

Bible Interpretation

Philosophical presuppositions.

Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation, especially texts in the area of literature (like poetry), religion, and law.

2Timothy 2:15 -- "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing (accurately handling) the word of truth."

Greek: *hermeneutike* may have derived from Hermes, the mythological Greek deity whose role is that of messenger of the gods.

The traditional etymology of hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word ἐρμηνεύω (*hermeneuō*, "translate", or "interpret").

A proper hermeneutic engages in rigorous **exegesis**.

Greek ἐξήγησις (*exegesis*) from ἐξηγεῖσθαι (*exēgeisthai*) 'to lead out.'

The definition is: A critical explanation or interpretation of the text.

Eisegesis is the opposite – forcing meaning into a text.

In John 1:18, Jesus exegeted the Father.

A Brief History of Exegesis

Medieval (5th to the 15th century) Christian interpretations of the Biblical text devised a form of exegesis that considered every text in a fourfold mode, emphasizing the distinction between the "letter" and the "spirit" of the text.

The literal sense understands the text based on what the text states or reports directly.

The allegorical sense explains the text in a way where each literal element has a symbolic meaning.

The moral application understands the text according to how it applies to and is understood by the individual reader or hearer.

The Analogical sense draws out of the text the implicit (implied, but not plainly stated) allusions it contains to secret metaphysical and eschatological knowledge, or gnosis.

It is really twofold: The literal sense versus a spiritual or mystical sense.

The Protestant Reformation ushered in a renewed interest in the interpretation of the Bible, which stepped away from the interpretive tradition developed during the Middle Ages, returning to a concentration on the texts themselves. Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasized “*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*” – or, “writing his own interpreter”. It is the basis for concepts such as “*sola Scriptura*”.

My Hermeneutic Approach

- The Literal Method (or Face Value Method, sometimes called the “Natural Method”)
- The fallacy of “wooden literalism.”
- Words mean things.

Consistent hermeneutics

Consistency matters. We should not have one method for some portions of the Bible (like the passages on salvation) and another for other portions (like the prophetic or apocalyptic).

Eschatological Concepts

Eschaton – last things

eschatology (*eskhatos* “last, furthest, remote.”) – As a theological term it means the study of “last things,” i.e. death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Millennium -- From *mille* “thousand” + *annus* “year,” hence a period of 1,000 years.

The basic dividing line in eschatology is between futurist or historicist.

Futurist -- The view that the prophecies of Revelation (and related passages) focus upon the end of the age (world), and that therefore the greater part of the book has yet to be fulfilled.

Historicist -- The view that the prophecies of the Revelation (and related passages) provide a preview of history from the time of the writer to the end of the world, and therefore have been already fulfilled, at least in part.

Among the futurists you have:

Premillennialism -- Belief in a literal coming of Christ before the thousand-year reign of world peace.

Pre-tribulationism -- The belief that that Christ will return to gather (rapture / *harpazo*) Christians before the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Great Tribulation -- A seven-year interval when a world religious-political leader called the Antichrist takes power.

Rapture -- from Medieval Latin *raptura*, “seizure, kidnapping” from Latin *raptus* “a carrying off.” Translating the Greek *harpazo* --

- to seize, carry off by force
- to seize on, claim for one's self eagerly
- to snatch out or away

Historical Premillennialism -- Also called post-tribulation premillennialism. The use of the term "historic" implies that this point of view is the historical view of premillennialists, while pre-tribulationism is a newer understanding. Historic premillennialism teaches that the church was in the fore-vision of Old Testament prophecy, while dispensationalism teaches that the church is hardly, if at all, mentioned by the Old Testament prophets.

Among the historicists you have:

Amillennialism -- This is the teaching that there is no literal 1,000 year reign of Christ as referenced in Revelation 20. Instead, it teaches that we are in the Millennium now.

Postmillennialism -- Belief in the restoration of society, primarily through the influence of the church, before the return of Christ.

Preterism -- The view that the prophecies of the book of Revelation (along with the prophecies of Matthew 24, etc.) commented on events of John's day and did not make predictions about the future end of the world. Full preterists contend that all Biblical prophecy has been fulfilled as of 70 AD, while partial-preterists do expect a future return of Christ.

Covenantalism vs. Dispensationism

The terms "Covenantal Theology" and "Dispensational Theology" refer to two different ways of interpreting the biblical record of salvation history.

Covenantal Theology (Covenantalism, Federalism)

The standard description of Covenant Theology views the history of God's dealings with mankind, from Creation to Fall to Redemption to Consummation, under the framework of the three overarching theological covenants:

- **Redemption** -- the eternal agreement within the Godhead in which the Father appointed the Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to redeem his elect people.
- **Works** -- made in the Garden of Eden between God and Adam who represented all mankind as a federal head. (Romans 5:12-21) It promised life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam, and all mankind in Adam, broke the covenant, thus standing condemned. The covenant of works continues to function after the fall as the moral law.
- **Grace** -- promises eternal life for all people who receive forgiveness of sin through Christ. It is the historical, real-time expression of the eternal covenant of redemption. The covenant of grace became the basis for all future covenants that God made with mankind such as with Noah, Abraham, David, and finally in the New Covenant founded and fulfilled in Christ. These individual covenants are called the *biblical covenants* because they are explicitly described in the Bible. They are usually described as the various “administrations” of the single covenant of grace.

These three covenants are not explicitly presented as, nor called, covenants in the Bible. Covenant Theologians argue that they are implied in the Biblical data and are therefore referred to as “Theological Covenants.”

Strengths and Weaknesses

Dispensational Theology (Dispensationalism)

A hermeneutic that stresses the differing ways that God works with mankind during various periods (or dispensations, Gr. “*oikonomia*”) in salvation history (see Eph. 1:10; 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:4). In the classic Dispensational scheme, each dispensation begins with an offer by God and ends with failure by man and a period of divine judgment.

In Classic Dispensationalism, there are seven dispensations:

- **Innocence** (Adam and Eve in the Garden)
- **Conscience** (from Eden to the Flood)
- **Human Government** (the Flood to Tower of Babel)
- **Promise** (Abraham to Moses)
- **Law** (Moses to Jesus)
- **Grace** (New Covenant or Church Age)
- **Millennium** (Rule of Christ on Earth)

Strengths and Weaknesses

The two hermeneutics differ on how Old Testament promises to Israel will be fulfilled –

Dispensationalism says that they will be literally fulfilled with and for ethnic Israel

Covenantalism says with they are being figuratively fulfilled in the church, or they will be figuratively fulfilled in the eternal state (either in Heaven or in the New Jerusalem).

Replacement Theology -- A system of interpretation based on the idea that “the church” replaces national Israel as God’s vehicle of redemption, appropriating for herself all the promises made to Israel and rendering the Jewish nation irrelevant eschatologically.
