they were blind to the true interpretation of them. They rejected and crucified the very Christ to which the Scriptures pointed (Acts 13:27). The Scriptures exhort us to possess "lowliness of mind" (Philippians 2:3); "humility of mind" (Acts 20:19); and "humility" (I Peter 5:5). We are to "receive with meekness the engrafted word" (James 1:21).

D. The Interpreter Must Possess an Attitude of Reverence and Respect for the Word of God.

One of the greatest safeguards against mishandling the Word of Truth is to maintain a wholesome reverence for God's Word. If the interpreter recognizes the awesomeness of the Book he is interpreting, there will be less tendency to handle it

lightly. A proper respect will act as a restraint against using the Word to project his own ideas. David said, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psalms 119:6).

E. The Interpreter Must Accept the Total Inspiration of the Scriptures

According to Paul, in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." The Holy Spirit inspired the Word; it was "God-breathed." The Holy Spirit breathed into human vessels the very thoughts and words He wanted written. The Word flowed through those human channels involving, but not violating, their emotions, education, experiences, and personalities. Yet the Holy Spirit guarded and preserved each phrase, thought, and word from any error, omission, or inaccuracy. According to Peter, in II Peter 1:21, ". . . holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (see also I Peter 1:10-12). If the interpreter does not accept the total inspiration of the Scriptures, it will be impossible for him to properly interpret them.

F. The Interpreter Must Approach the Word of God in True Faith

Hebrews 11:3 tells us "Through faith we understand. . ." Reason alone cannot perceive and grasp the Divine communication. It is, unfortunately, possible to have eyes and not see; ears and not hear; a heart and yet not perceive (Matthew 13:10-17; Isaiah 6:9, 10). It was because the religious leaders depended on reason alone that they could not comprehend the sayings of Christ (Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 12:18-27; John 9:39-10:6). An overdependence on reason will result in faulty interpretation and misunderstanding. Faith, however, is not contrary to reason, but rather above it. Faith brings understanding to the heart which reason alone could never acquire. "But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

G. The Interpreter Needs a Renewed Mind

In Romans 12:2 the command is given; "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. . ." (see also Ephesians 4:23). The natural and carnal mind is at enmity with God and is not subject to His law. It cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. Only the regenerated mind can feel at home in the Scriptures (I Corinthians 2:14-16; Romans 8:5-7; Philippians 2:2, 3).

H. The Interpreter Needs to Depend Upon the Holy Spirit's Illumination

It is necessary that the interpreter receive illumination from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit inspired the Word and it is He who must interpret that Word. This occurs through illumination. The Bible is primarily a spiritual book, and spiritual things must be spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:7-16). The interpreter must recognize the theological difference between (1) Revelation, (2) Inspiration, and (3) Illumination.

1. **Revelation** is **imparted truth** which could not be discovered by natural reasoning. The Bible is the written revelation of God. In it God has revealed Himself; that is, His nature, character and being. All that may be known of God in this life is founded in and upon the Scriptures. They are the only inspired and infallible authority for all Christian faith and practice.
2. **Inspiration** describes the **process** by which the revelation was recorded. The Scriptures are an infallible revelation because of inspiration. God brought infallible revelation through fallible men without violating their personalities (II Peter 1:20, 21; II Timothy 3:16). Revelation is the substance and inspiration is the process by which that substance is Divinely communicated.

3. **Illumination** is the **perception** of truth brought about by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Many times the word "revelation" in the New Testament actually refers, theologically, to illumination (Ephesians 1:17, 18). The believer today simply receives illumination of the revelation given by inspiration. Illumination is the supernatural opening of the understanding to receive that which is revealed in Scripture. Inspiration was infallible; Illumination is fallible. The Holy Spirit knows what He meant when He inspired the Word; we, therefore, need His illumination. We must be sensitive to the Spirit, for it is His ministry to lead us into all truth (John 15:26; 16:12, 13). The agent of inspiration becomes the agent of illumination and interpretation.



I. The Interpreter Needs to Maintain a Spirit and Attitude of Prayer

Those who wrote the Bible were all men of prayer. Much of the Word was communicated to them by the Spirit of God while they were in an attitude of prayer. Prayer is the method by which man communicates with God. Illumination of the Word will most often come as the interpreter waits upon the Lord in prayer. The apostles of the New Testament said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

J. The Interpreter Needs to Meditate on the Word

In meditation upon the Word of God, the Spirit is able to bring holy thoughts to the heart and mind of the interpreter. To meditate means to "ponder; reflect; think deeply; to converse with oneself." David said of the righteous man, "In his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalms 1:2) (See also Joshua 1:8; Psalms 119:48, 78, 148).

K. The Interpreter Must be Intellectually Honest

Jesus said that an honest heart is good ground in which the seed of the Word may grow and bear fruit (Luke 8:15). If there is not intellectual honesty the interpreter can make the Word say whatever he desires. The dishonest interpreter can make the Scripture support any false doctrine he wishes to disseminate (II Corinthians 4:2; II Peter 3:15, 16; Ephesians 4:14). The false cults in Christendom, with their corrupt systems of hermeneutics, are not intellectually honest. Rather they twist the words of Scripture to suit their doctrines, deceiving thousands of people.

L. The Interpreter Needs to Recognize the Unity of the Spirit and the Word

The Spirit and the Word agree (I John 5:7, 8). The Spirit inspired the Word and so will never contradict it. No person can claim illumination by the Spirit in his interpretation of any passage if that interpretation is in conflict with other passages of Scripture. The believer must discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (I John 4:1-6). The spirit of error can take a verse and purport it to say opposite of that which the spirit of truth is saying; when in reality no verse can be made to contradict another verse. The Spirit will never communicate to the mind of the believer any doctrine or meaning of Scripture which is not already in Scripture itself.

M. The Interpreter Needs to Recognize the Unity and Harmony of the Progressive Revelation of Scripture

1. There is *unity of progression* in the books of the Bible. The Bible is a unity; it is one Book of many books. A survey of the Bible shows clearly that the revelation of God to fallen man has been progressive. The revelation of the plan of redemption moves progressively through the histories of the Old and New Testaments. This leads to the realization that no one book of the Bible is complete in and of itself. Each book needs the other books to supply that which is incomplete in it. Every book has some main emphasis or theme which is only a part of the whole, and which adds to the chain of truth already linked together by the preceding books.
2. There is *harmony of revelation* in the books of the Bible; no book contradicts another. Each adds to and complements the others so that the sixty-six books of the Bible are a unity; a progressive revelation; one harmonious whole. Truth itself is a harmonious whole; the interpreter must, therefore, gather every verse in each book pertaining to a particular subject in order to see what the Spirit has revealed concerning that subject.

N. The Interpreter Must Understand the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments

The theme of both Old and New Testaments is Jesus Christ and His plan of redemption. The Old Testament should be viewed as preparatory to the New Testament, with the Cross the dividing line between the two. Both testaments must be interpreted in the light of that which took place at the Cross. The dealings of God with Israel and the Gentiles under the Old Covenant must be distinguished from His dealings with them under the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

O. The Interpreter Needs to be Diligent in His Use of Study Resources

The interpreter must avail himself of proven resource materials. It is pseudo-spirituality for an interpreter to boast that he studies only the Bible. Many men of God have produced study resources which are invaluable to the interpreter, and to ignore these aids is to sever oneself from much needed help. The Holy Spirit will not help an intellectually slothful interpreter; the student must not expect the Holy Spirit to do what he can do himself. However, this is not to deny the interpreter's utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit's illumination. A delicate balance must be constantly maintained between the spiritual and the intellectual. Paul exhorted Timothy; "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (I Timothy 4:13). "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Timothy 2:15).

P. The Interpreter Needs to Possess a Sound Mind

In II Timothy 1:7 we read, "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." A sound mind has several distinct qualities:

1. Well-balanced
 - a. Not highly fanciful
 - b. Not hasty in judgment
 - c. Not given to extremes or vain and foolish notions
2. Quick and clean in perception
3. Acute in intellect
4. Good judgment and reasoning ability
5. Able to communicate clearly

Chapter 3

THE METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

The interpreter of Scripture must constantly keep in clear focus the basic objective of interpretation: discovering the meaning intended by the author when he wrote. Through the centuries the interpreters of Scripture have developed various methods of interpretation. (This development through history will be traced in Chapter 4.) These methods comprised and actually originated as differing approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. As they were developed they became comprehensive systems of interpretation, each possessing its own set of rules. As methods, they each include their own distinctive group of principles.

Some of the most prominent methods will now be briefly defined and evaluated.

I. THE ALLEGORICAL METHOD

A. **Origin:** The allegorical method originated through the union of Greek philosophy and religion. With the rise of philosophy, the Greeks began to realize that they could not interpret their religious writings literally and still hold to their philosophy. If both were taken literally they would be contradictory. Because of their new found loyalty to philosophy they had to conclude, in order to reconcile the two, that their religious writings meant something other than what they literally said. The method they created to do this was allegorism.

B. **Definition:** The allegorical method presumes that beneath the plain and obvious sense of Scripture lies its true meaning. It believes that what the words of Scripture literally say are only external "chaff" which hides the true spiritual "wheat" of the Word. In allegorization, a passage with obvious literal meaning is interpreted using a point by point comparison, which brings out a hidden spiritual meaning not evident in the plain language of the passage. This method has been applied to the whole of Scripture by allegorists both ancient and modern. As an example of allegorism, Tan (p. 38) cites Pope Gregory the Great's interpretation of the Book of Job: "The patriarch's three friends denote the heretics; his seven sons are the twelve Apostles; his seven thousand sheep are God's faithful people; and His three thousand hump-backed camels are the depraved Gentiles."

C. **Evaluation:** Centuries have proven the allegorical method to be quite inadequate in the interpretation of Scripture. The error of this method begins at its foundational assumption: that what God said in plain language is not really what He meant.

It is a dangerous method in that there are no Scriptural boundaries to guide its implementation. Undoubtedly, this is the reason for the great variety of contradictory theological positions among allegorists. Through the allegorical method Scripture is interpreted apart from its grammatical-historical meaning. What the author was trying to plainly communicate is almost totally ignored and what the interpreter desires to say is forced upon it. Allegorism obscures both the literal and figurative elements in Scripture. By exalting the interpreter's intentions and ignoring the author's intended meaning, the allegorical method fails to reach the basic goal of interpretation and must be discarded.

Extreme typology borders on allegorization. However, it must be recognized that these two are not synonymous. The difference, as cited by Mickelsen (p. 238) quoting K. J. Woolcombe, is that typology is "the search for linkages between events, persons or things within the historical framework of revelation, whereas allegorism is the search for secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meanings of a

narrative." The interpreter must also be careful not to confuse the practice of allegorization with the figure of speech called allegory. (For a discussion of the interpretation of allegory refer to Chapter 23, "The Allegorical Principle.")

II. THE MYSTICAL METHOD

A. **Origin:** Closely associated with the allegorical method is the mystical method of interpretation. Some scholars even view them as synonymous. However, here we will consider it on its own. In relation to the interpretation of Scripture, the origin of the mystical method can be traced to the Hagadic method of exegesis developed by the Palestinian Jews in the inter-testamental period. This method involved both allegorical and mystical interpretations of the Old Testament. In being over-anxious to apply Scripture to the lives of the people, interpreters mistook application for interpretation and read into Scripture depths of meaning not plainly there.

B. **Definition:** The mystical method presumes that hidden beneath the surface of the words and their plain sense there lies a multiplicity of meanings. It goes beyond the allegorical method by opening the door to a wide variety of interpretations. Using the mystical method, a passage of Scripture with obvious literal meaning is interpreted to have a number of exalted spiritual meanings. Because of the professed desire to reach beyond the letter into the spirit of the Word, the function of this method has also been called "spiritualization."

As an example of mystical interpretation, Terry (p. 165) refers to Swedenborg's interpretation of Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill." In applying a three-fold sense of Scripture to this commandment, he says that its *natural sense* is that murder, hatred and revenge are forbidden; its *spiritual sense* is that "to act the devil and destroy a man's soul" is forbidden; and its *heavenly sense* is that for the angels, hating the Lord and His Word is as murder.

C. **Evaluation:** History has proven the mystical method to be misleading and of little value in the interpreting of Scripture. The error in its foundational assumption goes beyond that of the allegorical method in that it presumes that a Scripture may have any number of meanings. In other words, in authoring Scripture, God meant many things other than those He actually said. The objection to this is, that if God did not mean what He said, then how can the interpreter discover what He did mean? Instead of regarding Scripture as a sensible communication from God, mystics turn it into a riddle and make it say almost anything other than what God meant for it to say. Differing from allegorizers, who tend to follow some system of comparison, spiritualizers are more erratic, not bound by any law. They each become a law of interpretation to themselves. By exalting the interpreter's intentions and ignoring the author's intended meaning, the mystical method fails to reach the basic goal of interpretation and must be discarded.

III. THE DEVOTIONAL METHOD

A. **Origin:** Like the mystical, the devotional method of interpretation originated with the Hagadic exegesis of the inter-testamental period. In seeking to apply the Scriptures to their lives, Jewish scribes began to interpret them in the light of their own life situations. In their zeal for application they produced faulty interpretation. In church history this method had its greatest emphasis among the Pietists of the Post-Reformation period. Thus it has also been known as the Pietistic method of interpretation.

B. **Definition:** The devotional method believes that the Bible was written for the personal edification of every believer and that its personalized hidden meaning can only be revealed by the shining of a great inner spiritual light. I John 2:20 is often used as a proof-text for this. It searches the Scripture to discover meaning that will build up the

spiritual life. In interpretation that which is most important is not what God said to others, but what He is saying to the interpreter. Thus, to interpret the Scriptures devotionally is to search beyond their plain obvious meaning for spiritual meaning applicable to the believer's life. As an example of devotional interpretation, some well-meaning Christians have interpreted Matthew 10:9, 10, 19 to mean that in their evangelizing they should neither take any material provision nor make any spiritual preparation.

C. Evaluation: Time has proven the devotional method to be quite dangerous as a system of interpretation. The chief danger of this method is that in seeking to apply Scripture personally the interpreter may ignore the plain literal sense of what God was saying to those in that particular historical setting, and thus apply Scripture self-centeredly. Two other weaknesses, noted by Ramm (p. 62, 63), are that devotional interpretation falls prey to allegorization or excessive typology, and may become a substitute for the requisite exegetical and doctrinal studies of the Bible.

However, this does not rule out altogether the devotional, practical and edifying use of the Scripture. Certainly this is a prominent part of the purpose of Scripture, and the Word of God is of no value to the believer unless it is applied to his life practically. The interpreter must recognize that Scripture is meant to be applied devotionally, but that this can only be properly done after it has been interpreted literally and historically. Devotional interpretation must also be harmonized with doctrinal interpretation.

IV. THE RATIONALISTIC METHOD

A. Origin: Having its seeds in ancient history, the rationalistic method blossomed during the Post-Reformation period and is still bearing fruit in this modern age. Through recent centuries the seat of rationalism has been in Germany, where the Schools of Higher Criticism have attempted to undermine the authority of Scripture. There are actually many different methods that are here being summed up under this title because of their common characteristics.

