

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BIBLE

James W. Garrett

**An introductory course in
Bible interpretation and application**

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Exegesis *ek hgeisqai* (*ek hegeisthai*) "To lead out" or "to show the way"

Eisegesis *eij hgeisqai* (*eis hegeisthai*) "To lead in"

Exposition *exponere* (Latin) "To set forth" or "To display"

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SECTION ONE: ABOUT THE BIBLE

THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

About forty men wrote the Bible over a period of 1500 years.

- The date of the Exodus was 1447 BC.
- Israel entered the Promised Land in 1407 BC. During this forty-year period, the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was composed, chiefly by Moses.
- The last books of the Bible were written by John the Apostle, in the final years of his life (John died 99-100 AD).
- Thus, in round numbers, the Bible was written between 1400 BC - 100 AD = 1500 years.

EXCURSUS: DATING THE EXODUS

The date of the Exodus is established by identifying a biblical event also recorded in solidly dated in non-biblical literature. The earliest event that can be so identified is the Battle of Karkar. Two methods are used the date the Battle of Karkar. One is by studying the Assyrian Canon, which contains a chronological list of the civil officers designated as *limmi* or eponyms. The other method is by studying the lists given by the Greek geographer, Ptolemaeus, in which he records the eclipses which occurred under the various Babylonian, Assyrian, and Persian rulers of Babylon. The exact dates of these eclipses can be determined astronomically. Thus, an exact chronology of late Assyrian history is possible. See, J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible* (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1946) pp. 75-76, 168-174; Merrill F. Unger, *Archeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1954) pg 244

Battle of Karkar

854-53 B.C.

Ahab, King of Israel, and Benhadad I, king of Syria, united their armies to oppose the Assyrian invader, Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC). The Assyrian historical record, contained on a monolith now housed in the British Museum, describes this battle and those who participated. The Assyrian record fits the situation described at the close of I Kings 20, the only time when Ahab and Benhadad I were at peace with one another.

Division of the Kingdom (854 + 77)

931 B.C.

The date of Solomon's death and the division of the Kingdom can be established by adding together the years that each king following Solomon reigned over Israel (see chart below) through the reign of Ahab. then adding that total to the date of Karkar: 854 + 77 = 931.

Kings of Israel from Karkar to the The Divided Kingdom

Jeroboam	I Kings 14:20	22 years
Nadab	I Kings 15:25	2 years
Baasha	I Kings 15:33	24 years
Elah	I Kings 16:8	2 years
Zimri	I Kings 16:15	7 days
Omri	I Kings 16:23	12 years
Ahab	I Kings 16:29	22 years
Total		84 years

Omri and Ahab (father and son) were co-regents for 7 years (I Kings 16:23 and I Kings 16:29). Thus 7 years must be removed from the total. **Total years from Ahab to the Division of the Kingdom: 84 – 7 = 77**

Beginning of Solomon's reign (931 + 40) 971 B.C.
Solomon reigned 40 years.

Construction of the Temple began (971 – 4) 967 B.C.
I Kings 6:1 states that the construction of the Temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign.

Date of Exodus (967 + 480) 1447 B.C.
I Kings 6:1 states that the construction of the Temple commenced 480 years after the Exodus.

THE WRITING AND COLLECTION OF SCRIPTURE

The first portion of Scripture to be written was inscribed on tablets of stone by Yahweh, Himself.

Exodus 31:18 *And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.*

Exodus 32:15-16 *Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. And the tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.*

Recall that when Moses came down from the mountain, he found the people worshipping before the golden calf and in his indignation, he threw down the tablets of stone, breaking them.

Exodus 32:19 *And it came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.*

Later, God instructed Moses to hew out two tablets of stone and return to the mountain. God inscribed the Ten Commandments on these tablets, which later were placed in the Ark of the Covenant.

Exodus 34:1 *Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered.*

Exodus 34:28 *So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he (Yahweh - note verse 1) wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.*

Not only did God inscribe the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, but He also dictated to Moses the terms and elements that were a part of the covenant. Parchment probably was the medium that Moses used to record this portion of Scripture.

Exodus 24:4, 7 *And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel... Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"*

Exodus 34:27 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."*

This is the account of the first writing of Holy Scripture: the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, written by the finger of God, Himself, and the terms and conditions of the covenant, dictated to Moses, who recorded them, probably on parchment.

Over the next 1000 years, prophets, kings, and other men of God wrote the literature that comprises our Old Testament. They wrote on parchment (thin leather) and papyrus scrolls (an early form of paper, made from papyrus reeds). The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written 460-430 BC

During the four-century period between the close of the Old Testament and the birth of Christ, Jewish leaders wrote various books. Some of these are history, such as the books of Maccabees. Some are books of wisdom. Others are apocalyptic. Some are rather bizarre. None of these are inspired. First Maccabees, the most reliable history book of the Jews, written in this period, states that there was no inspired prophet among the people of God, at that time. The book also states that the Old Testament Scriptures were all that they needed for comfort; they did not need any further writings. Here are some excerpts:

1 Maccabees 4:46 *and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.*

1 Maccabees 9:27 *Thus there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.*

1 Maccabees 12:5 *This is a copy of the letter which Jonathan wrote to the Spartans: 6 "Jonathan the high priest, the senate of the nation, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people to their brethren the Spartans, greeting. 7 Already in time past a letter was sent to Onias the high priest from Arius, who was king among you, stating that you are our brethren, as the appended copy shows. 8 Onias welcomed the envoy with honor, and received the letter, which contained a clear declaration of alliance and friendship. 9 Therefore, though we have no need of these things, since we have as encouragement the holy books which are in our hands,...*

1 Maccabees 14:41 *"And the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest for ever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise,*

Fourteen of these inter-testamental books have come to be called, "The Apocrypha." They were appended to the Old Testament in all Bibles up until 1827, but were not regarded as being a part of the Protestant Canon. Neither do the Jews accept them as canonical. Roman Catholic Bibles,

however, contain them because the Church of Rome has declared them to be a part of the Canon. These books provide the basis for some Roman Catholic doctrines, such as prayers for the dead. The apocrypha consists of the following:

- 1 Esdras
- 2 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- The Rest of Esther
- The Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus (also called, "Sirach")
- Baruch, with the Epistle of Jeremiah
- The Song of the Three Holy Children
- The History of Susanna
- Bel and the Dragon
- The Prayer of Manasses
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees.

After the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit returned to His work of Scripture writing. This is in keeping with Jesus' promise to the Apostles, a few hours before His arrest and crucifixion.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 16:13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, dated about 51 AD, usually is regarded as the first portion of the New Testament to be written.

By the end of the Second Century (about 175 AD), the principle books of the New Testament were in general use in the Church and acknowledged

- to be apostolic (written by an apostle or by someone associated with an apostle),
- inspired by the Spirit of Christ,
- and therefore authoritative and canonical.

The twenty New Testament books that were beyond dispute were the Four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen epistles of Paul, the First Epistle of Peter, and First Epistle of John.

Early church testimony is ambiguous concerning the remaining seven books. Hebrews, The Second Epistle of Peter, Second and Third John, James, Jude, and Revelation, were included in some of the early lists but one or more of them were omitted in other lists.

In an Easter letter, dated 367 AD, Athanasius of Alexandria listed the books of the New Testament as we have them today, indicating that the Eastern Church (Greek) had a clearly recognized canon. The Roman Synod of 382 AD, under Damascus, made a similar declaration, thus establishing that the Western Church (Latin) accepted the same canon.

Sometime in the Fourth Century, the Old Testament and the New Testament were collected into a single book, called, *Sacred Literature*.

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Although written over a period of fifteen centuries by approximately forty different men, in a variety of cultures, there is perfect harmony in the material. This fact leads us to conclude that all of the writers were guided by a single supernatural mind, the Mind of God.

- Some writers simply wrote down what God told them, as when Moses wrote the Law (Deuteronomy 31:24).
- Others, such as Matthew wrote down what he had seen and heard during the years that he had been with Jesus.
- Luke who never saw Jesus upon the earth, wrote what he learned from diligent research (Luke 1:1-4).
- Some probably used earlier writings, as when the writer of 2 Samuel refers to the book of Jasher, (2 Samuel 1:18 and Joshua 10:13) a book that no longer exists.

The Holy Spirit guided all of them; they wrote what God wanted them to write. This is called, "inspiration" (In II Timothy 3:16, the Greek term translated, "inspiration, is *theopneustos* [θεοπνευστος] meaning, *God breathed*).

There are various theories of inspiration. Here are two that often are offered by those who have a strong view of the inspiration of Scripture:

1. **Dictation:** According to this theory, the Holy Spirit dictated every word, and the human author just wrote down what was dictated. The Holy Spirit protected the human author from making any mistakes in the dictation.
2. **Mechanical:** The human author was like a typewriter. He was hardly aware of what he was writing, but was just the instrument used.

Much of Scripture requires us to hold a view other than these two because the personality of the human agent that the Holy Spirit used is apparent in the writing style. For example, Luke, a physician, writes very differently from John, who wrote in a very passionate style. Luke is very deliberate and very detailed (which hand was healed, for example). Luke and Acts (both written by Luke) are of the same style, and are quite different from the style of Matthew. Paul became very emotional in some of his writings, even leaving out words in his sentences.

We are on safe ground when we declare that Scripture is *plenary inspired* (meaning fully) and *verbally inspired* (meaning that the terms are influenced by and in some instances chosen by the Holy Spirit).

Here are important points to consider, concerning the inspiration of Scripture:

- I. Jesus quoted the Old Testament as if it were exactly what it claimed to be.
 - A. The incidents were spoken of as being historical events and the people real people.
 - God made male and female (Mark 10:6)
 - Abel was murdered (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51)
 - etc.
 - B. Jesus also quoted the Old Testament as if it were the Word of God.
 - "It is written... (Mark 11:17; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; etc.)
 - "Have you not read" (Mark 2:25)
 - "David himself said in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36)
 - "Until heaven and earth pass away, one *yodh* - the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet - or one corner of a letter shall not pass away from the Law" (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17)
 - etc.
- II. The New Testament writers considered the Old Testament to be inspired of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

2 Peter 1:15-21 *And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

The sense of this passage is that the Old Testament prophets were not just good news analysts. They did not look at what was going on and then, relying on their ability to

interpret events, predict what was going to happen, as an editor might do in a newspaper or magazine. The Holy Spirit was the author of their prophecies.

III. Peter considered Paul's writings to be of the same nature as the Old Testament.

2 Peter 3:15-16 and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

IV. Paul quoted Luke, just a few years after Luke was written.

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (I Timothy 5:18).

Note that the first half of this verse is a quote of Deuteronomy 25:34 *You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.* The latter portion of the verse, *The laborer is worthy of his wages,* is not an Old Testament quote, but a quote from Luke 10:7. Luke wrote,

"And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

The laborer is worthy of his wages may be inferred from some Old Testament passages, but there is no passage that contains the quote as recorded by Paul.

It is significant that Matthew 10:10 contains the same account as that described by Luke, but in Matthew's version, Jesus says, *the laborer is worthy of his food* (Greek - *trophe* [trofḥ] "food"). Luke, on the other hand, used the Greek term for wages (Greek – *misthos*, [mīsqow] "wages paid for work").

In I Timothy 5:18, Paul quoted Luke, word for word, using the term, *wages* (*misthos* [mīsqow]). The only reasonable explanation is that in I Timothy 5:18 Paul described Luke's Gospel as, "Scripture."