B. Definition: The rationalistic method presumes that the Bible is not the authoritative inspired Word of God. It interprets Scripture as a human document in the light of human reason. With the rationalist, "Nature is the standard, and reason is the guide." If the Bible can be made to harmonize with the knowledge of the interpreter, then it is to be understood as meaning what it says; but if not, it is to be regarded as mythical, or used by way of accommodation. Thus, a sort of educated modern mentality is used to judge and interpret Scripture. As examples of rationalistic interpretation: to explain away the supernatural, Lazarus is said to have gone into a coma rather than having died, and Jesus is said to have only appeared to have walked on the water; to undermine the authority and veracity of Scripture, historical events such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the transfiguration of Christ are explained as either fanciful exaggerations or contrived myths.

C. Evaluation: Several generations have proven this method to be little more than the method of unbelief. In fact, rationalistic exegesis could be better termed "exit-Jesus." Though claiming the title "rational," this method is actually most irrational. It is virtually uninterested in what the writers literally said, but cares only for what the interpreter thinks they should have said. It exalts the god of reason above the authority of the Word of God. By it the interpreter sets himself up as the standard of truth and only sees value in Scripture as it confirms his conclusions. For the interpreter who views Scripture as the inspired Word of God, the rationalistic method in all its various forms must be totally rejected.

V. THE LITERAL METHOD

A. **Origin:** In relation to Scripture, the literal method of interpretation is the oldest in existence. It is said to have originated with Ezra, the Father of Hermeneutics. The progress of its history will be traced in Chapter 4 through the Palestinian Jews, Christ and the Apostles, the School of Antioch, and the Reformers, to the fundamentalist Conservatives of the present day.

B. **Definition:** The literal method assumes that the words of Scripture in their plain evident meaning are reliable; that God intended His revelation to be understood by all who believe; that the words of Scripture communicate what God wants man to know; and that God based the communication of truth on the regular laws governing written communication, thereby intending for it to be interpreted by those same laws. This is not to deny the Holy Spirit's involvement in both the production and the interpretation of the Bible.

The expression "literal sense" may be defined as: the usual, customary, and socially accepted meaning conveyed by words or expressions in their particular contexts. It involves that which a particular word meant to the original writer and readers. It recognizes that a word may have different meanings in different contexts and thus must be interpreted in the light of its contextual usage. It contends that though a word may possibly have several meanings, in any one particular usage it generally will have but one intended meaning.

According to Tan (p. 29), "To interpret 'literally' means to explain the original sense of the speaker or writer according to the normal, customary, and proper usages of words and language." He notes that this method is also called the Grammatico-Historical method because, in order to determine the normal and customary usages of Bible language, the accepted rules of grammar and rhetoric must be considered and the historical and cultural aspects of Bible times must be taken into consideration.

Though we do not totally agree with the results of Tan's application of the literal method, we do endorse his expansion of it (p. 30-35), in the following four areas:

1. **The Literal Sense does not exclude the figurative.** Some interpreters have used the term figurative in opposition to the term literal, as though the figurative meaning of words were opposed to their literal sense. However, in that figurative language is a part of normal communication, it also is encompassed by the literal system of interpretation. Thus, the literal includes the figurative.
2. **The Literal Method does not exclude the spiritual meaning.** Some interpreters have used the term spiritual in opposition to the term literal as though the spiritual meaning of Scripture were opposed to its literal meaning. Under the title of "the spiritual method," some interpreters have spiritualized Scripture to mean something other than what it says. The literal method, though rejecting spiritualization, does admit the spiritual substance and nature of the Scriptures. The Bible is a spiritual book conveying spiritual truth and therefore must be spiritually interpreted. This can be done by accepting as sufficient the illuminated literal meaning of the words.
3. **The Literal Interpretation does not exclude application.** Some interpreters confuse interpretation with application. John Calvin said, "The Word of God is inexhaustible and applicable at all times, but there is a difference between explanation and application, and application must be consistent with explanation." The task of literal interpretation is first to discern the meaning of God's Word, and then, upon that basis, to apply it. A general rule of the literal method is: "There is one interpretation, but many applications."

4. **The Literal Method does not exclude depth of meaning.** Some interpreters believe that the literal method greatly limits the believer in discovering the divine depths of truth latent in Scripture. Indeed, some definitions of this method do, but here it is defined to include depth of meaning within certain necessary limitations. In that God is the virtual Author of Scripture, some truths therein are patent, outward and obvious, while others are latent, inward and hidden. Historical events do have spiritual significance, and certain figures of speech, such as types, symbols, and allegories, do have hidden meaning. However, this meaning is solidly based on the earthly sense of the words and necessitates that interpretation remain within the proper boundaries of truths plainly revealed in God's Word.

C. **Evaluation:** In conclusion, the literal method stands out among the rest as the only sound, safe and sensible approach to the interpretation of Scripture. Each of the other methods have been proven inadequate in that they lack God-given and well-defined boundaries. It is upon this literal method that this text is built.

Chapter 4

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICS

The student will benefit greatly from a general knowledge of the history of Biblical hermeneutics. History serves to show the origin, progress and development of hermeneutical principles. It gives, as well, a working knowledge of the different periods, schools and methods of Biblical interpretation.

In addition it shows what external and internal pressures were brought to bear upon the interpreter of the Scriptures. One may look at the search by God's people through the centuries to discover what God meant by what He said. A knowledge of the history of Biblical hermeneutics can be a valuable safeguard, and at times a guideline, in helping the interpreter avoid the problems faced by previous interpreters. The more one understands the proper principles of interpretation, the better qualified he will be to handle the Word of God as an interpreter of the Divine communication.

Since the Fall, man has by nature been spiritually and mentally dull concerning the things of God. The scriptures attest to this fact: Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-17; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; II Peter 3:16; Luke 24:45. Sin cut off fellowship between God and man, and produced a communication gap which must be bridged. God took the initiative in restoring fellowship by giving His Word. That message must be interpreted for man. The History of hermeneutics shows us man's efforts to receive this Divine communication.

The history of hermeneutics has been more fully covered by better qualified men, and the student is referred to these in the Bibliography. The present consideration attempts only to give a brief history of hermeneutics, defining the boundaries of each period, listing the methods most often used, and giving a sketch of the key men and developments of that period.

Throughout the course of these historical sketches the student will come across indented notations. These are interpretative lessons which can be drawn from those particular time periods. This chapter is not designed to catalogue history, rather to interpret it. It will be seen that the prevailing attitude toward the Scriptures during any particular period generally affected the methods by which the Scriptures were interpreted.

I. JEWISH HERMENEUTICS

A. **Period (457 BC - 1975 AD):** The period of Jewish hermeneutics reaches from approximately the time of Ezra to the present day. This is due to the fact that the nation as a whole rejected their Messiah and therefore Jewish hermeneutics is to be distinguished from Christian hermeneutics.

B. **Methods:** In Ancient Jewish hermeneutics the dominant methods of interpretation were the literal and allegorical. In the last few centuries modern Judaism has emphasized rationalistic methods of interpretation.

C. History

1. **Ezra, The Father of Hermeneutics:** The weight of opinion considers Ezra to be the first of the notable Jewish interpreters and the founder of the Palestinian literal school of interpretation. With the loss of the temple and its ceremonial function and the cessation of the throne of Judah at Jerusalem, the Jews in Babylonian captivity resorted to the Sacred Writings for comfort and strength. The Law and the Prophets became their refuge when bereft of all the externals of the Mosaic religion. At the close

of the 70 years in Babylon, a remnant of the Jews returned to Palestine to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Their desire was to restore the glory of their Mosaic heritage. However, the Babylonian Jews had learned to speak Aramaic, not Hebrew. Thus there existed a language gap between them and their Scriptures. Ezra the scribe, and with him a number of Levites, undertook the great task of translating and interpreting the Sacred Writings, concentrating on the Law (Nehemiah 8:1-8; 10-18; Ezra 8:15-20).

NOTE: This illustrates that in interpretation it is essential to first bridge the linguistic gap. All hermeneutics is based first on translation.

Ezra the priestly scribe took the Book of the Law and, standing on a pulpit of wood, *"caused the people to understand the Law . . . So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"* (Nehemiah 8:7, 8).

So we see in the efforts of Ezra and the Levites the first intimation in Scripture of Jewish interpretation and formal exposition of the Word of God. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show how the areas of the Law pertaining to mixed marriages, observances of feasts and fasts were interpreted quite literally to the people by this great priest and scribe.

NOTE: Thus we see Ezra using literal and practical methods of interpretation.

2. **The Synagogue — Great and Local:** The word "synagogue" means literally "to lead, bring or gather together." It refers to a place where Jews gather for worship and religious study. The synagogue dates back to the time of the captivity in Babylon. Having no Temple and desirous of gathering together for the reading of the sacred Scriptures, the Jews built synagogues. By means of the synagogue service the Law was kept alive in the hearts of the people. Ezekiel's house was very likely such a gathering place (Ezekiel 8:1; 20:1-3).

The Great Synagogue, in Jewish history, was an assembly or council of 120 members, probably founded and presided over by Ezra after the return from the captivity. Nehemiah referred to the "chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites" under Ezra the Scribe, gathered together to interpret the Law (Nehemiah 8:13). This verse implies the formation of a council to arrange religious matters; the forerunner of the Sanhedrin, which had its earliest roots in the time of Moses (Numbers 11:16, 17) and Jehosaphat (II Chronicles 19:8-11). The Great Synagogue of Ezra's time instituted several post-Mosaic festivals and organized the synagogue ritual, including the systematic reading and exposition of the Scriptures. Their motto was "Set a hedge about the Law."

The Great Synagogue was represented by "the elders" and "they of old time" (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33). These succeeded the ministry of the prophets and continued through to the days of Christ. By that time it had developed into the Sanhedrin; which consisted of:

- a. The High Priest as President
- b. The Chief Priests or Heads of the 24 Courses of the Priests
- c. The Scribes or Lawyers, interpreters of the Law
- d. The Elders, who were representatives of the laity

Because of the need for mass instruction the Jews began to institute local

synagogues in various cities, which functioned in allegiance to the Sanhedrin. The local synagogue's services were presided over by a Chief or Rabbi, assisted by a council of elders (Mark 5:22, 35; Luke 4:20; John 16:2; Acts 18:8). The main object was not public worship, but rather religious instruction from the Law. By New Testament times most cities had a synagogue in which "Moses was preached" (Acts 15:21). However, these local synagogues could only promulgate the interpretations of the law handed down from the Sanhedrin. Thus, when the Sanhedrin rejected Jesus as their Messiah, so did the local synagogues.

NOTE: Centralized ecclesiastical authority may originate with noble motivation, but it can easily degenerate until it defeats its own purpose. The same walls that lock truth in may also lock further truth out. We should constantly be aware of the dangers involved in any central ecclesiastical body becoming the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture.

3. **The Scribes:** The Hebrew scribe or writer appears to have been at first a court or military official (Exodus 5:6; Judges 5:14). Later he became a secretary or recorder for kings, priests and prophets (II Samuel 8:17; 20:25; II Kings 18:18; I Kings 4:3). Finally the scribe was acknowledged as a secretary of state, a doctor or teacher (Ezra 7:6). As a group, scribes became a class or guild (I Chronicles 2:55). They were the copyists and authorized expounders of the sacred Scriptures. By the time of Christ they had become known as Lawyers; the official interpreters and expounders of the Law (Matthew 22:35; 23:1-33; Luke 5:30; 10:25). By failing to maintain the purity of interpretation exemplified by Ezra, they came under the same denunciations of Christ as did the Priests, Pharisees and Sadducees.

NOTE: by missing the spirit of the truth the interpreter will misinterpret the truth and be left only with the letter of it.

4. **Schools of Interpretation:** In the generations succeeding Ezra and Nehemiah, and with the end of the prophetic voice with the prophet Malachi, various schools of interpretation emerged.
 - a. **The Palestinian Jews** — Ezra was the founder of the Palestinian literalist school of interpretation. Following his example, the Jews accepted totally the inspiration and authority of the Word of God. Their greatest objective was the interpretation of the Law. In dealing with the Scriptures, their order of priority was (1) the Law, (2) the Prophets and (3) the Writings.

However, in seeking to "set a hedge about the law," they desired to formulate an authoritative interpretation. While they guarded the law to the letter, they also accumulated numerous traditions which they placed alongside the law. These traditions grew out of their desire to apply the law to their ever-changing conditions of life. As this body of traditional interpretations grew it became known as the Oral Law, which through the centuries gained equal status with the Written Law in authority. Christ rebuked them for this because the oral traditions made the Word of God "null and void" (Mark 7:13).

In the 2nd Century A.D., Rabbi Judah produced a written compilation of all the oral law then in existence. This Second Law became known as the Mishna, which means "the oral doctrine and the study of it."

In order to further establish the authority of the oral law the Jews originated a false tradition saying that Moses had received it at Mount Sinai. They claimed that he had passed it on to Joshua, who gave it to the elders. The elders passed it on to the prophets, and later it came into the hands of the Rabbis.

NOTE: By adding to the Word of God and canonizing their interpretations, interpreters may cause the Scriptures to be nullified. The interpreter must never exalt his interpretation of Scripture to a place of equal authority with Scripture itself.

In the Mishna, which was an interpretation of the Mosaic Law, there were two kinds of interpretation:

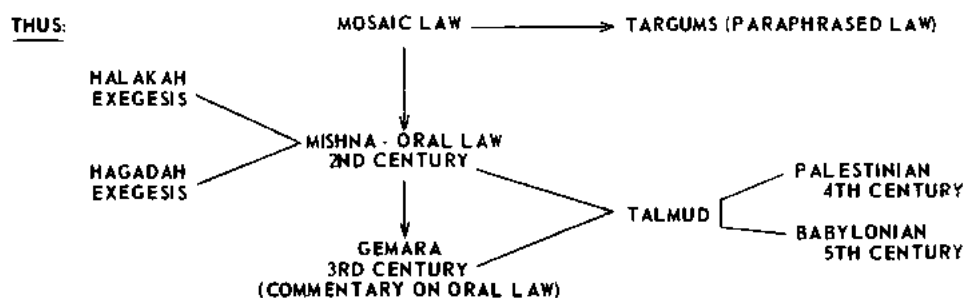
- (1) **Halakah** — This refers to legal exegesis which, in the Mishna, was only used in its treatment of the Pentateuch. It was used primarily in dealing with the code of the law. Its aim was to deduce from the Law rules on subjects not specifically dealt with in the Law. This was done by comparing and combining relevant written laws. This type of interpretation could be described as rigid and legalistic.

NOTE: Through this kind of interpretation, much was read into the Law of Moses that was not really there. It also led to the authoritative interpretation by the Pharisees.

- (2) **Hagadah** — This refers to homiletic exegesis which, in the Mishna, was used throughout its treatment of the entire Old Testament. It was used primarily in dealing with non-legal portions of Scripture, such as history, prophecy and poetry. Its aim was to stir the Jews to godly living. This was done by using such homiletic devices as wise sayings, parables, allegories, legends, proverbs and mystical interpretations of the Old Testament events. This type of interpretation could be described as devotional and sermonistic, with a constant emphasis on the practical.

NOTE: Because this kind of interpretation utilized much non-Biblical material which became authoritative, it weakened the authority of the Scriptures and opened the door to the authoritative use of more legends, secret meanings and allegorical expositions.

With the codification of the Mishna, many Rabbis began to write commentaries on it. These interpretations of the oral law were produced from the 3rd to the 5th Centuries and became known as the Gemara. Thus, the Gemara was a commentary on a commentary. These two, the Mishna and the Gemara, together constituted the Talmud, of which there were two versions: one produced in Palestine



at the close of the 4th Century; one produced in Babylon at the close of the 5th Century. Other writings, known as the Targums, were actually paraphrases of most of the Old Testament.

Since the Hagadic methods of interpretation spread throughout the world of Judaism it is worthwhile to note some of the Hagadic principles. Terry (p. 608) refers to four of the 32 rules of interpretation collected by Eliezer Ben-Jose as examples of Hagadic hermeneutics.

- (1) The use of one of three different particles indicated that there were hidden meanings in the text not evident to the "literal" reader. This rule is illustrated by Genesis 21:1, where it is said, "Jehovah visited Sarah" (הָרָא = Sarah, הָרָא = herself). The untranslated particle (הָרָא — normally used to identify and emphasize the object of a verb) is supposed to show that the Lord also visited other women besides Sarah.

NOTE: There is no Scriptural basis for this principle. It obviously leads to random exegesis and fanciful interpretations.

- (2) A subject will shed light on others while it explains itself. Thus in Jeremiah 46:22, "Its cry shall go like the serpent," is a statement which serves, besides describing the loud cry of Egypt, to indicate that the serpent sent up a great cry when the Lord pronounced His curse against it in Eden.

NOTE: This principle detracts from any balanced emphasis of the plain meaning of Scripture.

- (3) Great concepts are represented and made plain by small natural things. Thus in Deuteronomy 32:2, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain," the great doctrines of revelation are made understandable by comparison with the rain.

NOTE: This principle is consistent with Scripture and is actually a principle of symbolism demonstrating accommodation.

- (4) Explanations are obtained by reducing the letters of a word to their numerical value and substituting another word or phrase having the same value. Thus, the sum of the letters in the name of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, is equivalent to 318, the number of trained men (Genesis 14:14). Accordingly this shows that Eliezer alone was worth a host of servants.

NOTE: This principle has no foundation in Scripture and turns the Scriptures into putty in the hands of the exegete.

The Palestinian Jews did accept the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, but this belief degenerated into Bibliolatry. With a superstitious reverence for the Word of God, they viewed the very letters of the Law as sacred and even counted them. A prime example of the kind of error that Hagadic hermeneutics led to is seen in Rabbi Akiba. He maintained that every repetition, figure, parallelism, synonym, word, letter, particle, and even the very shape of a letter, had a hidden or secret meaning.

NOTE: The error seen here is letterism, which sees great significance in the minutest details. This arose when men began to worship the Scriptures and forgot their Author.

In reviewing Palestinian Jewish hermeneutics, one ascetic sect worthy

of note is the Qumran community. They were a group who had isolated themselves from society in order to live in strict accordance with the Law of Moses. Their exclusivism crept into their hermeneutics, and they tended to interpret Scripture in terms of their own community. This often led them to ignore the context in interpreting a Scripture.

Mickelsen (p. 23) notes that their three main procedures were to interpret the text in terms of (1) Qumran, (2) another contemporary group, and (3) eschatology. His evaluation is that in their haste to apply the Scriptures to themselves and their own times the Qumran interpreters failed to recognize what the writers were trying to convey to those who first read their words.

NOTE: This illustrates one way in which the interpreter can be lead to violate the foundational principle of context. Their exclusivism caused them to be self-centered in their interpretation. Thus, they fell into the pitfall of building their eschatology around their own movement. A “we are the people” attitude will always produce biased and corrupted interpretation.

The Palestinian Jews did develop some sound principles of exegesis that are still valid today. Ramm (p. 46-47) gleans six principles from Hillel, Ishmael and Eliezer, notable Jewish interpreters. He states that they insisted on the following rules.

- (1) A word must be understood in terms of its sentence and a sentence in terms of its context.
- (2) Scriptures dealing with similar topics should be compared, and in some instances a third Scripture would relieve the apparent contradiction between two Scriptures.
- (3) A clear passage is to be given preference over an obscure one if they deal with the same subject matter.
- (4) Very close attention is to be paid to spelling, grammar, and figures of speech.
- (5) By use of logic we can determine the application of Scripture to those problems in life Scripture has not specifically treated.
- (6) The God of Israel spoke in the tongues of men and this asserts that the God of Israel has adapted His revelation to its recipients.

NOTE: These are all valid principles which are discussed in other portions of this text.

The Palestinian Jews are to be commended for their acceptance of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures and for their development of some sound principles in relation to literal interpretation. However, a failure to produce sound exegesis was caused by their yielding to traditionalism, letterism and exclusivism.

- b. **The Alexandrian Jews** — As the colony of Jews in Alexandria were Hellenized they developed a system of hermeneutics distinct from that of the Jews in Palestine. Their greatest link with Palestinian interpretation was their acceptance of Hagadic principles. This can be seen by the admittance of apocryphal books into the Septuagint. The Jews being saturated with Greek culture, it was only suitable that

their Hebrew Scriptures be translated into the modern Greek language. While performing this task, the Jews demonstrated a Hagadic looseness by adding philosophy, fiction and legend to Scripture.

NOTE: Wrong concepts concerning inspiration always constitute a wrong foundation for interpretation. If the foundation is out of line, then the whole structure will be as well.

The interpretation of the Scriptures by the Alexandrian Jews was deeply affected by their Greek cultural environment. The rise of Greek philosophy had caused problems in that it contradicted the established Greek religion. To solve the conflict between their philosophy and religion, the Greeks developed the method of interpretation known as allegorization. They taught that the true meaning of a passage was not its literal or plain sense, but was secret, hidden beneath the surface. This allowed them to interpret their religious writings to mean whatever they desired. By allegorizing the religious heritage of their gods, the Greeks were able to bridge the gap which existed between their religion and philosophy.

The Jews in Alexandria, though rejecting Greek religion, began to accept Greek philosophy. Though "Sons of Moses" in religion, the Jews became "Sons of Plato" in philosophy. Consequently they faced a problem very similar to that of the Greeks: how to reconcile their Hebrew faith with their Greek philosophy. The Jews found a ready-made answer in Greek allegorization. It was the "golden calf" that had just come out of the melting pot of Greek religion and philosophy, and the Jews found it convenient to bow down to the same idol. Later on, this method of allegorization filtered into the Christian Church, causing much confusion.

NOTE: Though Scripture often needs to be interpreted culturally, the interpreter must recognize that God's Word is essentially trans-cultural. He must avoid the danger of allowing his own culture to dictate and corrupt his interpretation of Scripture.

Aristobulus (160 BC) is suggested to have been the first Jewish writer who used allegorical methods of interpretation. He said that Greek philosophy borrowed from the Old Testament and especially from the Law of Moses. He also taught that Greek philosophy could be found in the Law by using the allegorical method.

NOTE: Much misinterpretation comes because the interpreter reads into the Scriptures his own ideas or bias. This is called eisegesis (reading into), which is the opposite of exegesis (drawing out what is really there).

The best known of all Jewish interpreters in Alexandria was Philo (20 BC–54 AD). He was a man of mixture: he possessed a deep reverence for the Scriptures, but also had a great fondness for Greek philosophy. To reconcile these, he counted Greek philosophy as belonging to the Law of Moses. To substantiate this, he developed an elaborate system of allegorization, borrowing some of the Halachic and Hagadic principles from the Palestinian Jews. Though not its originator, he is spoken of as the "fountain-head" of allegorical exegesis. Berkhof (p. 16) briefly defines Philo's principles of interpretation to be the following:

- (1) The literal sense must be excluded if it says anything unworthy of God.
- (2) The literal sense must be excluded if a contradiction would be involved.
- (3) The literal sense must be excluded when the Scripture itself allegorizes.
- (4) The Scripture is to be allegorized:
 - when expressions are doubled
 - when superfluous words are used
 - when there is a repetition of facts already known
 - when an expression is varid
 - when synonyms are employed
 - when a play on words is possible in any of its varieties
 - when words admit of a slight variation
 - when the expression is unusual
 - when there is anything abnormal in the number or tense

Philo's principles can be summarized under two main points: he believed that there was a literal sense to Scripture, but that it represented the body of flesh — for the immature; the allegorical or hidden meaning was the important sense, representing the soul — for the mature.

As an example of Philo's exegesis, Ramm (p. 28), points out that Philo interpreted Abraham's journey to Palestine to actually be referring to a Stoic philosopher's moving from sensual understanding (Chaldea), to the enlightenment of Platonism (Palestine), and marrying abstract wisdom (Sarah). Thus Philo missed the mark. As an exegete he was more of an example of what should not be done. He ignored the grammatical, contextual, stylistic and historical factors and opened the door to all types of misinterpretation. By de-emphasizing the historical standpoint of the author, he forced strange and mystic meanings into the text. Through allegorization, he ended up compromising and corrupting the very Scriptures he revered so highly. This could be said as well of the Alexandrian Jews in general.

NOTE: The wrong use of allegorization causes it to become an arbitrary system of interpretation, allowing the interpreter to impose upon Scripture any meaning he desires. He can make the Scriptures say whatever he chooses for them to say. Extreme allegorization does not take into consideration what the writer had in mind when he wrote. It, nevertheless whether theoretically or practically, ignores the literal sense of Scripture.

- c. **The Karaites** — A sect of Jews known as the Karaites ("readers") was founded in 800 AD by Anan ben David. They are considered the "Protestants" of Judaism. They rejected the authority of the oral law and the Hagadic method of exegesis. The Karaites were literalists: they accepted as basic the literal rendering of the text unless, by virtue of the nature of the sentence, this was not possible. In rejecting allegorization and the Hagadic method, their exegesis was far more sound than that of the Palestinian or Alexandrian Jews. However, they did accept the Talmud as an aid to understanding the Scriptures.

Beginning with the ninth century, the influence of the Karaites became widespread among Judaism.

NOTE: By using the literal sense as the basis for interpretation, sound exegesis will be more readily achieved.

Rabbi Saadia—Gaon (892 AD) became the first Jew to develop the science of grammar.

NOTE: The study of language is one of the first steps toward solid interpretation.

- d. **The Cabalists** — This 12th Century movement developed a system of letterism and allegorism through exegetical gymnastics; actually a hyper-literalism. The Massoretic text which had been produced by the Rabbis was looked upon as having supernatural power. The very numbers of the letters, the individual letters, the words, vowel-points, accents, all had special significance. Cabalists also employed the allegorical method of the Alexandrian Jews, resulting in absurd interpretations.

NOTE: Letterism, allegorism and a superstitious reverence for the Scriptures produces utter confusion.

- e. **The Spanish Jews** — In Spain, the Jews from the 12th to the 15th Century developed a healthier method of interpretation. The Christian Church was in a general state of darkness, but there were some Spanish Jews who did maintain at least a small lighted lamp. Even in the midst of persecution, certain key men arose and made significant contributions to the science of hermeneutics.

Aben Ezra (1092 AD) was a great rabbinical scholar who favored a thoroughly grammatical interpretation. While refuting the fanciful interpretations of his day, he contended that "if the plain interpretation of a passage be not opposed to reason, why should we seek for any other?" As a matter of balance, he did acknowledge that some phrases contained both a literal and symbolic meaning. His method was to first determine the grammatical sense of a passage, secondly to consult another version, and finally to utilize Jewish tradition.

NOTE: If the literal sense makes sense, seek no other sense.

Moses Maimonides (1135 AD) who, as a youth, was driven from Spain by the Mohammedan persecution, became known among his people as "the Second Moses". His great aims were to harmonize Judaism with science and philosophy, and to harmonize the written and oral laws. His controversial teachings divided Judaism into two bitterly opposed factions.

NOTE: If the interpreter's goal is off center, his efforts will be in vain.

- f. **The French Jews** — Among the French Jews there were two men worthy of consideration. One, a scholar of note, was Rashi (1040 AD). His method was to give a literal explanation of the Hebrew text. However, his respect for the Talmud led him to combine Hagadic exegesis with the literal.

NOTE: Holding to a literal method of interpretation will not insure pure doctrine. Mixture can infiltrate any system of hermeneutics through an inconsistency in application.

Another scholar of note was Ralbag (1300 AD). His exegetical procedure, according to Terry (p. 625), was to first explain the words of a section, to then view the passage in the light of its context, and finally to make a practical application.

NOTE: Three prominent principles of interpretation are the linguistic, context, and moral principles.

- g. **The Modern Jews** — According to Terry (p. 628), the general trend of the modern Jew is towards rationalism. Their appeal is to reason and conscience in the exposition of the Scriptures. They reject the revelation of God in Christ. They expect no Messiah nor the restoration of the Mosaic economy. Though the Jews were entrusted with the Oracles of God (Romans 3:1, 2), the veil of unbelief prohibits an understanding of them (II Corinthians 3:14-16). The Jews will never properly interpret their Scripture until they accept its key, Jesus of Nazareth.

NOTE: The Old Testament cannot be properly interpreted apart from its key, the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. APOSTOLIC HERMENEUTICS

A. **Period (26 AD–95 AD):** The period of Apostolic Hermeneutics reaches from the ministry of Christ to the death of the Apostle John.

B. **Methods:** In Apostolic Hermeneutics the literal method prevailed. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament writers infallibly interpreted the Old Testament in their writings.

C. History

1. **Jesus Christ, the Perfect Interpreter:** Because Jesus was the Living Word, He could infallibly interpret the written Word. He was the personified interpretation of the Old Testament: the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44). During His ministry, He interpreted to His disciples, from the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself. He opened their understanding accordingly. Rules or principles of interpretation were part of His very nature and being, for He was God's Word to man, incarnate; He was the bridge between God and man. The communication gap was bridged in and through Him. Because of the purity of His hermeneutics, Jesus was able to expose all corrupt interpretation. He condemned the Halachic and Hagadic tradition of the elders because they made the Word of God of none effect (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-7). He reproved the Scribes and Pharisees, the authorized interpreters of the Law, for their legalistic interpretations of the Scriptures, which brought the people into total bondage (Matthew 23:1-33). Christ also rebuked the Sadducees for their ignorance of the power of God and of the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29).

The religious leaders of His day were blinded by unbelief and false hermeneutics; thus they crucified the very Messiah whose coming their own Scriptures foretold (Acts 13:27).