V. John claimed Divine authority for what he wrote in Revelation.

Revelation 1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

VI. The Lord gave warning to any who would add or take away from the Book of Revelation

Revelation 22:18-19 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

VII. To those in whom the Spirit of God dwells, or those who are being touched by the Spirit of God, the Bible has the "ring of truth."

- John Calvin described the Bible as being, *auto pistis*, meaning, "self-authenticating." A "natural man" may not accept this. Evidence of this is demonstrated on the various talk shows on TV where humanistic individuals discuss the Bible or issues that the Bible touches. These "natural" individuals treat the Bible with contempt, or no more than the product of human genius.
- 1 Corinthians 2:14 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE

The two major decisions that have to be made about the contents of the Bible are

- (a) which books belong in the Bible;
- (b) which manuscripts of these books convey the original text.

As noted above, the general corpus of the New Testament canon (literally, *cane*, or *measuring rod*) was established by 200 AD. The Jewish canon was established with certainty much earlier. Josephus, born 37 AD and writing in the last quarter of the First Century AD, stated that the Old Testament canon, as we have it today, was established during the work of Ezra and the Great Synagogue, c. 450 BC (some contend for a later date). However, even before an authorized list was compiled, it is clear that each of the individual books that constitute our Old Testament were regarded as being the Word of God as soon as they were produced.

The Protestant canon consists of sixty-six books, (39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament). The Roman Catholic canon includes the apocryphal books. The canon is the list of books, which the Church has deemed to be a part of the organism of revelation and therefore the divine authority in the Church. The canon was determined by noting which books, historically, had been universally regarded as a Scripture.

Although God inspired those who wrote the **autographs** (the **original manuscripts**), He did not inspire those who copied or translated the Bible. It is evident that both copyists and translators could and did make errors.

Many ancient manuscripts and translations have been preserved. By comparing them, we usually can determine with strong certainty the language of the autograph. In a few cases, we cannot be certain, but none of the uncertain passages or terms have serious implications for our faith.

While we do not have any part of the Bible in the handwriting of the original author, we do have two kinds of sources from which we can learn what the autograph contained.

1. **Manuscripts**: these are hand-written **copies** of the original documents or copies of copies. We define manuscripts as copies, written by hand, in the language of the original document.
2. **Versions**: hand-written **translations** into another language. Some of the ancient versions were translated from **copies** of the documents much older than any which we now possess. Therefore, they are very valuable in helping us to know what was written, originally.

OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS AND VERSIONS

1. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language between the years of 1400 BC and 400 BC (round numbers). The oldest Hebrew **manuscripts** are the Scripture portions that were found among the Dead Sea scrolls (found in caves near the Dead Sea in 1947 and years immediately following). Most of these manuscripts date from around 100 BC, when they were copied from earlier copies. There are many extant Old Testament manuscripts that were copied in later centuries.
2. The oldest **version** of the Old Testament is a Greek version, called the *Septuagint*. The name comes from the Latin word for "seventy," because according to tradition 72 Jewish scholars did the translation in 72 days in Alexandria, Egypt. The truth is the Pentateuch portion of the *Septuagint* was translated about 250 BC. Various people translated the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures over the next seventy-five years. The translation was based on Hebrew manuscripts much older than any which we now possess. This version is very valuable in helping us to know what the original manuscripts contained.

The *Septuagint* was the version of the Old Testament read by most Jews during the time that Jesus was on the earth, and during the remaining years of the First Century. The *Septuagint* seems to have been translated from ancient manuscripts that were not identical to the family of manuscripts on which our present Old Testament Bibles are based. Thus, there are some slight differences between the *Septuagint* and our Old Testament. Since the *Septuagint* is the form of the Old Testament quoted most often in the New Testament, many Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament are slightly different from those verses in our Old Testament.

In time, the Jews became very disturbed because the Christians pointed to Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of the Messiah's virgin birth. The Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is *almah*, which can mean "nubile young woman," or "virgin." When the translators of the *Septuagint* came to this passage, they translated *almah* with the Greek term, *parthenos*, meaning, "virgin." This clearly demonstrates that the pre-Christian Jews of Alexandria understood the *almah* of Isaiah 7:14 to foretell a coming virgin birth (Some have argued that they understood this to refer to a young woman who had been a virgin up to the point of the time that she conceived. This doesn't make much sense, because the birth was to be a "sign." How could something be a sign, when a virgin bride's first conception and birth occurred every day of the year in every society?)

A very anti-Christian Jew named, Aquila, produced a Greek version of the Old Testament in the Second Century and chose Greek terms that Christians could not use to defend Christianity. Aquila's version replaced the *Septuagint* for many Greek-literate Jews because of the anti-Christian sentiments that had risen in the Jewish communities.

Other important Greek versions of the Old Testament also translated in the Second Century AD are those of Theodotion, and Symmachus. In addition to the Greek versions of the Old Testament, there also are ancient versions of the Old Testament in Syriac, Egyptian, Ethiopic, Armenian, and other languages.

The history of the Old Testament can be divided into four periods:

1. *From the writing of the autographs to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.* In Ezra's era, the Old Testament canon was collected and inspiration ceased.
2. *The era of the Scribes.* Ezra began a "race of scribes" who were devoted to the study of the Scriptures and were custodians of sacred truth. The scribes formalized the Old Testament canon. They described themselves as "putting a hedge around the Law," meaning that they were to ascertain, defend, perpetuate the true interpretation of Scripture and to preserve it from error in transmission. They functioned through the 5th Century AD.

The Scribes began the critical observation of the text known as *Massora* (meaning, "tradition"). When transcribing and copying, the Scribes counted the number of the letters, words, and verses; they noted the middle letter in a sentence and in a document (these usually were signified by making the letter a bit smaller or larger).

During this time, through the reverence that developed for the words of the Old Testament, the style of Hebrew script evolved into the style that we see today, beautiful, block letters. Calligraphy was important to the Scribes.

Hebrew at this time had no vowels. It was a consonantal alphabet. Pronunciation was preserved through oral tradition. There was a difference between the pronunciation of the Hebrew by Egyptian Jews and Palestinian Jews.

The Scribes began the Talmud, which is a laboriously minute interpretation of the Law.

3. *The Massorites succeeded the Scribes.* The successors to the scribes, the *Massorites* (they took their name from *Massora*) continued and enlarged the work of the Scribes. The *Massorites* functioned from c.500 AD until after c.1000 AD. They added vowel points to the alphabet. Because the words themselves were considered sacred, the vowels were not inserted between the consonants, as is true in most languages. Instead, they were added below or above the consonants. Thus, the words were not altered.

Example: consonant without vowel point  (pronounced as if the English letter "B")

Example: consonant with vowel point  (pronounced like the "BE" in the word, "bed")

Some manuscripts were prepared for reading in the synagogue by having the text in two columns. The first column was the sacred text, without vowel points. Beside it was the text with vowel points, to aid the reader.

4. *The modern era began about 1100 AD and extends to the present.* There is some slight difference in the manuscripts that have their origin in Spain and France, from those that have their origin in Germany and Russia.

NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS AND VERSIONS

1. All of the books of the New Testament were written in Greek, during the seventy years that followed the death of Christ (some very minor sections may have been in Aramaic, then transposed into Greek). The originals and the early copies all were written in Greek *uncials* (the term means, "inch," indicating that they were written in letters one inch high - an exaggeration, but the manuscripts are written in large capital letters).

The oldest New Testament manuscripts that we possess were copied about three hundred years after the ascension of Christ, around 350 AD. Only two manuscripts are of this age:

- *Codex Sinaiticus* (so called because it was found in a monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai in 1844) now kept in the British Museum;
- *Vaticanus* (so called because it was placed in the library of the Vatican, soon after that library was established in 1448 and still is kept there).

Another important manuscript is *Alexandrianus*, which was copied about 400 AD. The Patriarch of Constantinople brought the manuscript from Alexandria to England in 1628 and gave it as a gift to Charles I. It also is kept in the British Museum.

There are more than one hundred other *uncial* manuscripts in our possession, dating from the Fifth to the Tenth Century.

In the Ninth and Tenth Centuries, a new style of writing Greek was developed, called, "cursive" or "running" (sometimes called miniscule). There are hundreds of cursive manuscripts dating from the Ninth Century to the invention of the printing press in the Fifteenth Century. If you buy a Greek New Testament, today, it will be written in cursive.

Example: Uncial Greek word for "son" (*huios*), UIOS

Example: Cursive Greek word for "son," υἱός

Note that the cursive Greek has a breathing mark (**Ϸ** over the second letter (*iota* - **ι**), indicating that the word should be pronounced as if it began with an "H." It also has an accent over the fourth letter (*omicron* - **ο**), indicating that this is the syllable to emphasize in pronunciation. Thus, the word is pronounced as if spelled, *wheeos* (accenting the last syllable).

Even though Greek Uncials had vowels, the reader was supposed to know how to pronounce the words (smooth or rough breathing at the beginning of the word and accents). In this way the written language made the same assumptions that written Hebrew made before vowel points were added to that language. It was assumed that readers knew the spoken language.

In Uncial writing, there was no space between the words. Also, when a writer arrived at the edge of the page he just went to the next line without indicating that he was either in the middle of a word or at the end of a word.

- Here is John 3:16 in Greek cursive style:

Outw|j gar hgaphsen o` qeoj ton kosmon(w|ste ton ui'on ton monogenh/ edwken(
i|ha paj o` pisteuwn eij auton mh. apo,|htai al|l| ech| zw|hn aiwnion|

- Here is John 3:16 in Greek Uncial style:

OUTWSGARHGAPHSENOQEOSTOKOSMONWSTETONUIONTONMONOGEN
HEDOKENINAPASOPISTEUWNEISAUTONMEAPOLHTAIAIALLEXHZWHNA
IWNION

If the same procedure were used in English, here is how it would appear.

- Cursive style:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (NAS)

- Uncial style:

FORGODSOLOVEDTHEWORLDTHATHEGAVEHISONLYBEGOTTENSON
THATWHOEVERBELIEVESINHIMSHOULDNOTPERISHBUTHAVEETERN
ALIFE.

Reading Uncial manuscripts sometimes is difficult. Note, for example, the sentence,

GODISNOWHERE.

Two opposite meanings are possible. This is the sort of challenge faced by those who work with Uncial manuscripts.

2. In the first half of the Second Century (before 150 AD) the Bible probably was translated into Syriac, and not much later into Latin. Some of the oldest versions of the New Testament extant today are in the Peshito-Syriac language (meaning, "common" Syian - about 2000 of these are extant).

A more careful Latin version was translated around 400 AD. This version is called the *Vulgate*, meaning, "popular." The Vulgate translation was done by Jerome, at the instruction of his church superiors. Jerome was an excellent scholar who sought to find the oldest manuscripts possible in producing his Latin version. It became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church as well as Western Europe. From that time forward, all Roman Catholic versions must be tested by how faithful they are to the Vulgate. This version and the King James Version of 1611 were the two most important translations ever produced.

In the Third and Fourth Centuries, versions were made in Coptic (Egyptian), Gothic, Ethiopian, and Armenian. Since these versions are translations of very ancient manuscripts, or copies of ancient translations, they help to increase the certainty that our present Bible is based on a reliable documents.

This process needs to be understood, because the first thing that one does in Bible exegesis is to determine what the original autograph said. Sometimes there will be manuscript differences. This is not a ploy of liberals or those who would tamper with the Bible. It is a real condition that we have to face.