The following are examples of some of the principles Jesus used in His interpretation of the Old Testament:

- a. **The Context Principle (Matthew 22:41-46)** — Jesus interpreted Psalms 110:1 in the light of the whole context of the Old Testament, which attests to the Deity of the Messiah.

- b. **The First Mention Principle (Matthew 19:3-9)** — Jesus used the first mention of marriage in Genesis 2:24 to interpret the Mosaic commandments concerning divorce.
 - c. **The Election Principle (Matthew 12:15-21)** — On the basis on the election principle, Jesus interpreted Isaiah 42: 1-4 to be a reference to His own election as the chosen servant of Jehovah.
 - d. **The Covenantal Principle (Matthew 12:1-4)** — When dealing with the violation of the Sabbath Day, Jesus brought in David, a covenant man, as a witness. Because David was involved in a higher covenant, as was Jesus, he was able to transcend the ceremonial law of the Mosaic Covenant.
 - e. **The Ethnic Division Principle (Matthew 10:5, 6)** — In commissioning the twelve apostles to go only to "the lost sheep of the House of Israel," Jesus used the ethnic division principle to interpret and apply an Old Testament prophetic stream (Jeremiah 23:1-4; 50:6, 17; Ezekiel 34:1-19).
 - f. **The Chronometrical Principle (Luke 21:20-24)** — Jesus utilized the chronometrical principle to interpret a certain prophetic portion of Daniel (Daniel 11:33).
 - g. **The Christo-Centric Principle (Luke 24:27-44)** — On the road to Emmaus, Jesus used the Christo-Centric principle to interpret portions of the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets to the two disciples.
 - h. **The Moral Principle (Matthew 24:36-39)** — Jesus used the moral principle to interpret the days of Noah and draw from them a spiritual lesson.
 - i. **The Symbolic Principle (Matthew 21:42-44)** — In interpreting two statements from the Old Testament, it seems apparent that Jesus used the symbolic principle to refer to the rock as being symbolic of Himself.
 - j. **The Parabolic Principle (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)** — With the parabolic principle, Jesus interpreted His own parable of the sower.
 - k. **The Typical Principle (Luke 11:29, 30)** — Jesus identified Jonah's experience as typical and then interpreted it using the typical principle.
2. **The Apostles, The Inspired Interpreters:** The Lord Jesus poured out His Spirit upon His Apostles. There is no doubt that great understanding and illumination came to them by the Holy Spirit (John 16:9-16; Luke 24:27, 44; II Corinthians 3:14-18). They became the infallible interpreters of the Old Testament writings. This is seen by their use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. The Apostles rejected the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament as practised in the Alexandrian school. Paul condemned Jewish fables, Jewish traditions, endless genealogies, false knowledge, Greek philosophy and the Jewish Midrashim. He knew of these things and counted them all refuse for the knowledge of God in Christ (Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 1:4; 4:7; 6:20; II Timothy 2:14-16, 23). The following are examples of some of the principles the Apostles used in their interpretation of the Old Testament.

- a. **The Context Principle (I Peter 2:4-10)** — In verse 6, Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 and then interprets it by drawing from the context of the Old Testament other relevant statements (Psalms 118:22, 23; Isaiah 8:14; Exodus 19:5, 6; Hosea 1:6, 9, 10).
- b. **The First Mention Principle (Hebrews 6:20-7:21)** — In interpreting the statement from Psalms 110:4 concerning the Melchisedec priesthood, the writer to the Hebrews uses the first mention of Melchisedec in Genesis to prove his identity.
- c. **The Comparative Mention Principle (Romans 3:1-12)** — In verse 4 Paul quotes Psalms 51:4 and substantiates his interpretation by comparing it with other references from the book of Psalms.
- d. **The Progressive Mention Principle (Hebrews 10:37-11:40)** — The writer to the Hebrews quotes a phrase from Habakkuk 2:4 and then draws many examples from the context of the entire Old Testament to develop his interpretation.
- e. **The Election Principle (Romans 9:6-13)** — Here Paul uses the election principle to interpret a phrase from Genesis 21:12: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."
- f. **The Covenantal Principle (Hebrews 8-10)** — In Hebrews 8:1-12 a quotation is made from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The writer then proceeds to use the covenantal principle to expound the meaning of that quotation.
- g. **The Ethnic Division Principle (Galatians 3:1-29)** — In verse 8 Paul quotes Genesis 12:3: "In thee shall all nations be blessed." He then uses the ethnic division principle to show the interpretation and fulfilment of that phrase.
- h. **The Chronometrical Principle (II Peter 3:1-13)** — Peter quotes Psalms 90:4 in verse 8 and then interprets it by the chronometrical principle.
- i. **The Christo-Centric Principle (Hebrews 10:1-14)** — The writer to the Hebrews utilizes the Christo-Centric principle to interpret Psalms 40:6-8).
- j. **The Moral Principle (I Corinthians 9:9-12)** — In dealing with the commandment of Moses concerning oxen, Paul draws out the moral lesson contained in it and applies it to his own situation.
- k. **The Symbolic Principle (I Peter 2:4-8)** — In dealing with the symbol of the stone, Peter appeals to several Old Testament passages which interpret its meaning.
- l. **The Typical Principle (I Corinthians 10:1-11)** — Here Paul uses the typical principle to interpret the exodus of Israel from Egypt.
- m. **The Allegorical Principle (Galatians 4:21-31)** — In this passage, Paul develops and interprets an allegory using people and places from the Old Testament.

In the interpretation of Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament, it is evident that Jesus and the Apostles infallibly used the principles of hermeneutics. Studying the various periods of the history of interpretation is certainly profitable. However, a consideration of the hermeneutics of Jesus and His apostles is of incomparably greater value.

III. PATRISTIC HERMENEUTICS

A. **Period (95 AD–600 AD):** The period of Patristic exegesis reaches from the close of the New Testament Apostolic period through to the Middle Ages. This period of time may be sectionized into the following:

1. 95-202 AD
From Clement of Rome to Iranaeus
2. 202-325 AD
The School of Alexandria
3. 325-600 AD
The School of Antioch;
East and West divisions to the close of the 6th century

This period covers the writings of the Ante-Nicene and the Post-Nicene Fathers; from Clement of Rome to Gregory the Great. The New Testament Canon was established during this period. The orthodox doctrines concerning the Person of Christ and the Godhead were formulated out of the controversies over the heresies of this period.

B. **Methods:** In Patristic Hermeneutics the methods of interpretation used were often a mixture of the literal and the allegorical methods. However, the allegorical method was dominant.

C. History

1. **95-202 AD from Clement of Rome to Iranaeus:** A brief survey of this period indicates that there was no significant development in the methods of interpreting Scripture. The Fathers, generally speaking, were too busy defending the Christological doctrine against the Ebionite and Gnostic heresies to form any proper system of hermeneutics. They were acting as guardians of the apostle's doctrine in the midst of raging heresies. Consequently, there were many great defenders of the faith but very few expositors of the Word during this time. Though upholding sound doctrine, the Fathers soon lapsed into allegorization in their interpretation.

NOTE: A doctrinal defensiveness may cause the interpreter to err in his development and application of hermeneutical principles.

The following is a selection of certain Patristic Fathers from this time period with a brief evaluation of their hermeneutics.

- a. **Clement of Rome (30-100 AD)** — Clement was a man of the Scriptures, quoting at length from them in his writings. He strongly believed that the Old Testament was preparatory for the Christ of the New Testament. Because of this he was generally free from fanciful interpretations of the Word of God.

NOTE: Laying a heavy emphasis on the use of the Context and Christo-Centric principles will do much to insure sound interpretation.

- b. **Ignatius (30-107 AD)** — Like Clement, Ignatius was Christo-Centric in his interpretation of the Scriptures. However, his favorite subject was ecclesiastical order. He exalted the bishop's office and the presbytery as the guardians against heresies. In his interpretation he generally avoided the allegorical method.

NOTE: A proper emphasis of the Christo-Centric principle may

help to preserve the interpreter from the pitfalls of extreme allegorization.

- c. **Barnabas (100 AD)** — His writings are full of mystical allegorizations after the style of Philo. Numerous statements from Scripture are spiritualized and their meanings perverted.

NOTE: The method of allegorization allows the interpreter to pervert the meaning of Scripture.

- d. **Marcion** — Marcion rejected the God of the Old Testament as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, he eliminated the Old Testament because of its irrelevancy to New Testament Christianity. In his extremism he accepted only the parts of the New Testament writings which were non-Jewish in character.

NOTE: To assent that the Old Testament is irrelevant to New Testament Christianity is to violate, among others, the Context, Christo-Centric, and Ethnic-Division principles.

- e. **Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)** — Justin Martyr wrote the first apologies of the Christian faith. He also made an elaborate attempt to explain how Old Testament Messianic prophecies found their fulfilment in the Christ of the Gospels. However, in his overemphasis on Christology in the Old Testament he failed to recognize what each writer is saying to his own generation. Also, being a philosopher, he tended to mix Plato with Christ. As a result he fell into allegorism and produced many extreme and fanciful interpretations.

NOTE: Balance must be maintained in the use of hermeneutical principles. Emphasizing the Christo-Centric principle to the point of disregarding historical elements is to abuse the Scriptures. Mixing philosophy with Christianity may necessitate allegorization and lead to misinterpretation.

- f. **Iraeneus (120-202 AD)** — Iraeneus is known for his battles against the Gnostic heresies. The strength of his interpretation lay in his use of a sound historical perspective.

NOTE: Literal interpretation, with the historical background in plain view, is the foundation for sound doctrine.

2. **202-325 AD The School of Alexandria:** At the beginning of the 3rd Century, Biblical interpretation was greatly influenced by the catechetical school of Alexandria. As noted under "Jewish Hermeneutics," Alexandria had become the great melting pot of Greek philosophy and Judaism. Platonic philosophy, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism and Judaism had all endeavoured to harmonize religion and philosophy by means of the allegorical method. With the spread of Christianity a large population of Hellenized believers developed in Alexandria. The allegorical system of interpretation that had arisen among the pagan Greeks and had been copied by the Alexandrian Jews was readily available to the Christian church. Under the same pressures that were upon the Greeks and the Jews, the Christians chose the same solution: the allegorical method. The terms allegorical, mystical and spiritual became practically synonymous. The allegorical was confused with the typical. By means of allegorization the Old Testament could be used as a Christian document. The Old Testament was looked upon as an obscure book of parables, enigmas and riddles which could only be interpreted through allegorization.

NOTE: Proper motivation in interpretation must be guided by proper principles of interpretation. Attempting to extract New Testament truths from the Old Testament by means of allegorization will lead to misinterpretation.

Two of the most prominent fathers during this period were Clement and Origen. They were the chief representatives of the school of Alexandria. Both regarded the Bible as the inspired Word of God and believed that special rules of hermeneutics had to be applied to interpret it. They admitted the literal sense of Scripture but gave exalted prominence to the allegorical sense.

- a. **Clement (153-217 AD)** — Clement of Alexandria, a man of great learning, read widely from the works of Philo. Consequently, he adopted Philo's allegorical method of interpretation. An interest in philosophy also had a great influence on his exegesis. He was the first interpreter to apply the allegorical method to the Old and New Testaments together. He viewed all Scripture as needing allegorical interpretation. He taught that the Bible hides its sense to make its readers inquisitive, and thus to cause them to search for the words of salvation that are hidden herein. According to Ramm (p. 31), Clement taught that Scripture had 5 possible meanings:

- (1) The **historical** sense of Scripture: taking a story in the Old Testament as an actual event in history.
- (2) The **doctrinal** sense of Scripture: the obvious moral, religious, and theological teachings of the Bible.
- (3) The **prophetic** sense of Scripture: including predictive prophecy and typology.
- (4) The **philosophical** sense: follows the Stoics with their cosmic and psychological meaning (which sees meanings in natural objects and historical persons).
- (5) The **mystical** sense: deeper moral, spiritual and religious truth symbolized by events or persons.

NOTE: The interpreter's background, good or bad, will greatly influence his system of interpretation. His view of the purpose and nature of Scripture will also affect his view of its interpretation. Mixture will only breed mixture.

- b. **Origen (185-254 AD)** — Origen was the disciple and successor of Clement of Alexandria. He surpassed his teacher and became the greatest Biblical critic, theologian and exegete of his era. His methods of interpretation followed those of Philo the Jew and Clement the Christian. Origen regarded the three-fold sense or arrangement of Scripture as being analogous to man's triune being: body (corporeal), soul (psychical), and spirit (spiritual). He believed that the Scripture was literal, moral and mystical (or allegorical). However, in his exegesis, he rarely dealt with the literal or moral, rather majored on the allegorical. Actually, his spiritual interpretation was a mixture of the typological and allegorical methods. His principles of interpretation are briefly outlined here:

- (1) The literal meaning of Scripture is its superficial sense; it is to be viewed as "the body" of Scripture rather than the "soul" (moral

sense) or the “spirit” (allegorical sense).

- (2) The interpreter is dependent upon the enablement of the Spirit of Christ for his understanding of Scripture.
- (3) The ultimate meaning of Scripture lies in its spiritual sense. Therefore, the primary means of interpreting the Scriptures is to spiritualize them. The Bible is essentially a spiritual book; one vast allegory.
- (4) The Old Testament is preparatory to the New Testament. “The New is in the Old concealed and the Old is in the New revealed.” For this reason the New replaces the Old.

NOTE: An improper concept of Scripture will lead to improper interpretation. The literal sense of Scripture is not to be viewed as the superficial sense but rather as the all-important foundational sense.

3. **325-600 AD The School of Antioch:** Another famous school which notably influenced the interpretation of Scripture was the school at Antioch. About the beginning of the 4th Century, a school was established here where the early believers had first been called Christians (Acts 11:26). This school opposed the Alexandrian school of allegorical exegesis. Their methods of interpreting the Scriptures were more honorable, scientific and profitable. The following is a summary of the hermeneutics of the School of Antioch:

- They recognized the Bible as a *progressive revelation*.
- They believed in the *unity* of the Bible because of its *Christological* emphasis.
- They avoided the *letterism* of the Palestinian Jews.
- They fought and avoided the allegorism of Alexandria, including Origen and Philo.
- They emphasized *literal and historical exegesis*. (For them, “literal” included both plain literal and figurative literal. The significance of figures of speech were included in the literal sense of a passage.)
- They replaced allegory with *typology*.
- They avoided dogmatic exegesis.

NOTE: To avoid allegorical interpretation and to follow literal exegesis is to give proper direction to the hermeneutical process. A proper understanding of the literal sense of Scripture provides a sure foundation upon which the interpreter may build.

The following is an evaluation of three of the Fathers of this period:

- a. **Diodorus, of Tarsus (Died 393 AD)** — As a presbyter of Antioch, Diodorus was probably the most influential of that school. He later became the Bishop of Tarsus. Emphasizing historical interpretation, he followed the literal sense of Scripture and made no attempt to explain the mystical. He took a firm stand against allegorical interpretation. He wrote a treatise on his principles of interpretation and instilled them into his pupils.