An example is Matthew 17:21 and its parallel passages, Mark 9:14-29 and Luke 9:37-43.

- Matthew 17:21 in the King James Version reads,

But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

Mark 9:29 in the King James Version states,

This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Luke 9:37-44 in the KJV makes no reference either to prayer or fasting. The account concludes,

42 And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. 43 And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, 44 Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.

- The NAS puts brackets around Matthew 17:21 and notes in a sidebar that some manuscripts do not contain this verse.
- The NIV does not even contain Matthew 17:21, except in a footnote without comment.

Mark 9:29 receives similar treatment in recent versions.

- The NAS states, *by anything but prayer*, then notes, in a sidebar, that many manuscripts add *and fasting*.
- The NIV reads, *only by prayer*, then states in a footnote, "some manuscripts, *prayer and fasting*."

Why is there this difference? Did Jesus say that *this kind comes out only by prayer and fasting*, or did He say, *this kind comes out only by prayer*?

Most members of the Byzantine family of manuscripts contain the expression, *and fasting*, at Mark 9:29. Most Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean families of manuscripts testify to the absence of, *and fasting*.

The same thing can be said for Matthew 17:21. It tends to be present in Byzantine texts and absent in the other text types.

How can this be explained? One thing that quickly entered the life of the early church was an emphasis on asceticism. This began to influence the doctrines relating to salvation, sanctification, etc. The following quote from Bruce Metzger illustrates how this tendency was reflected in copying and producing manuscripts.

"In view of the increasing emphasis on asceticism in the early Church and the corresponding insistence upon fasting as an obligation laid on all Christians it is not surprising that monks, in their work of transcribing manuscripts, should have introduced several references to fasting, particularly in connection with prayer. This has happened in numerous manuscripts at Mark 14: 29; Acts 10:30; and First Corinthians 7:5. In Romans 14:17, where the kingdom of God is said to be not eating and drinking, *but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, codex 4 inserts after *righteousness* the words *and asceticism* (*kai aḗkhsiv*). Such interpolations abound in chapter Seven of First Corinthians." (Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, page 203).

This presents a possibility for the explanation of how the reference to fasting entered the Mark passage. What about Matthew 17:21?

Indeed, there is strong manuscript evidence that this verse was added. This is called a, "gloss." Christian scribes often made notes on the side of the page, even as most of us do in the borders beside the text in our Bibles. In all probability, a Byzantine scribe producing a copy of Matthew, put a note on the border of his manuscript, quoting the parallel passage in Mark (which in his Byzantine manuscript contained the expression, "and fasting"). When a later manuscript was produced by copying the manuscript with the note, the note became incorporated in the text. Thus, the many copies that were made of his manuscript and the copies made of the copies began a Byzantine family of manuscripts with this gloss.

Consider how many people, on the basis of this verse, have begun a time of prolonged prayer and fasting in order to displace a demon, when the Gospel account provides no basis for such action. As a matter of note, Jesus did not pray before casting out the demon. What He was addressing, in the statement, by *anything but prayer*, was the flagging prayer life of his disciples. A constant, intense prayer life is required for spiritual power.

Another example is John 5:4 in the KJV, *For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

The description about the troubling of the water would have confused some readers. So, a scribe sought to explain the troubling of the water by writing in the margin the Jewish tradition, *an angel went down at a certain season and troubled the water*. In copying the manuscript, this marginal note became incorporated into the text. This phrase is absent in the two oldest manuscripts of John. Other manuscripts put an asterisk around the phrase, indicating that the scribe who copied it realized that it was not present in all of the manuscripts available to him. So, the more recent versions of John 5 do not contain this phrase, or else bracket it, indicating that it does not enjoy manuscript integrity.

FAMILIES OF MANUSCRIPTS

There are four major "text types" of New Testament manuscripts (so identified because of the geographical areas from whence they originated):

1. Alexandrian
2. Western
3. Caesarean
4. Byzantine

As the Roman Church gained dominance in the western portion of the empire, Latin began to replace Greek as the language of literature. Greek continued to prevail in the East, around Constantinople (Byzantium), until the Muslims conquered the Eastern Empire in the middle of the Fifteenth Century. This being true, Greek manuscripts gave way to Latin in all but Byzantium. It is for this reason that we have more Greek manuscripts of the Byzantine text type.

Since we have more Byzantine text types than we have of the other types, the Byzantine text type is called "The Majority Text."

- One sub-family of the Byzantine text (also known as the *majority text*) is the *textus receptus*. The *textus receptus* is the result of the work of Erasmus (who died 1536), who assembled a Greek New Testament from the many manuscripts available to him (Byzantine texts, for the most part).
- After Erasmus' death, Stephanus (who died 1559) continued the work of Erasmus.
- Beza (who died 1605) continued the work.

The King James Version is based on the *textus receptus* (the text assembled by Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza). Most versions produced since the final decade of the last century (NAS, RSV, NIV, NASB, etc.) are based on a study of all four text types.

The point is, we must determine the text, before beginning exegesis.

Excursus: THE ENGLISH BIBLE

- 1 Caedmon was a singer who sang Scripture texts in Anglo-Saxon. According to tradition, he was an illiterate servant in a British monastery who sang in his sleep the verses that he had heard the monks reciting. The monks wrote down these beautiful songs. Caedmon's paraphrases are thought to be the first form of the Bible in English.
- 2 The churchman known as the Venerable Bede, at the hour of his death in 735 AD, finished the translation of John's Gospel into Anglo-Saxon, one of the languages from which English developed.
- 3 King Alfred, about 900 AD, translated portions of the Bible into this pre-English Anglo-Saxon language.
- 4 With William the Conqueror's victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 AD, the Norman-French language entered England and blended with the Anglo-Saxon, producing what is known as "Middle English." Around 1380, Wycliffe and his co-workers translated the Bible into Middle English. These early translations were not translations of the Hebrew and Greek, but were translations of the Vulgate, the official Bible of the Church at that time.
- 5 The moveable type printing press was invented in 1450 and the first book of any size to be printed was Gutenberg's edition of the Vulgate. It took six years to complete the printing of this book (the Gutenberg Vulgate was released in 1456)
- 6 Between 1522 and 1534 Martin Luther made the first translation in Western Europe that was based on the Greek and Hebrew texts, rather than the Vulgate. Although this was a German translation, it must be mentioned in a study of English translations, because it set the stage for future translations of the English Bible.
- 7 In 1525, William Tyndale began to produce the first printed English Bibles. Before Tyndale's work, there were only handwritten copies of Wycliffe's Bible. The Wycliffe Bible, now 150 years old, was in Chaucerian English, a language that could not be read by the common man in Tyndale's era. The Church and the king opposed Tyndale. He fled to Germany where he did his translation work, smuggling copies of his Scriptures into England in bales of fur and sacks of grain. He was captured and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. He translated and printed only the New Testament and about half of the Old Testament (Pentateuch and Jonah were done first. Then he revised some of his former work and translated further through Chronicles).
- 8 In 1535, Miles Coverdale printed the first complete English Bible. Part of the New Testament was Tyndale's work. The rest was based on two Latin and two German versions, so it was not a translation of the original languages.
- 9 In 1537, Thomas Matthew printed the first English Bible to be promoted and licensed by the church. This Bible was the work of Tyndale's friend, John Rogers. Rogers accessed the work of his predecessors. Thus, Genesis through Second Chronicles was Tyndale's work. Coverdale's work was the rest of the Old Testament. The New Testament was Tyndale's Translation.
- 10 During the years of 1539-1541, The Great Bible was produced. King Henry VIII authorized Thomas Cromwell to supervise the production of a Bible that contained no controversial material. It was chained to the pulpit and the King proclaimed that the Bible should be read in the churches.

- 11 1560 saw the production of the Geneva Bible. This was the result of Mary Tudor's coming to the throne of England. She was a Roman Catholic who began her reign by killing all who were associated with the work of the Great Bible. Scholars fled to Geneva and produced a new Translation. This is the translation that was brought to America by the colonists. It is called the "Britches Bible," because Genesis states that God made "britches" for Adam and Eve. This was a very popular translation.
- 12 The Bishop's Bible was produced in 1568, after Elizabeth came to the throne. The Church of England did not approve of the Geneva Bible. So the Queen authorized the Bishops to oversee the production of another Bible. The Church and government tried to force the Bishop's Bible on the people, but it never did gain popularity.
- 13 The Rheims-Douai Version was produced in France in 1582-1609. This was the first Roman Catholic authorized English version of the Bible. Since the Vulgate is the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, Rheims-Douai is an English translation of the Vulgate, not a translation of the Hebrew and Greek.
- 14 The King James Version was produced in 1611 AD, as a part of an effort to unite the people of England. When James came to the throne, he called a council to iron out problems that divided the nation. One problem was the loyalty that different groups had to different versions of the Bible. Someone in the council suggested that a new translation of the Bible be made without footnotes. Fifty-four scholars were appointed to do the work. The result was an accurate and beautiful translation (although the committee, for political reasons, did choose to anglicize some terms, rather than translate them). This was the age of Spenser, Bacon, Sidney, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, the era in which the English language reached its peak in beauty of expression. The KJV reflects the beauty of the language spoken and written during this era.
- 15 1901 was the year that the American Standard Version was published. Many manuscripts had been discovered since 1611. The language also was changing. So, a committee was formed to produce a Bible reflecting the findings of scholarship and the manuscripts that had been discovered. The English Standard Version was published in 1885. The Americans on the committee disagreed with the English on a few passages and so they published the American Standard Version in 1901. This is a very accurate translation of Hebrew and Greek. It did not gain popularity because it is such an excellent reproduction of Hebrew and Greek syntax that it is awkward English.
- 16 The Revised Standard Version New Testament was produced in 1952, with the entire Bible following a few years later. The translators, by and large, were theological liberals and this comes through in many passages.
- 17 In the decade of 1950 – 1960, the Jehovah's Witness organization, The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society produced a version in six volumes, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. This version, reflecting the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, contained marginal references and footnotes expressing the JW theology. In later decades the six volumes were combined into a single volume. Initially, the one volume edition (1961) did not include the footnotes and marginal comments. These, however were reinstated in some later editions and revisions.
- 18 J.B. Phillips paraphrase in 1958 was one of the first successful attempts to produce a Bible in contemporary English. Phillips' work was very popular in some segments of the church, both in England and America.

- 19 New English Bible of 1961 was produced by a committee of scholars appointed by an organization of English churches (Church of England, Church of Scotland, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian Church of England, Society of Friends, Church of Wales, Churches of Ireland, British and Foreign Bible Society, and the National Bible Society of Scotland).
- 20 The New American Standard Version of 1963 is a revision of the 1901 ASV. 58 evangelical scholars did the work.
- 21 The American Bible Society, concerned about producing a Bible that could be read by anyone who could read English, sponsored the translation of Today's English Version. The New Testament was published in 1966 (the New Testament initially was released with the title, *Good News for Modern Man*), the entire Bible being released in 1976, under the title, *The Good News Bible*. Dr. Robert G. Bratcher did most of the work. The language is generic English without any national characteristics (Anglo or American).
- 22 The Roman Catholics produced the Jerusalem Bible in 1966. This is a translation based on textual studies by the Roman Catholic School of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem. It is the English translation of the French Bible prepared under the editorship of Pere Roland deVaux, OP
- 23 Kenneth Taylor produced the Living Bible Paraphrase in 1971. Since this is a paraphrase, it is best read in conjunction with another version.
- 24 The New International Version New Testament was published in 1972, followed by the entire Bible a year or so later. This version was underwritten by the New York Bible Society. 100 evangelical scholars did the work. This version follows the dynamic equivalency principle of translation.

Earlier in the 20th Century, there were other versions that enjoyed wide use.

- The Scofield Reference Bible is a KJV with a few archaic terms updated, and in some instances, verses expanded for clarity. The SRB contains footnotes based on Darby's view of prophecy, which is pre-millennial Futurist School of Prophecy.
- Moffet was the first popular 20th Century translation. After enjoying initial popularity, it quickly fell into disuse.
- The Amplified Bible is an attempt to make clear to people the meaning of obscure or difficult terms, by listing synonyms or expanding verses.
- Beck, Williams, and others have produced private translations that have been popular in some quarters.

In recent years, there have been so many paraphrases and versions produced (many targeted toward special interests or groups) that it is almost impossible to keep a current list.

TRANSLATION STYLES

Two styles of translation are displayed in current English versions:

- *Formal Equivalency* refers to the style of translation in which the English word that is an exact translation of the Greek or Hebrew is used. The New American Standard Version is an example of this style of translation.

- *Dynamic Equivalency* refers to a style of translation in which the English word that best conveys the meaning of the text to current English readers is used. The New International Version is an example of this style of translation.

James R. White illustrates the difference in these two styles by calling attention to the French expression, "*j' ai le cafard.*" Literally, this means, "I have a cockroach." This is the *formal equivalency* translation. However, this is a French idiomatic expression that does not mean, literally, what the words say. The French use this expression to mean, "I am depressed," or "I have the blues." This is how the expression would be translated using *dynamic equivalency*.

Even though the translators of each version committed themselves to one or the other of the above styles, all versions do slip over into both styles in some instances. Thus, the dynamic equivalency NIV translates by formal equivalency, in some instances. On the other hand, the formal equivalency NASB translates by dynamic equivalency in some passages.

There is another type of Bible transmission, a *paraphrase*. Paraphrasers do not concern themselves with translation. They are concerned with thoughts. Paraphrases are interpretations of the Bible. Those who produce the paraphrase interpret what a verse means, then state that in their own words. Paraphrases reflect the theology and subjective inclinations of those doing the work and should not be used to determine Scriptural truth. They may be useful for devotional reading, but always should be read with another version at hand. The most popular example of a paraphrase is the *Living Bible*. A popular paraphrase of more recent origin is *The Message*. Genesis 6:1-2 is a good example of the difference between a translation and a paraphrase.

The NAS **translates** these verses, *Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.*

The 1971 version of the Living Bible **paraphrases** these same verses, *Now a population explosion took place upon the earth. It was at this time that beings from the spirit world looked upon the beautiful earth women and took any they desired as wives.*

The NAS is a literal translation of the Hebrew. The Living Bible is a paraphraser's interpretation of what he thinks the Hebrew means. A paraphrase is not a translation, but an interpretation.

LITERARY GENRE IN THE BIBLE

It is important to recognize the different literary genre in Scripture. Each genre uses a particular technique to communicate its message. One of the tasks of the exegete is to recognize the type of literature with which he is dealing and interpret the document in accordance with the method of communication associated with that genre. Scripture contains nine types of literature:

Narrative	Poetry	Epistle
Precepts and codes	Figures of Speech	Apocalyptic
Wisdom	Parables	Prophetic

SECTION TWO: INTRODUCTION TO HERMENUTICS

GENERAL COMMENTS

A. There is a difference between Bible study and devotional reading of the Bible.

1. Devotional reading involves hearing from God for our own individual lives.

EXAMPLE: My reading of Acts and how God spoke to me from Acts 13:36

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay;

A number of years ago, I was going through a time in my life in which everything was falling apart. There were problems in the church, difficulties among family members, etc. It seemed that everything into which I had poured my life was labeled, "failure." One afternoon, as I sat at my desk, reading through Acts, I read the verse quoted above. Suddenly, I was arrested in my reading. I sensed the Holy Spirit say to me, "Do not concern yourself about building anything lasting. Allow me to use you to accomplish my purposes while you are on the earth, then die, be gone, be forgotten."

This is not an appropriate exegesis of this verse. David, for example, built something lasting. The Davidic Dynasty culminated in the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. David is remembered. The personal word that the Holy Spirit communicated to me from this verse was a personal word. It is not a truth that I can teach from this verse.

2. Bible study, however, is the pursuit of truth.
3. What we gain in devotional reading is not something to present in a teaching. It might be given in a testimony, but not as a truth that must be accepted by the Church.
4. In this course, we will be concerned with Bible study, not devotional reading.

B. The purpose of Bible study is four-fold:

1. First, to know God and to know about God.
 - a. We can learn much about God from observing His creation, but much misunderstanding of God can come from this source. We see things through our personal filters.
 - b. All over the world, throughout all ages, every race has come to an understanding of God through the experiences of life and an awareness of God in nature.

Romans 1:18-23 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in*

unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Acts 17:23 *For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "To an unknown God." What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.*

Note how the different nations of the world have viewed God: animism, the super-humans of the Greeks and Romans, the Aztecs, the Egyptians, etc.

- c. It is only by revelation that we know the true nature of God. Note that Paul said to the Athenians, "What therefore, you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."
 - d. Thus, *nature* and *experience* are the *subjective revelation* of God, because from these sources one can reach only subjective conclusions about God.
 - e. The Bible, however, is God's *objective revelation* of Himself. He has spoken. He has parted the curtain and asked us to look.
2. The second purpose for Bible study is to know God's will. What He has predetermined (God's *unchanging* [immutable] will) and what are His wishes (God's *permissive* will).
 3. A third purpose is to know the doctrinal truths concerning salvation, the Church, heaven & hell, and important matters concerning the Kingdom of God.
 4. A fourth purpose is to saturate ourselves with God's Word to the degree that we begin to think and act in a manner that is well pleasing to God. It does little good to fill our heads with knowledge if no alteration of our inner character occurs.

Bernard L. Ramm wrote, "There must be no separation of exegesis and application. The twentieth century has witnessed too many instances in which exegesis was carried on without fulfilling itself in application. Christians could have had any number of cell Bible studies and never passed judgment on the Hitler regime. ... Application is not a second and dispensable activity after exegesis, but in the normal situation, exegesis leads inevitably to application (Bernard L. Ramm, in *Hermeneutics*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p 10-11).

Psalm 119:11 *Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

- C. There are four basic activities involved in Bible study:
1. OBSERVATION: What do I see. No detail is unimportant
 2. INTERPRETATION: What does it mean? "What does the author say and what did his original hearers understand him to say?"
 3. CORRELATION: How does this relate to what the rest of the Bible says? An accurate understanding of any Biblical subject must take into account all that the Bible says on that subject.
 4. APPLICATION: What does it mean to me (or those to whom I minister)? This is the goal of the other steps.
- D. Neither #3 nor #4 can occur without the correct interpretation. This is the business of hermeneutics.
- E. The goal of this course is to help you develop the tools and the skills needed to become responsible Bible interpreters.
- F. DEFINITIONS:
1. *Hermeneutics*: the science of interpretation.
The term is a classical term, derived from the name, *Hermes*. The ancients believed that Hermes was the messenger of the god's and the interpreter of Zeus (The Romans called them Mercury [Hermes] and Jupiter [Zeus]). This is the background for the episode in Acts 14:8-13.

NAS Acts 14:11-13 *And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." **And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.** And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.¹*

Every hermeneus (interpreter) was thought to inherit some of the mystic qualities of this god of philology. It is from this Greek mythology, that the term hermeneutics developed; i.e., someone who interprets literature.

¹ Note that in this passage the KJV uses the Latin names (Jupiter and Mercury), because of the influence of the Latin Church, whereas, the NAS translates the Greek literally, without interposing the Latin names.

2. *Sacred Hermeneutics*: The science of interpreting the Scriptures
3. *Exegesis ek hgeisqai (ek egeisthai)* "To lead out" or "to show the way"

Exegesis refers to looking into Scripture objectively and allowing what we discover to lead us to truth.
4. *Eisegesis eij hgeisqai (eis egeisthai)* "To lead in"

This is a negative term. It refers to seeing in Scripture what we want to see. Eisegesis sees things in Scripture that are not there.
5. *Exposition (Latin: exponere)* "To set forth" or "To display"

This refers to accurately presenting to others the truth that we discover through exegesis.

THE HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICS

JEWISH INTERPRETATION

A. Beginnings: The work of Ezra

Ezra was scribe and a priest:

- Ezra 7:6 (KJV a "ready scribe in the Law of Moses"; NIV a "teacher well versed in the Law of Moses"; NAS a "scribe skilled in the Law of Moses")
- Ezra 7:11, 12, 21 "Ezra the priest, the scribe" (NIV priest and teacher)
- Nehemiah 8:1 "Ezra the scribe"
8:4 "Ezra the scribe"
8:9 "Ezra the priest and scribe"
8:13 "Ezra the scribe"
12:26 "Ezra the priest and scribe"

Nehemiah 8:1-8 presents an interesting picture of Ezra. He was a very learned bi-lingual teacher. The post-exilic speech was Aramaic. In the scene described, he and his associates read the Hebrew and translated aloud into Aramaic.

B. The Pairs

From Maccabean times to the end of the Herodian age (168 BC - 10 A.D) interpretation was highlighted by two sets of rabbis engaged in respectful debate.

During this period, the practice of substituting one letter for another and forming new words, as well as assigning numerical value to letters and words was in vogue. There

was an obsession with trying to find some secret or hidden element in the words. An example of this technique is seen in Genesis 2:7.

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

יְהוָה יָרָא אֶת הָאָדָם מִפֶּתַח הָאָדָם וְנָשָׁף אֶת הָאָדָם וְנָשָׁף אֶת הָאָדָם
 וְנָשָׁף אֶת הָאָדָם וְנָשָׁף אֶת הָאָדָם וְנָשָׁף אֶת הָאָדָם

The rabbis saw a hidden truth in the opening words of this verse. Here is how they "discovered" a hidden truth. Hebrew is written right to left, rather than left to right, as in English. Thus, Genesis 2:7 begins with the expression, **וַיִּצְרָם** and *He formed*. The

first letter of the verse is **ו** (*waw*) which indicates, *and*. Next is the word, *form*,

צָרָם (*yatsar*). Note that the word begins with a **צ** (*yod*). In order to say, "**He** formed," a *yod* must be added to the beginning of the word and the vowel points must be changed.

- **צָרָם** (*form*)
- **וַיִּצְרָם** (*he formed*)

Thus, the verse (not including *and*) begins with a double *yod*.

The word for "impulse" (*yetzer*) is a noun. It has the same consonants (**צָרָם**), as the verb, "form," but it has different vowel points.

- *yatsar* **צָרָם**
- *yetzer* **צָרָם**

Since the first letter of the word "form" is a *yod*, and the first letter of "impulse" is a *yod*, and since there is a double *yod* in the expression, *and Jehovah God formed*, then, according to the rabbis, God created two impulses - a good impulse and a bad impulse.

This seems to be reaching very far to find a secret or hidden meaning in Scripture, but this is the sort of thing that men of all generations have done when they have tried to turn the Bible into a mystical book full of hidden messages.

This resulted in the practice of producing complex writings that were interpretations of interpretations. Thus, much of the rabbinical writings about Scripture came to be "Rabbi X says and Rabbi Y points out that Rabbi X meant..."