NOTE: The interpreter must maintain the literal sense of Scripture amidst the pressures of allegorism. He must recognize that developing a sound system of principles is the foundation for the development of doctrine.

- b. **Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)** — As a disciple of Diodorus, Theodore was first a presbyter of Antioch and later became the Bishop of Mopsuestia. He emphasized grammatico-historical interpretation and had no appreciation for the allegorical method of the Alexandrian school. He repudiated their extreme view of inspiration of certain portions of Scripture. Thus, he was quite liberal in his view of Scripture. Though a great exegete, he tended to be intellectual, rationalistic and dogmatic in his interpretation.

NOTE: The interpreter must not over-react against an extreme lest he fall into the opposite extreme. When faced with an extreme, the good interpreter will maintain balance.

- c. **Chrysostom (354-407 AD)** — Though also a disciple of Diodorus, Chrysostom differed greatly with Theodore. As to his view of Scripture, he was much more conservative than Theodore, accepting the infallible inspiration of the Word of God. Though he followed the grammatico-historical method of interpretation, his exegesis was more spiritual and practical in nature. He also rejected the allegorical method.

NOTE: A good interpreter will possess both a proper concept of Scripture as well as proper methods of interpreting it. Sound interpretation goes beyond the intellectual level, and recognizes the spiritual and practical nature of Scripture.

During the 4th and 5th centuries great doctrinal controversies continued to divide the church. The greatest of these was the Nestorian controversy concerning the union and distinction of the human and divine natures in Christ's person. The School of Antioch was accused of unorthodoxy and in time lost its influence. This hastened the Church split, which divided the churches into Eastern and Western Divisions. We will now consider certain church Fathers from the Eastern and Western Divisions, noting their contributions to the field of hermeneutics.

d. **The Eastern Division**

- (1) **Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373 AD)** — As "the father of Orthodoxy," he was a great defender of the faith against the Arian Heresy. He held generally correct principles of interpretation, though at times he indulged in allegorization.

NOTE: Sound principles of hermeneutics are foundational to sound orthodox doctrine.

- (2) **Basil of Caesarea (330-379 AD)** — Basil's background included a thorough knowledge of Origen. He embraced asceticism and became the great propagator of monasticism in Asia Minor. With the death of Athanasius, Basil was one who took up the torch of Orthodoxy. As to hermeneutics, he condemned those who did not accept the obvious sense of Scripture, rather imposed their own fanciful ideas upon it through mystical interpretation. He was basically a sound interpreter.

NOTE: To obtain sound interpretation, the interpreter must avoid the mystical tangent and the tendency to impose his own ideas upon Scripture.

- (3) **Theodoret (386-458 AD)** — Trained in a monastery near Antioch, Theodoret was greatly influenced by the teachings of Diodorus, Theodore, and Chrysostom. He followed the literal method of interpretation promulgated by the Antiochian School and produced some of the best specimens of ancient interpretation. Terry (p. 649) quotes Theodoret's preface to the Psalms: "When I happened upon various commentaries, and found some expositors pursuing allegories with great superabundance, others adapting prophecy to certain histories so as to produce an interpretation accommodated to the Jews rather than to the nurselings of the faith, I considered it the part of a wise man to avoid the excess of both, and to connect now with ancient histories whatever belonged to them."

NOTE: In interpreting the relationship of prophecy to history, the interpreter must maintain the delicate balance between the literal and spiritual emphasis.

- (4) **Andreas (450- AD)** — As the Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, he wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation. He held to a three-fold sense of Scripture: the literal, the figurative, and the mystical. The mystical sense was the most prominent in his expositions.

e. **The Western Division**

- (1) **Tertullian (150-225 AD)** — As "the father of Latin theology" Tertullian wrote mainly in the field of apologetics, battling the Gnostic heresies. To him Christianity was the knowledge of God based on reason and the authority of the orthodox Church. Because of apostolic succession, the Church alone had the right to use the Scriptures to formulate creeds. For Tertullian the orthodox creeds then became an authoritative "rule of faith" by which the Scriptures were to be interpreted. Though generally sound in his doctrine, he started a trend toward heresy by exalting the authority of the Church in matters of interpretation. He generally maintained the literal sense of Scripture but followed allegorical interpretation in his treatment of prophecy.

NOTE: An inaccurate conception of the fundamental principles of Christianity will lead to a faulty formulation of hermeneutical principles.

- (2) **Ambrose (337-397 AD)** — Ambrose, bishop of Milan, was a great violator of sound hermeneutical principles. He treated the historical sense as being irrelevant and proclaimed the glories of the hidden mystical sense of Scripture. He used Paul's statement that "the letter kills but the spirit gives life" as a slogan to justify his extremely fanciful allegorical interpretation.

NOTE: In rejecting the laws of literal interpretation, the interpreter is given over to the lawlessness of allegorical interpretation.

- (3) **Jerome (340-420 AD)** — Proficient in both Hebrew and Greek, Jerome authored a new translation of the Bible known as the Latin Vulgate. In theory he emphasized the literal and grammatical sense of Scripture, but in practice he often followed the

allegorical method, even to the extent of allegorizing the New Testament. He believed that there was no inherent contradiction between the literal and the allegorical. Failing to appreciate the authors' viewpoints and purposes, he was unable to enter into the authors' positions and ascertain their main ideas. Though sometimes faulty in his interpretation, he was one of the greatest Biblical scholars of his day.

NOTE: Bridging the language gap alone is insufficient. The interpreter must build a complete bridge between his viewpoint and that of the author.

- (4) **Augustine (354-430 AD)** — If Jerome was one of the greatest scholars of this period, Augustine was one of its greatest theologians. Though deficient in the knowledge of the original languages, he did make significant contributions in the fields of theology and hermeneutics. Augustine did accept the allegorical method because it provided him with a means of reconciling his religious background with his Christian faith. However, he did modify allegorism by confining it mainly to the prophetic Scriptures. Following the trend introduced by Jerome he gave prominent place to Church tradition, regarding it as an authority over interpretation. He allowed the Scriptures to be interpreted four ways:

- Historically
- Grammatically
- Comparatively
- Allegorically

According to Ramm (p. 36, 37), Augustine's hermeneutics can be summed up in the following twelve principles:

- A genuine Christian faith is necessary for the understanding of the Scriptures.
- Although the literal and historical are not the end of Scripture, we must hold them in high regard. Not all of the Bible is allegorical by any means, and much of it is both literal and allegorical.
- Scripture has more than one meaning and therefore the allegorical method is proper.
- There is significance in Biblical numbers.
- The Old Testament is a Christian document because it is a Christological document.
- The task of the expositor is to get the meaning out of the Bible, not to bring a meaning into it.
- We must consult the analogy of faith, the true creed, when we interpret. To this must be added love.
- No verse is to be studied as a unit in itself. Therefore we must note the context of the verse.
- If an interpretation is insecure, nothing in the passage can be made a matter of orthodox faith.
- We cannot make the Holy Spirit our substitute for the necessary learning to understand Scripture.

- The obscure passage must yield to the clear passage.
- No Scripture is to be interpreted so as to conflict with any other: the harmony of revelation. But to do this we must distinguish the times: "Distinguish the times and you harmonize the Scriptures." We must take into account progressive revelation.

Though Augustine adhered to basically sound principles of interpretation, in practice he often violated them. As a great theologian with a fondness for allegory, Augustine's influence opened the door for allegorism to become the dominant method of interpretation during the Middle Ages.

NOTE: Failing to bridge the linguistic gap leaves one open to faulty interpretation. Failing to break completely away from a heretical religious background leaves the interpreter open to mixture. When sound principles are adhered to they must also be consistently applied.

- (5) **Vincentius (5th Century AD)** — According to Terry (p. 659), Vincentius is to be noted for his exaltation of Church tradition in matters of interpretation. In his work *Commonitorium* (434 AD), he attempts to show that the tradition of the Catholic Church, as well as Scripture, are both necessary in order to establish true doctrine. His ecclesiastico-traditional method of interpretation can only be appreciated by those who hold Church tradition and authority above reason and conscience.

NOTE: Using Church tradition as the final authority in matters of doctrine is to violate the supremacy of Scripture and discount the involvement of reason and conscience.

In summarizing the period of Patristic Hermeneutics it is evident that two major streams of interpretation had developed. That which came to a head in the conflict between the School at Antioch and the School at Alexandria had been developing through the previous periods. The first stream was characterized by literal interpretation. It began with Ezra, was perverted by the Palestinian Jews, restored by Jesus and the Apostles, and was proclaimed by the School of Antioch. The second stream was characterized by allegorical interpretation. It began with the Greek philosophers, was borrowed by the Alexandrian Jews, and was passed on to the School of Alexandria.

IV. MEDIEVAL HERMENEUTICS

A. **Period (600-1517 AD):** The period of Medieval Hermeneutics reaches from the beginning of the 7th century to Martin Luther, The Great Reformer.

B. **Methods:** During this period there were generally four senses attributed to Scripture:

1. The Literal Sense — the plain evident meaning
2. The Allegorical Sense — the hidden theological meaning
3. The Moral Sense — the hidden practical meaning
4. The Eschatological Sense — the futuristic meaning

By far the dominant method of this period was the allegorical.

C. **History:** During the Middle Ages there was a stagnation in the field of Hermeneutics. Originality was superseded by imitation and no new principles of

interpretation were formulated. Because of an extreme emphasis on tradition, the writings of this period tended to be merely a rehash of the teachings of the early Church Fathers. This reveals the bondage to Church tradition and authority that existed.

It became an established principle that the interpretation of God's Word had to adapt itself to the tradition and doctrine of the Church. The teachings and expositions of the Fathers became the final explanation of the Bible. The Scriptures were used only to confirm what the Fathers said, and if contradiction existed then the writings of the Fathers were accepted above the authority of the Scriptures. In fact, the teachings of the Fathers were sought for in the Bible.

In Medieval times ignorance and superstition prevailed. Neither the laity nor much of the clergy had an understanding of the Scriptures. They had been hidden away for preservation in the monasteries and came to be regarded with superstitious reverence. The Bible was looked on as a book of mysteries and only the scholars of the Church were deemed qualified to unfold its mystical meaning. This mass ignorance resulted in a superstitious consulting of the Scriptures as magic oracles for subjective guidance. Thus, ignorance became the father of superstition and together they blanketed the Middle Ages with spiritual darkness.

We will now briefly consider several men from this period.

1. **Hrabanus Maurus (776-856 AD):** Hrabanus Maurus was a great teacher and a prolific writer. His writings were primarily a compilation of earlier Greek and Latin Fathers. He advocated the four-fold sense of Scripture common to this period: the literal, allegorical, moral, and eschatological senses. As to his method of interpretation he could be classified as a mystical allegorizer.

NOTE: To emphasize the existence of multiple meanings in Scripture is to allow the interpreter to force his every whim and fancy upon the sacred text of Scripture. It is also to ignore what the writer intended to say, substituting what the interpreter wants to say.

2. **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD):** Thomas Aquinas, a famous theologian, accepted the four-fold sense of Scripture. In theory he maintained that all theology was to be soundly based upon the literal sense of Scripture, but he also gave place to the other senses of Scripture, and often emphasized them. In practice he was constantly involved in allegorizing. He viewed the Scriptures, as interpreted by the Church, as the final authority in theological matters.

NOTE: It is very difficult for the interpreter to adhere to the "multiple sense" view of Scripture without lapsing into allegorization. The one leads to the other.

3. **Bonaventura (1221-1274 AD):** Bonaventura, an associate of Thomas Aquinas, was greatly influenced by the Neo-Platonism of Augustine. Historians have pictured him as a mystic, in contrast to Aquinas who was more of an intellectual. According to Terry (p. 666) he at times assumed a seven-fold sense of Scripture:

- a. The historical sense
- b. The allegorical sense
- c. The mystical sense
- d. The moral sense
- e. The symbolical sense
- f. The synedochical sense
- g. The hyperbolical sense

NOTE: Violating the literal sense of Scripture breaks down the safeguard against the invention of any number of conjectural senses.

4. **Nicholas of Lyra (1279-1340 AD):** In the field of hermeneutics, Nicholas has been spoken of as the bridge between the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Though he accepted the four-fold sense of Scripture, he emphasized the literal sense and opposed certain allegorical interpretations. It was his work that had a profound influence on Luther and thus he helped to “seed” the Reformation. His interpretation was basically sound.

NOTE: Exalting the literal sense of Scripture leads to sound exegesis.

5. **John Wycliffe (1328-1384 AD):** Because of his attack on the authority of the Church above Scripture, John Wycliffe has become known as “the morning star of the Reformation.” Because of his recognition of Scripture as the final authority in all matters of belief and practice he was compelled to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people.

NOTE: Before benefit can be derived from Scripture the linguistic gap must be bridged.

In viewing Medieval Hermeneutics one valuable approach is to see what principles emerged in the Catholic Church. The following is condensed from Ramm’s discussion of this area (p. 38-45).

- Catholic scholars accept the Latin Vulgate as the authentic version of the Bible. They include the Apocrypha.
- Catholic scholars accept whatever the Church has specifically said about matters of historical criticism.
- Catholic scholars accept the Church’s interpretation of all verses it has officially interpreted.
- Catholic scholars accept the literal and historical interpretation of Scripture as the foundation for Bible study.
- Catholic scholars accept the spiritual or mystical meaning as being beyond the literal.
- Catholic scholars accept the Church as the custodian and official interpreter of Scripture.
- Catholic scholars accept the Fathers as aids in interpretation as long as they agree with Church tradition.
- Catholic scholars accept Church tradition as that which fills out what is deficient in the Scriptures.
- Catholic scholars accept the principle of development in understanding the Bible. This gives them license to use implication, deduction, and that which “grows” out of Scripture to formulate doctrine.
- Catholic scholars accept that the true sense of Scriptures in reality is not to be found outside the Catholic Church.

NOTE: Exalting the Church above the Scriptures places fallible men above the authority of God in matters of doctrine and practice. The interpreter must constantly recognize that the only infallible interpreters of Scripture are the Holy Spirit and Scripture itself.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages there came a general revival of learning and a growing interest in the ancient languages. With the invention of printing and the publication of the Bible in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac and Arabic, the chains of ignorance and superstition were snapped. The Scriptures were appealed to as the final authority above the Church and the binding traditions of the Fathers. All of

this began to prepare the way for the Reformation and a new horizon for hermeneutics.

V. REFORMATION HERMENEUTICS

A. Period (1517-1600 AD): The period of Reformation Hermeneutics extends from the publication of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses to the end of the 16th Century.

B. Methods: There was a gradual breaking away from the four-fold method of the Middle Ages. There was a decided departure from the allegorical method to the grammatico-literal method.