C. The Qumran Community

In the Qumran community, interpretation was carried out without any regard to the context. The verse under consideration usually was explained as referring, in some way, to the Qumran sect itself. The Qumran interpreter forgot the principle of first finding out what the author was trying to convey to those who first read his writing.²

CHRISTIAN ERA

The earliest writings (commentaries) on Scripture date to within a few years after the close of the canon. There immediately arose two approaches to Scripture interpretation.

A. The Alexandrians

Clement (155-215) and Origen (-185 - 254) led the Alexandrians. Origen is the leader chiefly responsible for the Alexandrian approach to Scripture interpretation. Three influences led the Alexandrians to adopt an allegorical hermeneutic:

- Origen was greatly influenced by the Alexandrian culture. The philosophical schools of Alexandria were enamored with allegories. Eager to be accepted, intellectually, the Christians in Alexandria also adopted the allegorical hermeneutic.
- The moralistic attacks made on Scripture by the Alexandrian philosophers was a second thing that influenced the Alexandrian church to turn to an allegorical hermeneutic. Influential speakers such as Celsus and Porphyry scoffed at the immorality of some of the main characters in Scripture. For example, Lot's incest, Noah's drunkenness, Jacob's wives and concubines, Judah's seduction of Tamar, etc. were reminiscent of the immoral exploits of the Roman and Greek gods. On the defensive, Alexandrian Christian teachers began to explain these accounts as allegories, rather than literal events.
- Origen stated that a third reason for moving to an allegorical hermeneutic was the fact that the church contained many "simple Christians." Not being trained in the study of literature, these folk did not understand literary metaphors, parables, and poetry. They insisted that every detail in Scripture is literally true. They believed that John's apocalyptic description of the heavenly Jerusalem was literal. Origen insisted that these passages did not describe anything real. They were stories with an allegorical meaning behind every element.

EXAMPLE: The two apostles brought two donkeys to Jesus, for him to ride in the Triumphal Entry. These two donkeys represent the moral and the spiritual senses that bring people to Christ.

² This is almost a universal tendency of sects. In our day, we have seen a number of sects which believe that the prophetic and apocalyptic portions of Scripture to refer to their group.

B. The Antiochans

The Alexandrian allegorical hermeneutic encountered considerable opposition in the Church. Egyptian Church leader, Bishop Nepos, both geographically and chronologically close to Origen, wrote a treatise, *Refutation of the Allegorists*. Jerome, the most outstanding exegete of the early Church, at first followed the allegorical method, then rejected it, arguing for the literal interpretation of Scripture. The church leaders in Antioch took a totally different approach from those in Alexandria. They insisted that the Bible must be approached historically and understood literally. So, Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incest, etc., things that offended the Alexandrians, really did happen. They are not allegories. Those following this approach would see the Song of Solomon as an ode to the passion of married love, which God gave, as a blessing to His children.

The Antioch leaders took the position that when the Bible did use a figure or an allegory, the figure is based upon real events, and that the Bible always explains the allegory. The interpreter is not left to some fanciful imagination. The Antioch exegetes were not influenced by Greek philosophy. They were more impacted by the Jewish establishment in Antioch. One of the major leaders, Dorotheus, studied Hebrew from the Jewish Rabbis.

For a number of reasons, the influence of the Alexandrian church was far greater and broader in reach than that of Antioch. One reason was the influence of the Greek philosophers and the tremendous respect that these philosophers enjoyed in every nation. Origen, for example, wore the robe of a philosopher and was sought after as a philosophic lecturer. As a result, by 600 AD, Alexandria had won the day. From 600 AD - 1,200 AD, allegory reigned supreme in Bible interpretation. Ambrose wrote, concerning Bible interpretation, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Augustine (354-430 AD) said that a literal approach is absurd in the Old Testament.

Churchmen began spending their time trying to think up as many meanings as possible for a single word. Little booklets of allegorical lists were circulated. Each scholar tried to create the longest list. The allegorical interpretation of Scripture is one of the things that contributed to the tragedy of the Middle Ages.

C. The Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, the popular scheme of interpretation was "four-fold." According to this hermeneutic, every word, verse, and passage, had four meanings.

1. The LETTER shows what God did
2. ALLEGORY shows where our faith is hid
3. The MORAL MEANING gives us rules of daily life
4. The ANAGOGY shows us where we end our strife.(anagogy means, "heavenly," or "elevated")

Thus,

1. The literal is the plain meaning
2. The allegorical is what we are to believe
3. The moral is what we are to do
4. The anagogy is what we are to hope

Before Jerome came to reject the allegorical approach to Scripture, He interpreted "Jerusalem" in one passage, in the following "four-fold" manner:

1. literal : a city in Palestine
2. allegory: the Church
3. morally: the Soul
4. anagogically, :Heaven

It is interesting that I heard a well known teacher speak at a meeting in St. Louis, a few years ago, in which he said that every verse of Scripture has ten levels of meaning. Then he proceeded to allegorize the Song of Solomon in a very bizarre fashion.

At the close of the Middle Ages, thinking church leaders began to question the allegorical method. The Bible had become a mysterious book of confusion. The seeds of the Renaissance were being planted. Doubt and debate were becoming common. One Churchman who was prominent in these debates was Nicholas of Lyra (1299-1340). His teaching influenced the University of Erfurt, where Martin Luther studied.

D. Martin Luther

Martin Luther provided the first burst of responsible modern hermeneutics. Justification by faith, which he discovered while translating Romans, became the underlying principle of his teaching. He rejected the four-fold method of interpretation and insisted on there being a single, fundamental meaning to Scripture. Thus, every Christian should be able to read the Bible and interpret it for himself. There were no hidden meanings in the words. There were six elements in Luther's hermeneutic:

1. *The Psychological Principle:* Faith and illumination were necessary. Seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in Bible interpretation.
2. *Authority:* The Bible is the supreme authority and it is above all ecclesiastical authority.
3. *The Literal Principle:* Every word should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning and that meaning should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to do it.
4. *The Sufficiency Principle:* The devout and competent Christian can understand the Bible.
5. *The Christological Principle:* The literal interpretation is not the end, all is to bring us to Christ.
6. *The Law/Gospel Principle:* The Law is to drive us to our knees about sin; the Gospel is God's grace and power to save. We must not confuse these two in our interpretation.

E. John Calvin

John Calvin, about 23 years younger than Luther, was the other great liberator of hermeneutics. Calvin had a greater emphasis on the entire Bible. Luther was somewhat selective in his Scripture studies.

Calvin was more of a literalist than Luther. Luther would read salvation into a passage when it wasn't there. Calvin never did this.

Calvin was very systematic and logical, compared to Luther, who was somewhat emotional and unsystematic.

Calvin viewed the very words of Scripture as having been dictated by the Holy Spirit. He insisted more strongly than any of his contemporaries that the witness of the Spirit is necessary for understanding the Holy Scriptures. He called this the *testamonium* - the inner witness.

Important to Calvin was the principle of *autopistis*, which means that the Bible is self-authenticating. Rather than history or logical proof, he trusted in the Holy Spirit as the author of the Bible to bear testimony within the believer's heart, the authenticity of Word.

Calvin emphasized the office of pastor/teacher. This was of primary importance to the Church.

F. The Anabaptists

Next on the scene came the Anabaptists. They sought to return to the New Testament Church. The name, "Anabaptist," means, "re-baptizers." They insisted on believer's baptism. Therefore, all who had been sprinkled or baptized as infants must be baptized when they make a profession of faith.

They taught that the Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice. They held to the view that the individual believer was illuminated by the Holy Spirit and could interpret for himself. However, it was proper to submit one's interpretation to the community for dialogue and consensus.

G. Rationalism

Rationalism came on the scene in the 1600's. Galileo (1564-1642 AD), a prime example of the age, said that one could not be deceived by natural processes, but that one might be deceived by Scripture. Rationalism emphasized the human intellect. According to the rationalist, the human intellect is capable of determining truth and error. What is not "reasonable" is rejected. This was the seedbed from which rejection of the supernatural eventually developed. Thomas Jefferson was a rationalist. Using a razor, he cut out the passages of the New Testament that contained the moral teaching of Jesus and pasted them together to create what he considered to be the only authentic Bible. He considered

the rest of the Bible to be the product of religious tradition, rather than inspired Scripture. For many years, this "Jefferson Bible" was presented as a gift to every freshman United States Congressman.

H. Secularism

Secularism came on the scene in the 1800's. Biblical studies became separated from the Church and took place in secular universities. Germany became the center of secular Bible studies. Human reason became supreme. A closed view of history prevailed. Out of this movement came the Graff-Wellhausen JEDP hypothesis. In general this hypothesis states that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, but many unknown prophets produced it. Some of these used the name, Jehovah, for God. Others used the name, Elohim. The "Deuteronomist" put it all together and presented it as if it were a book from a single author. The priests wrote liturgical sections. This hypothesis changes the chronological order from law, priests, and prophets, to prophets, law, and priests. The liberal denominational seminaries adopted this hypothesis. This is one of the things that gave a bad name to seminaries. A saying came about, "Young preachers go to seminaries to lose their faith."

I. Progressive Theology

The 19th Century closed with hope and a progressive view of man. Most students of prophecy became post-millennialists (both the church and society were going to progress [a type of Darwinism], so that when Christ came He would come to a society and a church that had evolved into the Kingdom of God). Except for liberal theologians, who continued to emphasize the intelligence of man, World War I destroyed the progressive movement among most thinking people (A version of this progressive view prevails today in the "Dominion Theology" of Rushdoony, North, Peacocke, *et al.*).

J. Neo-orthodoxy

Next on the scene came "Neo-orthodoxy." Neo-orthodoxy was an effort to reclaim the Reformation basis for theology. Advocates of Neo-orthodoxy do not turn to the Bible as much as they turn to Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli to determine truth. In a way, Neo-orthodoxy is a return to the Jewish rabbinical method of interpreting rabbis, rather than interpreting the Word.

K. Existentialism

The next move, led by men like Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, and especially, Rudolph Bultman, held the view that the Bible is a human book subject to literary criticism like any other book. It is a record of revelation and a witness of revelation, rather than the inspired, objective, historical, propositional revelation in itself. According to this view, the Holy Spirit may speak God's revelation to us, as we read the Bible. If a text reaches out and grabs you, for you that is the Word of God. The impression that what you receive from this experience is the revelation, with little

concern for what the text really says. The Faith-Formula teachers express a type of existentialism in their use of the *rhema* principle. Also, some people who use Scripture “prophetically” demonstrate this expression of existentialism, when a “prophetic interpretation” is given to a verse, without regard to the verses original intent.

THE NEED FOR HERMENEUTICS

Anyone who reads a book, a newspaper article, or any other piece of literature, practices hermeneutics. As we read, we are interpreting the written statements and terms. The closer we are to the culture of the writer, the more accurately we understand what he is saying. This is called, "spontaneous hermeneutics." When a gap exists between the interpreter and the materials to be interpreted, rules are set up to bridge the gap. For most of human history, the gulf between the New Testament life-style and the life-style of the reader was rather small. However, in the past century, the gulf has become very great. Several gaps exist between the contemporary Christian and Scripture. We are removed from the biblical authors by time, so there is an historical gap; by culture, so there is a cultural gap; by language, so there is a linguistic gap; by geography, so there is a geographical gap; and by flora and fauna, so there is a biological gap; etc. Therefore, we seek principles, whereby we might bridge the gap between Scripture and us. This is biblical hermeneutics.

1. Occasionally, the view is expressed that the emphasis upon the principles of interpretation ignores the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is important.

1 John 2:27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Hebrews 8:10-11 For this is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD.' For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.

2. Even though there is justification for such fears, we cannot take I John 2:27 to mean that there is no need for expositors, or teachers. The New Testament contains many clear statements that God gave teachers as a gift to the Body.

Acts 13:1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

1 Corinthians 12:28 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.*

The exact meaning of I John 2:27 we will deal with later, but the point here is that teachers, expositors, are a part of God's provision for the Church.

3. The Old Testament has many statements concerning the need for Bible study and exposition.

Ezra 7:10 *For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

Nehemiah 8:1-8 *And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the square, which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.*

Psalms 1:1-2 *How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*

Psalms 19:7 *The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*

Psalm 119:34-105

From the many statements in the Psalms, it is clear that David's idea of coming to the Lord's will is to read the Word, study it day and night, get all of its precepts in the minds, etc.

4. The New Testament also emphasizes the need for responsible Bible study, both by direct and indirect statements.

When the rich man in hades asked for special messengers be sent to his family to warn them about hades, Abraham responded by saying that the Bible was sufficient witness:

*Luke 16:29-31 But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Paul insisted that responsible handling of Scripture be a trait of his fellow workers:

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

"Handling accurately," is a translation of the Greek term, (*ορθοτομew*) *orthotomeo*, which means "to cut straight." This term is used in the LXX with reference to "cutting a path in a straight direction" (Proverbs 3:6; 11:5). In the New Testament, the term occurs only here and has a metaphorical meaning. We look at the context (verses 14 & 16) and conclude that the meaning here is to "guide the Word of God along a straight path, without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk" (Bauer/ Arndt & Gingrich). Some have sought to relate the term to a stone mason who cuts a stone accurately. There is no basis for this definition, linguistically or in the use of the term in literature.

In his Second Corinthian Letter, Paul described his own reverent handling of the Word.

2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

The Greek term Paul used, (*καφλεuω* [*kafleuō*]), means, "to sell, or peddle at illegitimate profit." Paul thus says that he does not "merchandise" the Word of God. He is not doing what he is doing for profit. He does not tailor the word to appeal to his hearers, nor does he teach so as to get paid. Paul emphasizes the seriousness of exposition, "We speak in Christ in the sight of God." It is a very serious thing to represent God, and that is what one does when he is involved in exposition. James warned, *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.* (James 3:1)

EIGHT THINGS WHICH HINDER SOUND HERMENEUTICS

1. A desire to please the audience;
2. The belief that only clergy can understand the Bible, so our interpretation must agree with that of the preacher;
3. Using the Bible to prove doctrines;
4. Spiritualizing the Word;
5. Reading thoughtlessly;
6. Always looking for something new;
7. Ignorance
8. Dishonesty

THE BASIC OBJECTIVE OF THE INTERPRETER:

1. To discover what the author meant by a statement (command, question, etc.);
2. what his first hearers or readers understood to be the meaning of the statement;
3. to transmit that meaning to modern hearers.

SECTION THREE: THE CONTEXT

A common adage among Bible exegetes is, "A text without a context is a pretext." "Pretext" is pretending to be something that one is not. One of the main sources of false doctrine has been the practice of plucking an isolated verse out of the Bible and preaching a doctrine from it. In some instances, if the verse had been read in context, the meaning would be very different from the one received from the isolated verse.

DEFINING CONTEXT

The context involves both the immediate and the remote. Exegesis concerns itself with the following contextual progression:

A. *The word within the sentence.*

1. A word may have different meanings in different sentences.

- *leaven*, is used in Scripture to illustrate the pernicious growth of both good and evil.

Matthew 13:33 *He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal..."*

Matthew 16:6 *And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

- In each of the following passages, *faith* (**πιστιν** - *pistis*) has a different meaning.

Galatians 1:23 *but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."*

In this passage, the term, *faith*, refers to the doctrine of the Gospel

Romans 14:23 *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*

Faith in this context refers to a conviction concerning what is righteous and unrighteous behaviour.

1 Timothy 5:11-12 KJV *But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.*

Faith in this context is used for a pledge or a promise made to the Lord. The KJV translates the term, **πιστιν**, literally. Both the NIV and the NAS render the term according to the *dynamic equivalency* translation style. The NAS uses the term, *pledge*; the NIV reads, *first pledge*.

- Another example is the word, *blood*. In each of the following passages, the word has a different meaning.

Acts 17:24-26 (KJV) *God ... hath made of **one blood** all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;*

In this passage, *blood* refers to a group of people. Both the NAS and the NIV employ *dynamic equivalency* at this point : NAS - *made of one*; NIV - *From one man*.

Ephesians 1:7 *In Him we have redemption through His **blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*

In this verse, *blood*, refers to the atoning death of Christ.

Hebrews 9:6-7 *Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, not without taking **blood**, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.*

Here, *blood* refers to the fluid that flows through the veins.

2. A word may be used figuratively or in an idiomatic sense

Consider how Paul uses the term, *touch*, in I Corinthians 7:1, *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

The KJV and the NAS both follow *formal equivalency* here and render the term literally, *not to touch*. Some holiness groups have built a doctrine on this verse, prohibiting a man from shaking hands with a woman, etc. However, in context it is clear that Paul is speaking of sexual contact. The NIV reads, *it is good for a man not to marry*.

B. The sentence within the paragraph.

John 12:32 *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."*

"Lift Jesus Higher" is an exuberant worship song that is based on this verse:

Lift Jesus higher, lift Jesus higher,
Lift Him up, so the world can see.
He said, "If I be lifted up, from the earth,
I will draw all men unto me."

The idea of this song is that we should exalt and elevate Jesus so that men will behold him and believe on him. Some who sing the song might even have the ascension and enthronement in mind. This is a wonderful thought and, as an isolated verse, John 12:32 lends itself to this meaning. However, when the verse is read in the context of its paragraph, we find a different meaning to Jesus' being "lifted up."

John 12: 32-36 *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. The multitude therefore answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus therefore said to them, "For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. "While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and He departed and hid Himself from them.*

NOTE: Other passages in which "lifted up" is used in this same sense: John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34.

C. *The paragraph within the section (usually, the chapter).*

Amos 5:21-24 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

On the basis of this passage, some have argued that God disapproves of ceremonies and liturgies. Such is not the case here. God Himself had commanded the festivals, solemn assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, etc. This paragraph must be read in the context of the section of which it is a part.

The section begins at Chapter Four and continues through Chapter Six. The message of this section is that Israel has forsaken Jehovah. They did this by oppressing the poor, being unjust in the court system, bribery, oppression of the righteous who speak out against evil, worshipping other gods in addition to Jehovah, etc. They have kept up the Jehovistic religious ceremonies, but their lives did not express devotion to Jehovah. Therefore, their religious ceremonies have no meaning to Jehovah. He is going to bring judgment and their faithfulness to ceremony will not turn back that judgment. Only true repentance can turn away Jehovah's wrath.

D. *A section within a book*

Joel 2:1-11 Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor

will there be again after it To the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them, And behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, But a desolate wilderness behind them, And nothing at all escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots They leap on the tops of the mountains, Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, Like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them the people are in anguish; All faces turn pale. They run like mighty men; They climb the wall like soldiers; And they each march in line, Nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other; They march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, They do not break ranks. They rush on the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark, And the stars lose their brightness. And the LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?

From this section in Joel, has come the joyous worship song, "Blow a Trumpet in Zion." This song usually is sung with a sense of victory, often accompanied with abandoned dancing and joy, because the army of God is victorious.

A reading of the entire book of Joel reveals the exact opposite mood of the one displayed in the popular song, "Blow a Trumpet in Zion." The section is an occasion for sorrow; it is a dirge, not a victory song. The army of the Lord in this section of Joel is a plague of locusts that God is bringing on Israel as punishment for sin.

E. *A book within the bible*

The Epistle of James is an example of the importance of understanding a book within the context of the entire Bible. James emphasizes "works" in the life of the believer. Because of this, Martin Luther considered James to be a threat to the doctrine of salvation by grace. He called James "a straw epistle," and wanted to have it removed from the Bible. Indeed, James by itself might lead one to conclude that salvation is by works. On the other hand, within the context of the entire New Testament, James brings a balanced view of faith, grace, and works. *Faith without works is dead*, is truth, but it must be balanced by the truths concerning grace that are in the other portions of the New Testament.

THE CONTEXTUAL PROGRESSION

Word within the sentence ? Sentence within the paragraph ? Paragraph within the section ? Section within the book ? Book within the Bible

BASIC QUESTIONS ASKED OF THE CONTEXT

The objective, during this part of the interpretive process, is to place one's self into the setting of the times in which the book was written and to experience what the people in the account experienced.

Example: Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

All of the early converts were Jews (by birth or proselytes). In Acts 10, Cornelius and those of his household (Gentiles) received the Gospel, but Gentile evangelism still was a secondary activity. Then Paul began his labors.

Until the time of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), Christianity was viewed as an evolution of Judaism. After the Jerusalem council, Christianity was viewed as a distinct faith, with a Jewish background.

Yet, even after the Jerusalem Council, some Jewish Christians just could not bring themselves to accept the view that Christianity was not an expression of Judaism. They continued to insist that the Mosaic Covenant had a place of authority in the New Covenant messages. After Paul had brought the Gospel to the Galatians, Judaizers from Jerusalem came to Galatia to promote the Jewish Law as a necessary part of salvation.

What could Paul do? How could he share the Good News with the Galatians who had been tainted by Judaizers? How could he undo the damage? He turned to the Old Testament Law and proved from the Law itself that the Law cannot justify. This is a form of *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to authority). Understanding the problem and the process that Paul used to meet the problem, help us to understand the Letter to the Galatians.

The following are the basic questions that the exegete asks in interrogating the context:

1. Who is speaking?

Billy Graham's frequently repeated statement in sermons is, "The Bible says..." Even though this is a good statement in the way that Billy uses it, this concept sometimes is abused. Just because a statement is in the Bible, does not mean that it is true. The Bible quotes many different individuals and classes of individuals. God, Satan, good people, bad people, inspired people, uninspired people, angels, demons, a donkey, and uncounted others are quoted in the Bible. So, we need to ask, "Whose statement is this?"

John 9:31 is an example.

We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.

This verse has been used by some as an argument that God will not hear the prayer of a sinner. Experience flies in the face of such a teaching. Most of us know of sinners who in a

time of crisis cried out to God and God responded, often leading to the salvation of that desperate soul.

The key to solving the problem is to note the identity of the one making the statement in John 9:31 and the basis upon which it was made.

First, the Pharisees taught that God would not hear sinners. The Pharisees taught this not only because they believed it,³ but also to motivate people to adhere to the Pharisees' teaching concerning the strict observance of the law. The Pharisees' constant presence had conditioned the general populace to accept this belief as true. So, when the Pharisees told the blind man to give God the praise for his healing, and to give Jesus no credit because they declared Jesus to be a sinner (John 9:24), the blind man responded by repeating to them their own doctrine.

John 9:30-31a *The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners..."*

This is not a statement made by Jesus, an apostle, or by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is a statement made by a man whom Jesus had healed, who was repeating to the religious leaders the tradition that they had taught him. This is a debating technique known as *argumentum ad hominem* (appeal to the man – “since you believe this, then the following is true”).