C. History: The Renaissance in Europe brought about in the Church a definite loosening from the chains of ignorance and superstition prevalent during Medieval times. It opened the door to a period of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. A new awareness of "the great gulf" between Divine revelation and human reason paved the way for the battle cry of the Reformation "sola scriptura" (only Scripture). As the Bible was recognized as the only infallible Divine revelation available to man it was exalted above all human reason, including fallible ecclesiastical authority. For this reason the Bible began to be translated into many different languages during the 16th Century. The following is a list of some of the languages into which Scripture was translated during this period:

Danish	1524	Spanish	1543
German-Swiss	1524-1529	Polish	1561
English	1525-1535	Icelandic	
Dutch	1526	Finnish	1500-1600
Italian	1532	Swedish	
German	1534	Hungarian	
French	1535		

NOTE: Bridging the linguistic gap is the first step toward dispelling the darkness of ignorance and breaking the bondage of superstition.

In general, the Reformers contended for the following:

1. The Bible is the inspired Word of God.
2. The Scriptures must be studied in their original languages.
3. The Scriptures alone are infallible; the Church is fallible.
4. The Bible is the highest authority in all matters of theology.
5. The Church is subject to Scripture, not Scripture to the Church. The Church does not determine what the Scriptures teach, rather the Scriptures determine what the Church should teach.
6. Scripture is the interpreter of Scripture.
7. All understanding and exposition of the Bible must conform to the whole of Scriptural revelation.

NOTE: As heresy is fostered by faulty hermeneutics, so sound theology is nourished by proper hermeneutics.

Though there were many great reformers, there were two outstanding exemplary men: Luther and Calvin.

1. **Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD):** Luther's conviction concerning the role of the Church, the authority of the Scriptures, and the needs of the unenlightened masses, motivated him to light the torch of the Reformation. In 1517 he posted his ninety-five theses attacking the authority of the Catholic

Church. By 1522 he had translated the New Testament into German and by 1534 he had completed the Bible, thus placing the Bible in the hands of the common people. His theses lit the torch and his translations kept it burning. According to Ramm (p. 53-57) Luther's hermeneutics may be summed up by the following principles:

- a. **The Psychological Principle** — Inspiration demands illumination. The interpreter must depend on the Holy Spirit to quicken his God-given mental abilities.
- b. **The Authority Principle** — The Bible is the supreme and final authority for all theological matters, and is above ecclesiastical authority.
- c. **The Literal Principle** — Allegorism is invalid. The original languages are of primary importance. The interpreter must give attention to grammar and historical setting.
- d. **The Sufficiency Principle** — The meaning of the Scriptures is sufficiently clear so that any believer is capable of interpreting them.
- e. **The Christological Principle** — The function of all interpretation is to find Christ.
- f. **The Law-Gospel Principle** — The Law and the Gospel are to be always kept distinct. The Law is to condemn man and the Gospel is to redeem him.

NOTE: Accepting the truths of the supremacy of the authority of Scripture and the primacy of the literal method sets the interpreter free from the bondages of ecclesiasticism and allegorism.

2. **John Calvin (1509-1564 AD):** John Calvin, undoubtedly the first scientific interpreter in the history of the Christian Church. He maintained the fundamental principles of Luther but surpassed him in his use of them. He regarded the allegorical method as Satanic but did accept the validity of Old Testament typology. Differing from Luther, he did not force the whole of Scripture into Christological interpretation.

Calvin's hermeneutics could be summarized in the following statements:

- a. Calvin believed that the Spirit's illumination was vital to the interpreter. He recognized the Spirit's work of inspiration in writing Scripture and the need for the Spirit's work in interpreting Scripture.
- b. Calvin subscribed to the precept that "Scripture interprets Scripture." He exalted the importance of contextual interpretation and felt it necessary to compare all Scriptures treating common subjects.
- c. Calvin insisted upon the literal method of interpretation. He emphasized studies in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and historical background. He said, "the first business of an interpreter is to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say."
- d. Calvin rejected allegorism and its foundation stone: the medieval concept of the multiplicity of meanings in Scripture.
- e. Calvin joined with the other reformers in throwing off the yoke of the Catholic Church in matters of interpretation and theology.
- f. Calvin contended that theology could only be based on entirely proper exegesis. He denounced the use of misinterpretation to support orthodox doctrine.

NOTE: The proper rules of hermeneutics with a thorough and systematic application of them by a qualified interpreter will produce the highest quality of Biblical interpretation.

From the death of Calvin to the end of the 16th Century both Catholic and Protestant scholars became involved primarily in formulating doctrinal creeds and systematizing their theology. As the battle lines were drawn between Catholicism and Protestantism hermeneutics fell into the realm of polemics. A divided Christendom, with a militant spirit, entered into an age of controversy.

NOTE: When interpretation is forged in the heat of controversy it will always lack that delicate balance produced by an unbiased hermeneutic.

VI POST-REFORMATION HERMENEUTICS

A. Period (1600-1800 AD): The period of Post-Reformation Hermeneutics extends from the beginning of the 17th Century to the close of the 18th Century.

B. Methods: During this period most expositors adhered to and developed the hermeneutics of the Reformation: the literal method. This period also saw the rise to prominence of the devotional method of interpretation.

C. History

1. **Dogmatism:** As a period of theological dogmatism and controversy, the Post-Reformation stands as a bleak era in Church history. The light of the Reformation was shaded by a spirit of contention and bitterness among theologians. While rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church, they fell into a bondage to the creedal standards of the Protestant Church. In becoming divided amongst themselves, Protestant interpreters used the anvil of Scripture to hammer out their dogmas. They studied the Bible to find proof-texts for their theology and read their creeds into Scripture. However, in spite of the militancy of this period, the Post-Reformation scholars basically followed the guiding principles of the hermeneutics of the Reformers.

NOTE: In striving to defend purity of doctrine, the careless interpreter may lapse into eisegesis — allowing his theology to control his interpretation. Rather, he should exegete — allowing the interpretation of Scripture to control his theology.

Johann Cocceius (1603-1669 AD), a Dutch theologian, crossed the current hermeneutical trends in this period, opposing both scholasticism and dogmatic exegesis. His positive contribution was his concept of Scripture. To him Scripture was an organism with various vitally related parts. He believed that each passage must be interpreted by defining its terms, considering its context and relating it to the whole body of truth. On the other hand, by confusing interpretation and application he virtually allowed multiple meanings. He was also guilty of excessive typology in finding Christ and Church history everywhere in the Old Testament, opening again the door to allegorical and mystical methods of interpretation.

NOTE: The interpreter must recognize the organic nature of Scripture. He must also hold interpretation and application in definite distinction.

2. **Pietism:** Pietism emerged as a reaction against the theological dogmatism of the Post-Reformation. Protestant dogmatism used Scripture as a cold sword and thus destroyed spiritual life. The Pietists beat that sword into a plowshare, desiring to use it to produce life. They studied the Bible for personal edification and spiritual nourishment. The influence of Pietism extended to the Moravians, the Puritans, and the Quakers. The Pietistic principles of

interpretation were:

- The Bible should be studied in its original languages.
- A thorough knowledge of its historical background must be gained.
- The Holy Spirit must illuminate and apply the Word to the believer.
- The Bible should be studied devotionally and applied practically.

NOTE: The interpreter should combine the grammatical, historical and devotional studies of the Scripture to fulfil their purpose of producing life in the believer.

Two outstanding Pietists were Spener and Francke.

- a. **Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705 AD)** — Philipp Spener is known as the Father of Pietism, in that the name originated with a small devotional meeting in his home. He was greatly influenced by Puritan writings. He believed that purity of heart was much more important than purity of doctrine. As Luther rejected the authority of the Catholic Church, Spener undermined the authority of Protestant creedalism. He encouraged every believer to relate to the Word of God for himself, applying its truths to his practical life.

NOTE: The interpreter must maintain a balance by emphasizing both purity of heart and doctrine. Devotional interpretation must find its proper place in relation to doctrinal interpretation.

- b. **August Hermann Francke (1663-1727 AD)** — Under Hermann Francke's influence Pietism reached its peak in Germany. As a disciple of Spener, Francke propagated Pietistic principles. He taught that only those who were born again could have insight into the meaning of Scripture. In his lectures he combined exegesis with experience. Grammatical and critical studies were used as the external to bring him to the internal: devotional truth. He displayed strong ascetic tendencies and became legalistic in his attitude toward non-Pietists.

NOTE: Opposing one form of dogmatism may lead to another.

The devotional method of interpretation used by the Pietists did produce a Godly piety and a devout spirituality. However, in an over-reaction against dogmatism the Pietists tended toward mysticism in their interpretation. In their zeal to gain spiritual and practical benefit from Scripture they began to neglect theology.

NOTE: Devotional interpretation is profitable, but it must never be used at the expense of the doctrinal truth of Scripture.

3. **Criticism:** Seeing the weakness and insufficiency of the devotional method, many interpreters turned to a scholastic approach to the study of Scripture. The inadequacy of the dogmatist's ignoring of the historical background of Scripture to find his proof-texts caused many scholars to study the Scriptures analytically. Great strides were made in the field of textual criticism. Manuscripts were scientifically compared and evaluated for the first time. Extensive research in the original languages produced grammars and lexicons. Work was also done to prove the validity of the canon and the genuineness and credibility of its books.

NOTE: The sciences of canonology, textual criticism, and historical criticism are foundational to the proper interpretation of Scripture.

One outstanding scholar of this period and persuasion was, Johann August Ernesti (1707-1781 AD). Ernesti, as a classical scholar, brought to New Testa-

ment interpretation the same principles he applied to classical literature. In recognizing the human element in Scripture, he believed that the same basic rules used to interpret secular literature should also be applied to Biblical literature. According to Berkhof (p. 33) Ernesti laid four principles:

- a. The manifold sense of Scripture must be rejected and only the literal sense retained.
- b. Allegorical and typological interpretations must be disapproved, except in cases where the author indicates that he meant to combine another sense with the literal.
- c. Since the Bible has the grammatical sense in common with other books, this should be ascertained similarly in both cases.
- d. The literal sense may not be determined by a supposed dogmatical sense.

NOTE: To interpret Scripture, the human element must be recognized and given due consideration. The Bible is both a Divine and a human book.

4. **Rationalism:** Following the tendencies expressed by those involved in criticism, many scholars went a step beyond scholasticism and exalted human reason above the authority of Scriptures. In focusing on the human element of Scripture they so enlarged it as to rule out the Divine. Scholars began to interpret the Bible as they would any other literary work.

Two representatives of this trend of Rationalism were Hobbes (1588-1679 AD) and Spinoza (1632-1677 AD). They taught that man had no need of Divine revelation to be able to discern between the true and the false. Human reason alone was sufficient. They rejected any Scripture that presented things unexplainable by man's intellect.

NOTE: The interpreter must submit his intellect to the divine revelation of Scripture. Failure to do so is to deify the exercise of human reason above the authority of God's Word.

Because of his writings, in which rationalistic concepts are applied to Scripture, Semler (1725-1791 AD) has been called the Father of Rationalism. In his studies in the field of Canonology he became so enraptured with the human and historical elements in the origin of Scripture that he transferred this heavy emphasis into his hermeneutics. He believed that since the Scriptures were written in certain historical settings Divine truth was accommodated to the level of man's experience. Thus, for Semler, the truth of accommodation meant that the Bible was a fallible human production.

NOTE: To the interpreter the truth of accommodation must be submitted to a strict definition of inspiration. The Bible must be regarded as an infallible revelation, the truth of which is applicable to all ages.

VII. MODERN HERMENEUTICS

A. Period (1800-19-- AD): The period of Modern Hermeneutics reaches from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day.

B. Methods: All of the methods initiated during previous periods are still in existence today. However, the method which has become most prominent during this period has been the literal method.

C. History: Toward the close of the Post-Reformation era two opposing currents began to develop. On the negative side, humanistic rationalism caused interpreters to undermine the value and authority of Scripture by rejecting its Divine inspiration and

infallibility. On the positive side, many noble interpreters rushed to the defense of Scripture, and brought to full development the Bible's authority. The rationalism of the Post-Reformation prepared the way for the liberalism of the modern era. On the other hand the criticism of the Post-Reformation laid the groundwork for the conservatism of the modern age. At the beginning of the Post-Reformation battles raged over the finer points of theology. In modern times the great conflict has been over the foundational elements of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The following is a brief consideration of these two opposing streams.

1. **Liberalism:** As used here the word "liberalism" is a broad term including all schools of thought that depart from the foundational elements of orthodox Christianity.

a. **Liberals in General** — According to Ramm (p. 64-69) the religious liberals' approach to Scripture may be listed as follows:

- Religious liberals believe that "modern mentality" is to govern our approach to Scripture. What is not acceptable to the intellect of modern man is rejected.
- Religious liberals redefine inspiration. The involvement of the supernatural in the writing of Scripture is denied and inspiration is redefined as the Bible's religious effect on man.
- The supernatural is redefined. The supernatural is rejected as that which is beyond human knowledge or power, it is redefined to mean an abstract realm of thought.
- The concept of evolution is applied to the religion of Israel and thereby to its documents. The Scriptures are viewed as being primitive in relation to modern theological thought.
- The notion of accommodation has been applied to the Bible. The Biblical writers communicated their thoughts cloaked in the real and mythical concepts of their day.
- The Bible is to be interpreted historically. The historical setting was not the back-drop for the communication of truth, but rather was that which produced the theological concepts of the writer.
- Philosophy has had an influence on religious liberalism. One result of this has been to exalt the ethical sense of Scripture and reject any theological interpretation of it.

NOTE: To attack the authority of Scripture is in essence to attack the authority of God, and to leave man without any authoritative standard of truth nor any means of salvation.

b. **Karl Barth** — In the early part of the twentieth century, Karl Barth endeavoured to part with liberalism, but was unsuccessful in his attempt. Because of his failure to rectify the foundational-error of liberalism, he falls under the same classification. The following are his principles of interpretation, as listed by Ramm (p. 70-79):

- **The Revelation Principle** — The inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is denied. Revelation, in relation to Scripture, means that the Bible merely points man to his own encounter (revelation) with God.
- **The Christological Principle** — Only that which is directly related to Christ in Scripture is acceptable.

- **The Totality Principle** — Doctrine cannot be established by specific citations of Scripture. The literal method cannot provide the true meaning of Scripture.
- **The Mythological Principle** — Biblical events are not necessarily viewed as historical happenings, but rather as mythical stories contrived to communicate truth.
- **The Existential Principle** — The interpreter must be subjective and experience orientated in his approach to Scripture.
- **The Paradoxical Principle** — The truths of man's religious existence can never be precisely or rationally defined, they are tensions between irreconcilable opposites.

NOTE: Failure to accept the Divine authority of Scripture allows the interpreter to impose upon Scripture faulty principles of interpretation.