Sometimes it is not easy to determine who is speaking. For example, John 3:16 may have been spoken by Jesus, or it may be the opening sentence of John's commentary on the salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ. Bible students are divided over who said John 3:16.

Clearly, the words of Christ are recorded through verse 15. However, verse 16 begins with a different tone. The conversation with Nicodemus occurred about three years before Christ's crucifixion. Thus, if John 3:16 refers to the crucifixion, one would expect the verbs to be future tense, i.e., *He will give his only begotten Son*. However, the key verb in verse 16 is past tense, *He gave His only begotten Son*. Since John wrote this account about seventy years after Jesus' crucifixion, the past tense, *He gave*, would be appropriate if verses 16-21 are John's commentary on Jesus' statement in verse 15, *that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life*.

Two questions must be asked in order to attempt the resolution of this issue:

1. Does *gave* refer to the cross? (Could it refer to the incarnation, in line with Galatians 4:4 and Philippians 2:6-7?)
2. If the statement refers to the cross, is there any theological concept or linguistic form that would justify Jesus' speaking in the past tense?

³ They justified this doctrine by passages such as Isaiah 1:15; 59:1-2.

If the answer to the first question is, “yes,” and the answer to the second question is, “no,” then John 3:16 must be a part of John’s commentary, not a statement made by Jesus.

3. To whom is it spoken?

Matthew 10:8-9 *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give. "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.*

During the Jesus Movement, this passage influenced some to travel about the country evangelizing, with no more than the clothes on their backs. Usually, they were critical of those who had homes, jobs, etc. However, within its context, this statement clearly is addressed to the Twelve for a special one-time ministry. This is not a dictum given to all missionaries, evangelists, and preachers for all generations.

Another passage that might be cited as an example is John 15:14-15

"You are My friends, if you do what I command you. "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

To whom was this spoken? We go back to Chapter Thirteen where this section begins. The audience is the Eleven (Judas already had departed [see 13:26-30]). The context makes it clear that this was an emotional statement that Jesus made, describing the special relationship that He had with his apostles. Note the following statements, all past tense and all referring to the special relationship that Jesus had with His eleven disciples:

V9 *I have loved you*

V12 *I have loved you*

V15 *I have made Him known to you*

V16 *I have chosen you and ordained you*

V19 *I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*

V20 *Remember the word that I said to you*

V27 *and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning*

When a statement is made to a very obvious audience, we cannot broaden its application unless there is authority to do so elsewhere in Scripture. The recent use of this verse to urge a sentimental relationship with Jesus (He is my friend, usually expressed in a very sanguine manner) is not good exegesis. For that matter, after the ascension, Jesus always is described or addressed in an elevated and reverent manner, not as our bosom buddy.

An example of statements made to an obvious audience which later Scripture broadens is John 16:7:

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

The promise of the Holy Spirit, given here to the Apostles, is expanded to all believers of every generation in Act 2:38-39:

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

4. Why was it spoken?

As noted above with reference to Amos 5:21-24, this can be an important question. Let's look at another example, Daniel 1:8-12.

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king." But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink..."

What is this all about? Why did Daniel refuse to ingest the food from the king's table, requesting instead a diet of vegetables and water? Some have used this passage as an argument for vegetarianism. Is this valid?

At first blush, we might think that the reason for refusing the king's food was because it wasn't kosher. Daniel did not want to violate the dietary code of the Mosaic Covenant. There may be something to that, but how do we explain his refusal of the wine? Wine was very present in the diet of pious Jews. Wine also would not violate the standards of a vegetarian diet, because it is "the fruit of the vine."

Kiel and Delitzsch present excellent commentary on this question:

"The partaking of the food brought to them from the king's table was to them contaminating, because forbidden by law; not so much because the food was not prepared according to the Levitical ordinance, or perhaps consisted of the flesh of animals which to the Israelites were unclean, for in this case the youths were not under the necessity of refraining from the wine, but the reason of their rejection of it was, that the heathen at their feasts offered up in sacrifice to their gods a part of the food and the drink, and thus consecrated their meals by a religious rite;

whereby not only he who participated in such a meal participated in the worship of idols, but the meat and the partaking of which, according to the saying of the apostle (1 Cor. 10:20f), is the same as sacrificing to devils...Daniel's resolution to refrain from such unclean food flowed therefore from fidelity to the law, and from steadfastness to the faith that "man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3), and that from the assurance that God would bless the humbler provision which he asks for himself, and would by means of it make him and his friends as strong and vigorous as the other youths who did eat the costly provision from the king's table." (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1989, Kiel & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 9, The Book of Daniel, page 80)."

Another interesting example is I John 4:2:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God...

When Jesus was upon the earth, He encountered evil spirits, demons, who confessed that he was Jesus Christ in the flesh. In Matthew 8:28-32, Mark 5:1-13, and Luke 8:26-33, are three accounts of Jesus' encounter with a legion of demons who inhabited the demoniacs in Gadara. Note how Mark reports the exchange between Jesus and the demons:

*Mark 5:6-9 And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, he *said, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he *said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many."*

Even though the demon possessed man is the one who bowed down before Jesus, it is clear that it is the demons who are crying out and speaking to Jesus. Note that this legion of demons confessed that this flesh and blood Jesus was the Son of the Most High God. Other examples of demons making such a confession could be cited also. How does this jibe with I John 4:1-2? The answer is to be found in the situation faced by the Gentile Church at the close of the First Century.

I John was written expressly to address the false doctrine that prevailed in the Asian churches of his day.

There were three major heresies that infected the First Century Church:

- Judaism
- Nicolaitanism
- Gnosticism

Judaism declared that in order to be a Christian, in order to be saved, one had to submit to the Law of Moses... in essence, to become a Jew. Paul spent his life contending that this was error. He emphasized that Christians are under a new covenant.

John the Apostle outlived all of the other Revelatory Apostles. He settled in Asia Minor and wrote his Gospel and three epistles in the middle of the last third of the First Century. By this time, Christianity had become predominately a Gentile movement. Instead of having to deal with Judaizing teachers, John dealt with the new heresies that were troubling the church, heresies that came from Greek culture, Nicolaitanism and Gnosticism.

Nicolaitanism became quite strong and plagued the church for almost 100 years.⁴ Its adherents claimed to be followers of Nicholas, the proselyte, one of the seven deacons chosen in Act 6. They told this story about their founder. He had a very beautiful wife. After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles were jealous, and so, Nicolas brought his wife forth and said that anyone who wanted to marry her could have her.⁵ He said that "we must abuse the flesh." He himself never had any woman other than his wife, his sons and daughters were honorable. However, his followers, taking the expression, "We must abuse the flesh," began to do just that. They became very immoral, committed fornication without restraint and were described by Clement, one of the early Church leaders, as being "as dissolute as he-goats."

What this group did was take Paul's teaching that we are not under law, and pushed it to the extreme, disowning all moral obligation as something that pertained to the flesh, which was inappropriate for the spiritual man. Through debauchery they sought to destroy their bodies. To them, this was not sin, because it was a means of attaining a higher place, when the body was spent of its lustful forces.

This was a very popular movement. Huge numbers of Christians flocked to this sect. It is condemned in two of the letters to the seven churches mentioned in Revelation (Rev. 2:6; 2:16). Although not addressed as a sect, profligacy among clergy was known as "Nicolaitanism" even in the time of Urban II (reigned 1088-1099 AD).

Gnosticism, a form of the Greek Gnostic Philosophy, was the most dangerous enemy of the church during the first 150 years of its history. It was built on the premise that the spirit is good and that matter is evil. This being true, matter and spirit cannot have any enduring relationship. Therefore, salvation consists of escape from the realm of matter into the realm

⁴ The Nicolaitans are mentioned frequently in early Christian documents. Here are some of the more prominent: Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* III, 4), Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* III, 29), Irenaeus (*Adversus* 26:3), Hippolytus (*Philos.* VII, 24), Epiphanius (*Haer.* I, 225)

⁵ One version states that Nicholas was a jealous husband and that the apostles rebuked him for this. Thus, as an act of abusing the flesh, he surrendered his wife (see Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, [Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1996] Volume 2, page 464)

of the Spirit. There were numerous means of escape, the chief one being knowledge. In this special knowledge, called, "gnosis," known only by those who were initiated into the inner secrets of the group, man can rise above the earthbound chains of matter into heavenly apprehension of truth.

One form of Gnosticism was quite close to Nicolaitanism. Concluding that since the body is matter it cannot do good, these Gnostics declared that fornication, gluttony, and all other activities of the flesh are routine, but they do not touch the spirit of a man because the spirit is inherently good.

Many Greek Gnostics entered the church. Others, wanting to make Christianity acceptable to the intellectuals of the day, sought to conform Christian doctrine to Gnostic understandings. There were two main views of Christ held by different Gnostic groups in the First Century:

- a. Docetic gnostics - Jesus did not really appear in the flesh, but only seemed to do so. (*dokeo* "to seem"). He was a divinely orchestrated illusion. He was a "holo gram"... "a virtual reality" being.
- b. Cerinthian gnostics - Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary and was a human. The Christ-spirit inhabited the man, Jesus, at the time of his baptism, and left him before he went to the cross (this very heresy has been taught by some of the Word/Faith teachers in the last decade).

The Gospel of John and The First Epistle of John were written to combat these heresies. As one reads through I John, with the understanding of why John wrote it, it becomes a very polemical book. Galatians, Hebrews, and I John are the most polemical books in the New Testament.

Thus, the key to understanding I John 4:1-2 is to understand the audience to which it was written and what that audience was dealing with at the time that the letter was written. At the time that John wrote this letter, there were teachers and prophets circulating among the churches teaching Gnosticism. The statement in I John 4:2 was for a particular situation and in a particular time. It is not a plenary test for all times and in every location, concerning whether or not a spirit or a teacher is a genuine servant of God. This we know because of two very obvious reasons:

- There have been false teachers who have confessed that Jesus came in the flesh, yet have taught heresy.
- As seen in the Gospels, there were demons who acknowledged that the flesh and blood Jesus was the Christ.

5. When was it spoken?

The Bible is divided into two major divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The term, *testament*, means, "will" or "covenant." God set the terms whereby his graces are

extended to mankind. The will contains the promises and conditions tied to receiving the promises.

Even though the Bible is divided into two testaments, the reality is that God has dealt with man in more than just the two covenants referred to by the terms, "old," and "new." Another term that is used to describe God's dealing with man is dispensation. In some ways, this is a better term. The conditions and promises given under one dispensation did not apply to those under another dispensation, unless the later dispensation was a fulfillment of promises made under the former. There are four major dispensations recorded in Scripture:

- ***Patriarchal Dispensation:*** From the Garden of Eden until the giving of the Mosaic Law.

Under the Patriarchal Dispensation, God related to and made covenants with various "patriarchs." Usually, the covenant made with a patriarch also extended to his family. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the recipients of the most important patriarchal covenants. In each case, God set the terms.

- ***Mosaic Dispensation:*** From the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai, until the crucifixion of Jesus.

Under the Mosaic Dispensation, God made a covenant with the descendants of Jacob, the nation of Israel. The sacrifices, feast days, tabernacle, Ten Commandments, etc., all were a part of that dispensation. The major ordinance in the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision. Since the existence of the nation of Israel was an intermediate fulfillment of the promise associated with Abrahamic circumcision, God perpetuated this ordinance in the Mosaic covenant.

- ***The Life of Christ:*** From Jesus' baptism to His ascension.