2. **Conservatism:** As used here, the word "conservatism" is a broad term including all schools of thought that hold to the foundational elements of orthodox Christianity. In contrast to the principles of liberalism mentioned previously, the following is a summation of the conservatives' approach to Scripture:

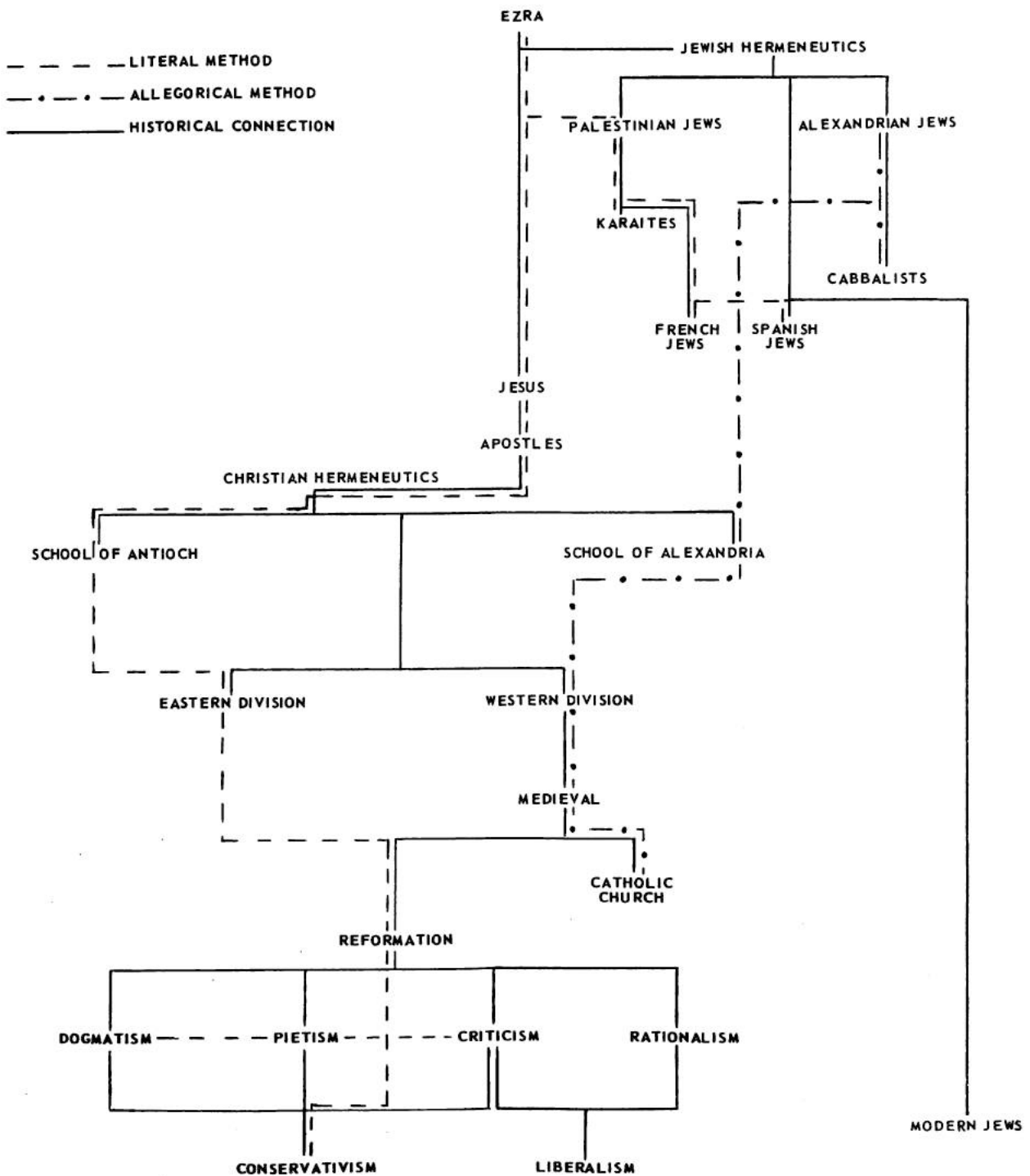
- a. Conservatives believe that reason must be submitted to Scripture. There are things in Scripture beyond human reason, yet not contrary to reason. Reason itself is not sufficient to interpret Scripture; illumination is essential.
- b. Conservatives hold to the plenary-verbal inspiration of Scripture, believing the Bible to be an infallible revelation.
- c. Conservatives accept the existence of the supernatural as being beyond human knowledge or power. This is applied not only to the origin of Scripture, but also to its contents.
- d. Conservatives recognize the progressive revelation of truth in Scripture, but view its truth as timeless, applicable to all ages.
- e. Conservatives believe God accommodated truth to man's frame of reference in order to communicate effectively, but this accommodation did not taint the character of the revelation.
- f. Conservatives view the historical settings of Scripture as the backdrops for the communication of truth.
- g. Conservatives support the validity of theological interpretation, believing the Scriptures were given to reveal God to man.

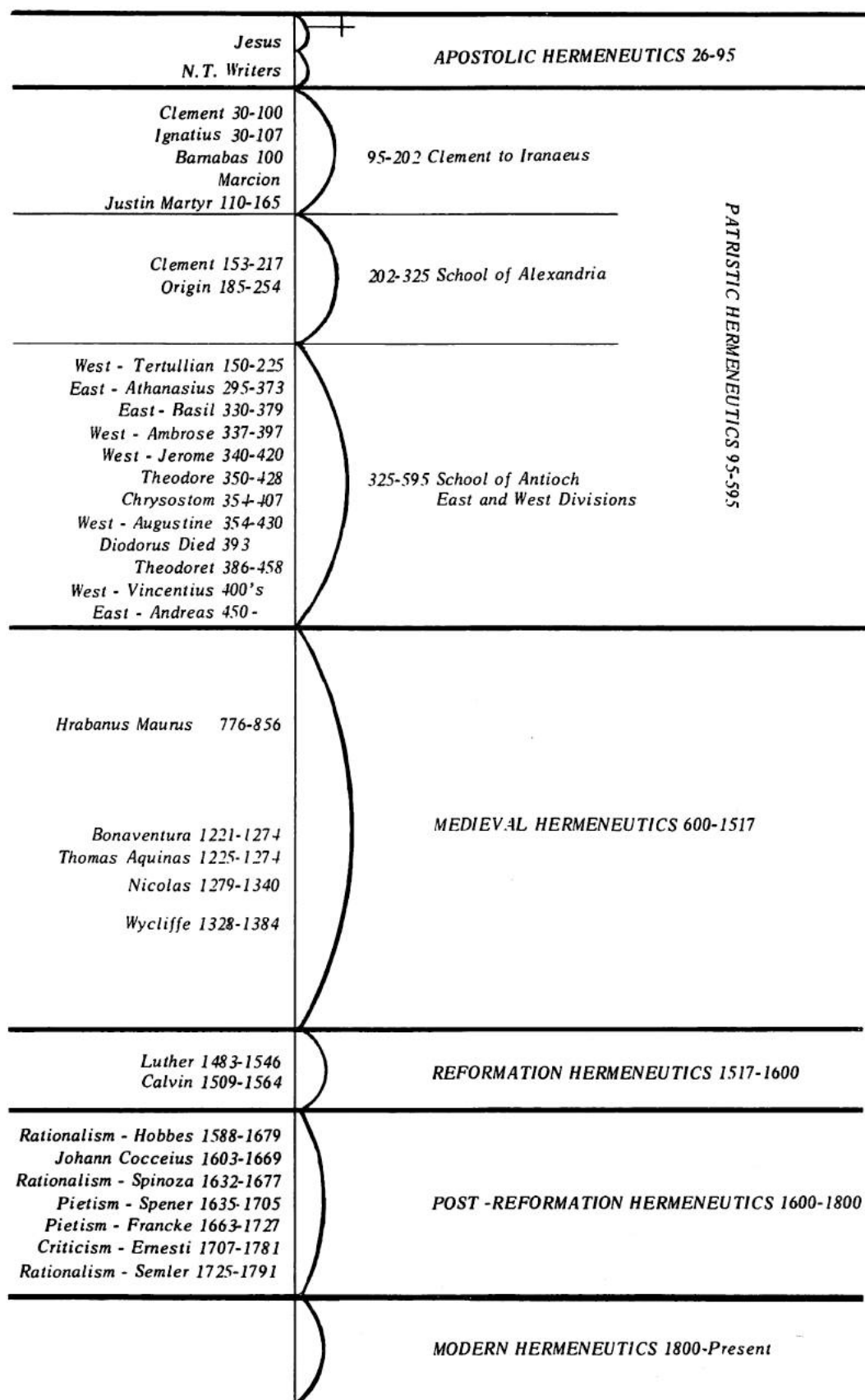
NOTE: For the interpreter the only proper point of commencement is a complete acceptance of the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture as God's revelation to man.

In bringing our discussion of the history of Modern Hermeneutics to a close, it must be recognized that during this period the literal method of interpretation has gained wide acceptance. The result has been that the method itself has become highly developed and great strides have been made in its various fields of study.

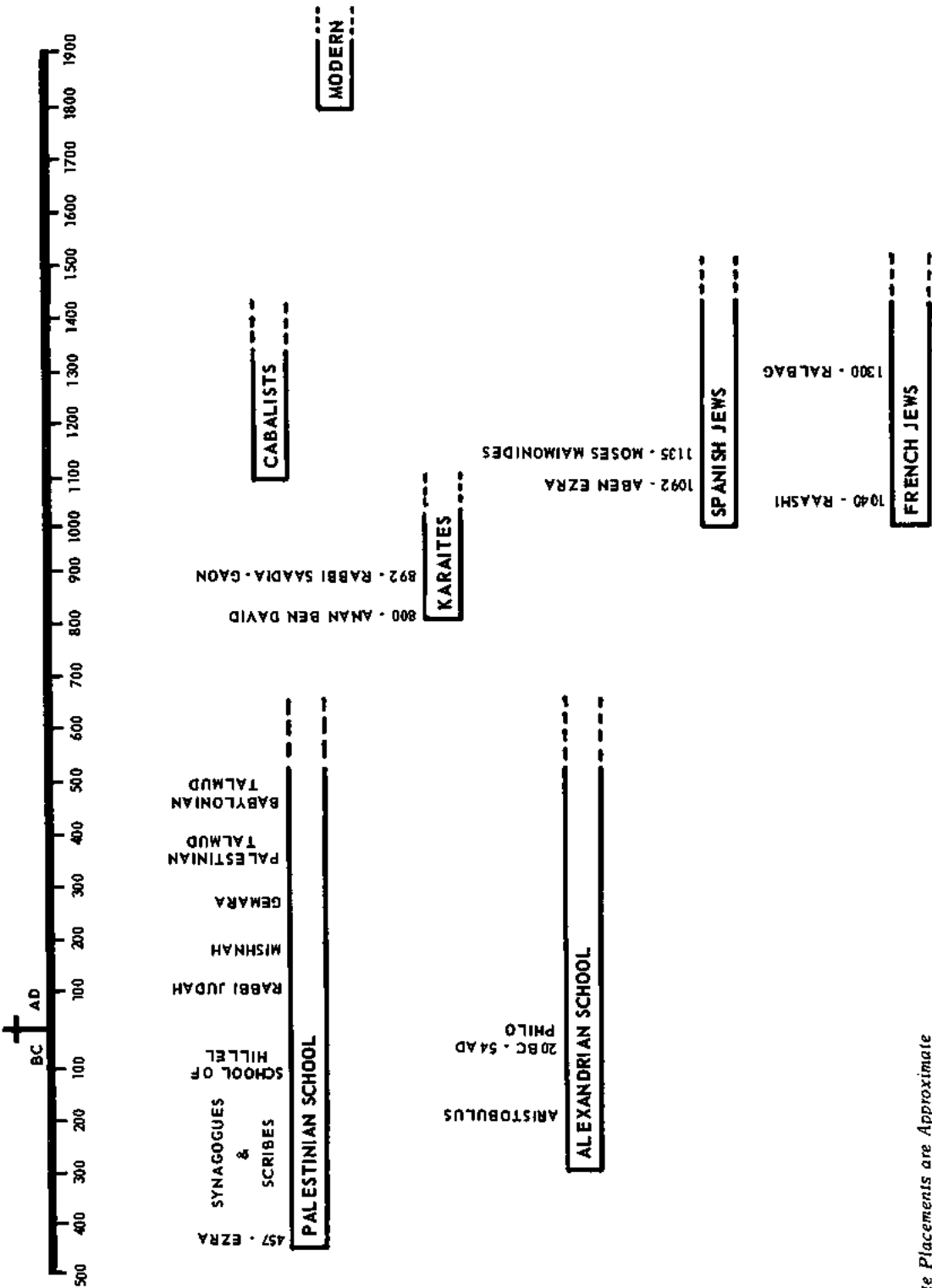
The following three charts illustrate the progression in the History of Hermeneutics. The first shows the development of hermeneutics through its various periods. The last two will clarify the time element in the chronology of the history of hermeneutics.

THE PROGRESS OF HERMENEUTICS





JEWISH HERMENEUTICS



Date Placements are Approximate

Chapter 5

FOUNDATIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

The goal of hermeneutics is to properly determine what God has said in the Scriptures; to determine the meaning of the Word of God. The foundation for reaching this objective is the bridging of the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers. This bridging of the understanding gap is the foundational *means* for reaching the desired *end*: knowing what God meant by what He said. This gap is basically fourfold: the *linguistic gap*, the *cultural gap*, the *geographical gap*, and the *historical gap*. Each of these will be considered using a problem/solution approach.

I. THE LINGUISTIC GAP

A. Problem: The Bible was written in three languages which are no longer in use. Ancient Hebrew, Ancient Chaldee and Koine Greek have long been extinct as spoken languages.

B. Solution: The way to bridge this linguistic gap is to study linguistics. Webster's dictionary defines linguistics as: "The science of languages; the origin, signification, and application of words; also called comparative philology." It is necessary to study Ancient Hebrew, Ancient Chaldee and Koine Greek in order to be able to read and understand the earliest Biblical manuscripts. This involves study in three basic areas: vocabulary, grammar and genre.

1. **Vocabulary:** In order to understand a sentence, it is necessary to understand the words of which that sentence is composed. There are four approaches to accomplishing this task:
 - a. The **Etymological** study of a word — attempting to understand a word by examining its origin, derivation, formation and history (e.g., the Greek word for obedience, *HUPAKOE*, comes from two Greek words: *HUPO*, which means "under"; and *AKOUO*, which means "to hear." Thus obedience is a "hearing under").
 - b. The **Comparative** study of a word — attempting to understand a word by studying all of its occurrences in Scripture. This can be properly done only by taking a Hebrew or Greek word, not just the English equivalent, and noting every usage of it in Scripture (e.g., the Greek word *DIKRINO* is translated in the King James Version: "to discern, to doubt, waver, to be partial, and to make a difference").
 - c. The **Cultural** study of a word — attempting to understand a word by ascertaining its original cultural meaning. This involves the literal sense of the word, which is its basic customary and socially designated meaning (e.g., the word "adoption" in modern day culture refers to the transferring of a child from one family to another, but in Hebrew culture it referred to a child coming of age in his own family).
 - d. The study of a word in **Cognate Languages** — attempting to understand a word by investigating its equivalents in related languages (e.g., equivalent words in Aramaic may help to clarify the Hebrew, since the two languages are so closely related).

2. **Grammar:** In order to understand a sentence it is not only necessary to have defined its words, but it is also essential to understand the part each word plays in the sentence. This leads to a study of the general principles and particular rules for writing the languages of the Bible. The same methods used to research the meanings of words can also be used to research grammar. The study of vocabulary supplies the parts, while the study of grammar provides the rules for putting the parts together into a whole.

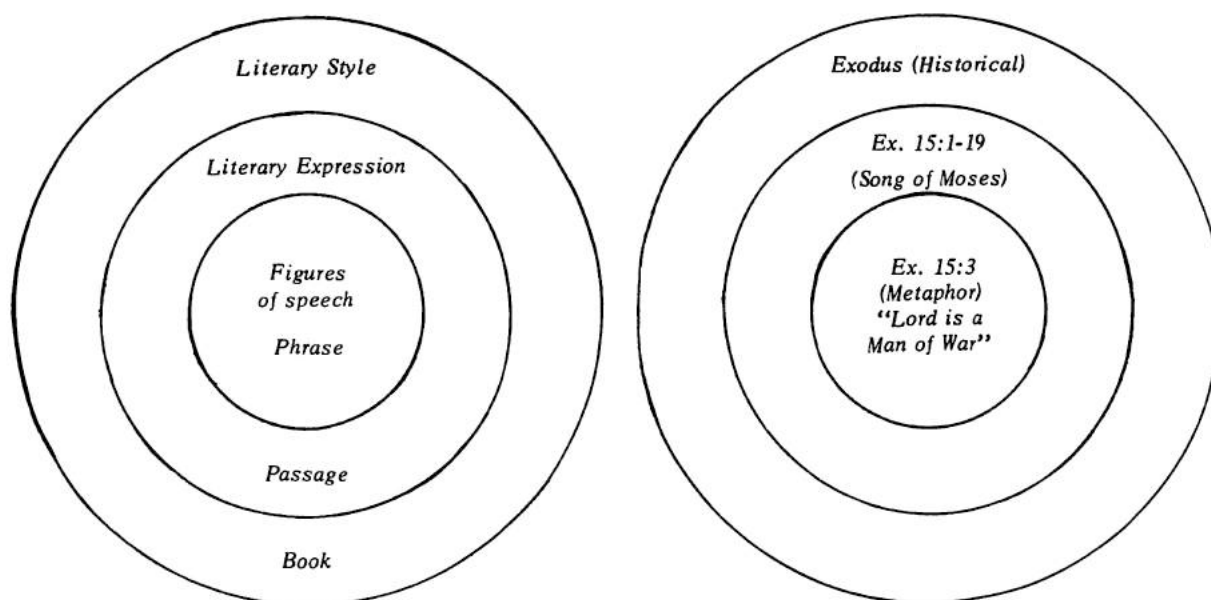
In studying grammar it soon becomes evident that languages are structurally different. In other words, their sentences and paragraphs are put together in different ways. Languages are structured in one of two basic ways, or in a combination of the two.

- a. **Analytic languages** — These are languages in which the order of the words in a sentence determines the role each word plays in that sentence (e.g., whether a word is a subject, indirect object, or a direct object). Hebrew and English are both analytic languages in that they stress word order.
- b. **Synthetic languages** — These are languages in which the ending of a word determines the role it plays in the sentence. Greek is a synthetic language stressing word ending (e.g., *anthropos* = a man [subject]; *anthropo* = to a man [indirect object]; *anthropon* = a man [direct object]).

In summary, we cannot overemphasize the importance of studying *vocabulary and grammar* together in order to arrive at proper exegesis. Word studies alone are insufficient, apart from grammatical considerations, to bring about correct interpretation.

3. **Genre:** In order to understand a writing, its literary genre (kind or style) must first be determined. It is the genre of the passage or book which sets the mood or stance from which the rest of the passage or book is seen. Literary genre can be illustrated by three concentric circles:
- a. **Literary style** — When a book of the Bible is approached, the first step in interpretation is to determine its literary style (e.g., whether it is historical, poetical, apocalyptical or prophetical).
 - b. **Literary expression** — Within any literary style there can occur passages utilizing unusual forms of literary expression (e.g., parables, allegories, psalms and riddles).
 - c. **Figures of speech** — Within any literary style or expression there may occur a figure of speech; that is, a phrase or a sentence in which the author expresses himself using words in a way differing from their normal use (e.g., metaphors, similes and idioms).

Just as vocabulary should not be considered apart from grammar, neither should vocabulary and grammar be considered apart from literary genre in solving the problem of the linguistic gap. The following is a diagram and illustration of the three circles of genre. It should be recognized that the illustration is partially inadequate in that figures of speech may be found outside of special literary expressions.



C. **Tools:** The following is only a partial listing of some of the tools that may be used to bridge the linguistic gap.

Concordances

Englishman's Greek Concordance (Zondervan)
Englishman's Hebrew & Chaldee Concordance (Zondervan)
Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament, J. B. Smith (Herald Press)
Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (Abingdon)
Young's Analytical Concordance (Eerdmans)

Lexicons

Analytical Greek Lexicon (Zondervan)
Analytical Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon, B. Davidson (MacDonald)
Greek-English Lexicon, Arndt & Gingrich (University of Chicago Press)
Greek-English Lexicon, T.S. Green (Zondervan)
Hebrew-English Lexicon, W. Gesenius (Oxford)
Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon (Zondervan)

Lexical Aids

Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine (Revell)
Grammatical Insights into the New Testament, N. Turner (T & T Clark)
Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek, B. Metzger
 (Theological Book Agency, Dist.)
New Testament Words, William Barclay (SCM Press)
New Testament Word Studies, J. A. Bengel (Kregel)
Synonyms of the New Testament, R. C. Trench
Synonyms of the Old Testament, R. B. Girdlestone (Eerdmans)
Syntax of the Moods and Tenses, E. Burton (T & T Clark)
Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Kittel (Ed. Eerdmans)
Word Pictures in the New Testament, A. T. Robertson (Broadman Press)
Word Studies in the New Testament, M. R. Vincent (Eerdmans)

Grammars

Essentials of New Testament Greek, J. H. Huddilston (Macmillan)
Grammar of the Greek New Testament, A. T. Robertson (Broadman Press)

Greek Grammar of the New Testament, Blass & Debrunner
(University of Chicago Press)
Hebrew Grammar, Wm. Gesenius (Oxford University)
Introductory Hebrew Grammar, R. L. Harris (Eerdmans)
Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, Dana & Mantey (Macmillan)
New Testament Greek for Beginners, J. G. Machen (Macmillan)
Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew, J. Weingreen (Oxford)
Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, E. W. Bullinger (Baker).

II. THE CULTURAL GAP

A. **Problem:** The cultural contexts of the Biblical writers differ vastly from the cultural context of the modern day reader.

B. **Solution:** This cultural gap may be bridged by studying the cultures in which the writers of Scripture lived. However, the solution to this problem is made more complex by the fact that different writers lived in cultural settings diverse from one another. As the centuries passed, God's people were influenced culturally by the Egyptian, Phoenician, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman cultures.

By "culture," we mean the ways and means, both material and social, whereby a given people carry on their existence. The cultural gap in its broadest sense would certainly include the linguistic gap, the historical gap, and the geographical gap. But for the purposes of this outline, we are using it in a much narrower sense. The study of Biblical cultures can be divided into two main classifications:

1. **Material Culture:** In order to understand a society it is necessary to study the material features and expressions of that society. This includes a consideration of such things as housing, cooking utensils, food, clothing, agricultural implements, weapons, means of transportation, animals, art forms, and religious articles (e.g., it is impossible to properly interpret Jeremiah 2:13 without an understanding of what a "cistern" represented in that cultural context).
2. **Social Culture:** In order to understand a society it is also necessary to explore the *way* things are done and the *manner* in which the people of that society relate to one another. Considering the way in which a society lives includes such areas as how the people make their living; where they live geographically; how they worship, recreate, make clothing, farm and cook. The *manner* in which the members of a society relate to one another would involve consideration of areas such as family customs, economic practices, civil laws, legal procedures, military tactics; as well as various types of social groupings (e.g., in Genesis 29:26 we find that Jacob would not have been deceived had he been familiar with the marriage customs in the land of Nahor; it is impossible to properly interpret I Peter 5:4 without an understanding of how the "chief shepherd" functioned in that day).

The way in which a people live within their environment molds their way of thinking. Therefore to understand the way in which a people think it is necessary to become acquainted with the way they live, bridging the cultural gap.

C. **Tools:** The following is only a partial listing of some of the tools that may be used to bridge the cultural gap.

All the Holy Days and Holidays of the Bible, H. Lockyer (Zondervan)
All the Trades and Occupations of the Bible, H. Lockyer (Zondervan)
Archaeology and the Ancient Testament, J. L. Kelso (Zondervan)

The Bible and Archaeology, J. A. Thomson (Eerdman's)
Biblical Archaeology, G. E. Wright (Westminster Press)
Everyday Life in Bible Time (National Geographic Society)
Insights into Bible Times and Customs, Weiss (Moody)
The Land and the Book, W. M. Thomson (Harper & Brothers)
Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, A. Edersheim (Eerdman's)
Manners and Customs of the Bible, J. Freeman (Logos International)
Manners and Customs of Bible Lands, F. H. Wight (Moody)
Orientations in Bible Lands, E. W. Rice (American Sunday School Union)

Bible Dictionaries

Bible Dictionary, Smith (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)
Davis Dictionary of the Bible (Revell)
International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Eerdman's)
The New Bible Dictionary (Eerdman's)
Pictorial Bible Dictionary, M. C. Tenney (Zondervan)
Unger's Bible Dictionary (Moody)

III. THE GEOGRAPHICAL GAP

A. Problem: The geographical context of the Biblical writers is foreign to the modern day reader.

B. Solution: This geographical gap may be bridged by a study of the geographical setting in which the events and writing of the Bible occurred. The problem is accentuated, however, by the fact that the writers themselves lived in different geographical contexts (e.g., Paul in Rome, Daniel in Babylon, and Moses in the wilderness). The problem is further complicated by the fact that some places mentioned in ancient writings either no longer exist or are no longer called by the same name. The answers to these problems can only be found by using the spade of archaeology. This involves study in three general areas:

1. **Political Geography:** In order to become acquainted with the cities, states and nations mentioned by the Biblical authors, we are dependent upon the research of the archaeologist. We are not necessarily looking to the archaeologist to substantiate the existence of a city or state, rather we are seeking facts concerning that place which will aid us in interpretation (e.g., it would be impossible to understand Elijah's run from Carmel to Jezreel in I Kings 18:42-46 without knowing the location of each and the distance between the two; archaeological evidence has greatly helped in understanding Isaiah 44:27-45:2 relative to the fall of Babylon).
2. **Geological Geography:** In order to understand references to climate, land formations, seas and rivers, we depend in part on archaeological evidences and in part on maps, written descriptions, photography and modern travel. A problem in this area is that, though the physical features of the Middle East have not changed drastically since Bible days, in some instances the names for them have (e.g., Psalms 125:2 and Isaiah 2:2 will be much more appreciated when the topography of the area around Jerusalem is considered; the significance of II Kings 5:10, 12 will be better understood by a consideration of the rivers mentioned).
3. **Botanical and Zoological Geography:** To understand allusions to plant life and animal life by Bible authors, we are dependent on both archaeology and modern science in order to relate ancient terms to presently known plants and

animals, and to study their characteristics and behavioural patterns (e.g., one cannot effectively interpret Proverbs 30:19-31, or Luke 13:32 without an understanding of the nature, habits and instincts of the creatures mentioned there; a study of Biblical botany will unfold the beauty of Song of Solomon 2:1-3).

Thus research into the political, geological, botanical and zoological divisions of geography enable the interpreter to bridge the geographical gap.

C. Tools: The following is only a partial listing of some of the tools that may be used to bridge the geographical gap.

All Animals of the Bible Lands, G. Cunsdale (Zondervan)

Animals and Birds of the Bible, B. L. Goddard (A. P. & A.)

Baker's Bible Atlas, Pfeiffer (Baker)

Geography of the Bible, D. Baly (Harper & Brothers)

The Macmillan Bible Atlas (Macmillan)

Oxford Bible Atlas (Oxford Press)

The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands, Pfeiffer & Vos. (Moody)

See also "Bible Dictionaries" listed under Cultural Tools.

IV. THE HISTORICAL GAP

A. Problem: The Historical context of the Biblical writers differs greatly from that of the modern day reader.

B. Solution: The way to bridge this historical gap is to become familiar with the historical setting for the events of the Bible and in which the writers lived. But this pursuit is complicated by the fact that the writers lived during a period spanning sixteen centuries, from Moses to John, and in a constantly changing world situation. In each era of history the world situation must be considered from three viewpoints:

1. **Political Background:** In order to understand the significance of events and viewpoints in Scripture, the political background must be taken into account. Succeeding governments have differing effects upon the peoples under their control so that the total lives of individuals are definitely influenced by the political order of which they are a part, whether willingly or unwillingly. In order to interpret the actions of Bible characters and writers, one must do everything possible to mentally place himself within that political environment (e.g., the significance of Hosea 12:1 can only be comprehended in the light of the political relationships between Ephraim, Assyria and Egypt; we cannot understand why the disciples of Jesus misunderstood His statements in Matthew 20:21 and Acts 1:6 without recognizing the political concerns of the day).
2. **Economic Background:** Another factor which must be taken into consideration in order to understand the significance of events and viewpoints in Scripture is the economic background of the period. The economic situation, whether local or universal, exerts great influence on a people's way of life. This is seen by the diversity or uniformity of occupations within a society and the resultant creation of rich and poor classes. The interpreter must imagine himself in the economic situation of the passage he is interpreting (e.g., the economic wealth and need in the Early Church played a major role in fusing the Jewish and Gentile believers; see Acts 11:27-29).
3. **Religious Background:** Finally, in order to properly understand events and viewpoints in Scripture, the religious background must also be considered.

Societies have always been greatly influenced by religion; the lives of individuals often revolve around, or are at least affected by their religions. Throughout Scripture God's people are seen in relation to other religious groups as either being influenced by them or in conflict with them. Hence the need for the interpreter to place himself within the religious frame of reference of the writers and characters of Scripture (e.g., the significance of Leviticus 18:9-14 cannot be estimated apart from an evaluation of the Canaanite religions; Paul's conflict in Ephesus can only be brought to life by research into the religious context of Diana worship in Ephesus; Acts 19:24-41).

Thus a study into the political, economic and religious background aids the interpreter in bridging the historical gap.

C. Tools: The following is only a partial listing of some of the tools that may be used to bridge the historical gap.

Archaeology & Bible History, J. P. Free (Van Kampen Press)
Archaeology and the Old Testament, Unger (Zondervan)
The Bible and Archaeology, J. A. Thomson (Paternoster Press)
Bible History — Old Testament, A. Edersheim (Eerdman's)
Old Testament Bible History, Edersheim (Eerdman's)
The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, A. Edersheim (Eerdman's)
The Works of Flavius Josephus (Kregel)
 See also "Bible Dictionaries" listed under Cultural Tools.