This is an unusual dispensation in that it overlapped the Mosaic dispensation. Much confusion has occurred because this three and one-half period of Living Grace has not been understood. The Law of Moses was not abrogated until the crucifixion of Jesus. However, when the Lord was present on earth, He had the authority to dispense grace apart from any covenant. This was because, as God, He was free to forgive, heal, etc., For example, note the following episode:

Luke 5:18-26 *And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in, and to set him down in front of Him. And not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, right in the center, in front of Jesus. And seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? "But in order that you may know that the Son of*

Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"-- He said to the paralytic-- "I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home." And at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."

When Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven you," He did so without following any of the elements of the then existing Mosaic covenant. In order to receive forgiveness of sins under the Mosaic covenant, sin offerings would have to be made. So, it is not surprising that the scribes and Pharisees considered Jesus to be speaking blasphemies. His answer is interesting, *in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...* This is similar to when Jesus was questioned as to why He and his disciples did not keep the Sabbath law, Jesus replied that He was the *Lord of the Sabbath* (Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5).

Related to this is the statement in Hebrews 9:16-17:

Hebrews 9:16-17 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

While Jesus was on the earth, He dispensed his treasures as He wished. Since His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the Church has been obligated to abide by the terms of the New Covenant, as elucidated by Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

- ***Christian dispensation:*** From the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) until the end of the age.

As we already have noted, early in the history of the Church, an effort was made to bring all Christians under the Old Testament. Christian leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit, rejected that attempt (Acts 15). This was one of the challenges that Paul continually faced. The New Testament epistles of Galatians and Hebrews are polemical documents arguing that the Old Testament is abrogated by the New. Sections of Romans and Colossians also argue this truth.

The tendency to infiltrate the New Covenant with the Old seems to be a problem in almost every age. It is difficult for many Christians to accept the absoluteness of the removal of the Old and the instituting of the New. For example, the Ten Commandments do not govern us today, except to the degree that they have been expressed in the tenets of the New Covenant. Indeed, at least in spirit, nine of the Ten Commandments are found (even intensified) in the New Covenant. Sabbath keeping is not (Romans 14).

God's Scriptural revelation is progressive. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are essential parts of this revelation. They are a unit. Many people talk about how the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. The God of the Old Testament is portrayed as harsh and judgmental, while the God of the

New Testament is loving and accepting. This is not true. Jesus spoke more of hell and judgment than anyone else in the Bible.

Much of the New Testament cannot be understood without a knowledge of the Old Testament. For example, John 3:14, speaking of the serpent's being raised in the wilderness has no meaning, unless one knows the story of Numbers 21. The New Testament is a commentary on the Old Testament. It explains the purpose of much that happened in the Old Testament.

Example: The Book of Hebrews is a document that explains the purpose and significance of the Old Testament forms of worship.

Example: Matthew 19:3-12 contains Jesus' explanation as to why God allowed divorce in the Old Testament and what God's will really is in this matter.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

*They *said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away? 8 He *said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. (Matthew 19:7-8)*

6. Where was it spoken?

This is a question that many inexperienced exegetes fail to ask. Sometimes the question is relevant and sometimes it is not, but it should be asked. For example, II Chronicles 7:14, which is repeated so often concerning the sins of America, is a passage in which the "where" is important. We quote the context:

*Chronicles 7:11-22 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the LORD and in his palace. Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and **have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.** If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now **My eyes shall be open and***

My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. And as for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked even to do according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to be ruler in Israel.' *But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you and shall go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?'* And they will say, 'Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshipped them and served them, therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.'

The land was a holy land. All of the citizens, the good and the bad, were "His people." The Temple was a special place where the people would come together to pray, to seek the face of God, and to repent, if repentance were appropriate. Nothing like this exists today. The people of God are a segment of society, the minority in most societies. So, even if all of the Christians in a given land repent of sins, most of the inhabitants of the land probably will not repent. Therefore, the judgment of God may have to come on the land, in spite of the repenting of all of God's people in that country. Also, the land itself is a factor. Palestine was and is a special place with special promises attached to it.

So, even though it is appropriate for the people of God to repent, if they have done wrong, and God may respond by "healing their land," God cannot be held to 2 Chronicles 7:14 as a promise to us, today. It may be a hope, but it cannot be something that we can hold God to, as if it were a plenary promise.

7. What was said?

The answer to this question will involve many things.

- **The exegete should make certain that the English translation accurately conveys what the original language said.**

Note an example relating to the question about whether or not Jesus washed all of the disciple's feet and whether or not Judas partook of the Lord's supper. The King James Version translates John 13:2,

KJV John 13:2 *And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;*

If this translation, *and supper being ended*, is accurate, then Judas would have been present for all of the things that are described in John 13. The New American Standard Version translates the participle accurately,

NAS John 13:2 *And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,*

It was, *during supper*, that Judas' heart was given to Satan, and thus, the statements made concerning him, during supper, make sense (John 13:10-11, 21-30).

Any time a difficulty arises in trying to make sense of a passage, the first thing to do is to make certain that the translation is not misleading.

- **Small details are important.**

For example, note the different prepositions relating to prayer and the Holy Spirit (*in* and *with*). The following is an excerpt from a paper that we wrote on this topic, a few years ago.

It is important that we recognize the difference between *praying in the Spirit*, and *praying with the spirit*. First, we note Paul's language in I Corinthians 14:14-16.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.

Notice that Paul speaks here of the human spirit and the human mind (i.e., *my spirit, my mind*). He states that when he prays in a tongue, that his human spirit is praying. When he prays in a language that his mind understands, his mind is involved in the prayer. Notice that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in these verses. The key terminology here is, "with." Paul prays *with* his spirit and *with* his mind (Note that the next verse [16] states that Paul sings "in spirit." Since the definite article is missing, and this is in the context of the previous two verses, it is obvious that Paul is speaking of his human spirit's singing in tongues). Note that the translators in this passage correctly use a small "s" rather than a capital "S" in spelling spirit.

Next, we notice the terminology in Jude 17 -21.

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of

God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Jude contrasts those who are devoid of the Holy Spirit and those are not devoid of the Holy Spirit. Jude then states that praying in the Holy Spirit is one of the activities related to our remaining strong and faithful in the faith. The terminology here clearly refers to "praying *in* the Holy Spirit. The human spirit is not referenced here.

The third passage that is relevant to our study is Ephesians 6:18.

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times **in** the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,*

This is the concluding exhortation in Paul's discussion of the Christian armor. Paul states that all prayer and petition (all kinds of prayer) are to be prayed *in* the Spirit. This clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, because of the use of the definite article and the preposition, *in* (consistent with the exhortation of Jude).

Since all prayer at all times is to be prayed *in* the Holy Spirit, and since Paul spoke of praying with the human spirit (in tongues) and praying with the mind (known language), then

- prayer *in* the Spirit may be in tongues (praying by the human spirit)
- or in one's natural language (praying by the human mind).

The important thing is that whether in tongues or in our native language, our prayer should be in the Holy Spirit.

Charismatics and Pentecostals have elevated tongues, as if praying in a tongue were superior to praying in the language known to the speaker. They have pointed to I Corinthians 14:4,

One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

The conclusion reached by many Pentecostals and Charismatics is that praying a tongue has some special edifying value that praying in a known language does not have. The point that Paul is making in this verse, however, is that uninterpreted tongue speaking has no value to the church. Only the tongue speaker is edified by this sort of activity.

Jude speaks of "*building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit,*" which, as we just demonstrated, can be either with tongues or a known language. The key to building up one's self is praying *in* the spirit, not praying *with* the spirit. So, either tongues or non-tongues will build up the praying believer, if such prayer is *in* the Holy Spirit.

It is clear that at Corinth, because of their divisive behavior, the tongues speakers, were praying *with* the spirit, but not *in* the spirit. The Holy Spirit never would motivate someone to use a spiritual endowment to elevate pride-filled individuals and to thus divide the local church.

It is important that all of our prayers be prayed in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, even to the point of whether we should pray in tongues, or in English.

- **Does the context of the passage under consideration give a special definition to any terms?**

We already have considered this point, but a further example might be helpful. Note Paul's use of the term, *justification*, in Romans 5:18

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

The context makes it clear that *justification* in this verse refers to the resurrection, not spiritual salvation. The one transgression of Adam resulted in the entrance of physical death into the human race. The righteous act, Christ's death, resulted in *justification*, i.e., the acquittal or release from that sentence. In this passage, the term refers to no more than this. Elsewhere, *justification* refers to the work of eternal salvation.

- **Are there any patterns of language in this passage that are consistent with patterns that the author displays throughout his writings?**

For example, how should Romans 9:5 be punctuated? The NAS punctuates the verse as follows:

whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

The question is, whether or not the expression, *God blessed forever*, refers to God the Father or to Christ Jesus. If it refers to God the father, then a better punctuation would be to put a period after the word, *flesh*. By so doing, the verse would read,

and from whom is Christ according to the flesh. Blessed forever be God, who is over all.

The RSV, NEB, TEV, Moffatt, Berkley, and other versions punctuate the verse with a period after *flesh*.

The NIV, NAS, KJV, put a comma at that point.

One thing that influenced the punctuation of the verse in these versions was the theological posture of the translators. Which is correct? The following considerations influence our decision:

- Paul consistently uses terminology that makes a distinction between God (the father) and Jesus Christ (the possible exception being in those instances in which the Godhead may be referenced, such as Romans 3:23, *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*).
- Paul consistently restricts the term, *theos*, (God) to God the Father. Example: *Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1) This does not mean that Paul denies the Deity of Jesus. He affirms Christ's Deity in many ways in many passages. He just does not apply the term, *theos*, specifically to Jesus.
- The result of this decision leads us to conclude that the term, *theos*, in this phrase also applies to God the Father.
- Based on these facts, we are led to place the period after *flesh*.

Having reached this conclusion, we then understand the flow of Paul's argument and his point in this section. Paul has been discussing the privileges of Israel, climaxing the discussion by mentioning Israel's greatest privilege, i.e., being the agent through which the Messiah came into the world. In the final phrase of 9:5, Paul employs the Greek term, $\omega\eta$ (*oon*) as emphasis of the fact that God the Father is over all, suggesting that the tragic apostasy of the Jews is in itself a part of the dispensation of Him who is God over all, Jew and Gentile, past and future.

We are able to reach this conclusion because we have been able to research Paul's use of the term, *theos*, and discover that he uses the term to refer to God the Father, not God the Son.

SECTION FOUR: LITERARY *GENRE*

The Bible consists of many different types of literature (*genre*). The generic approach to the literature of the Bible is necessary for a proper exegesis. There is a great difference, for example, in the methodology employed in interpreting the poetry of a psalm and that employed in interpreting an historical narrative. An exegete must understand the differences in *genre*, the purposes of each *genre*, and how truth is gleaned from each *genre*. In this section, we will rely heavily upon the Fee and Stuart text, *How to Read the Bible for all it's Worth*.⁶

NARRATIVES

The Bible contains more *narrative* literature than any other *genre*. 40% of the Old Testament is narrative. In the New Testament, large portions of the Gospels and most of Acts are narratives. Narratives are stories. Bible narratives contain God's story, as it relates to man. Biblical narratives primarily show God at work in creation and among His people. At the same time, they provide illustrations of many lessons important to our lives.

The Special Nature of Old Testament Narratives

The Old Testament story is told on three levels:

Top Level: The universal plan of God, worked out through His creation.

Creation → Fall → Power of Sin → Need for Redemption → Jesus Christ

Middle Level: Centers on Israel (The call of Abraham, establishment of the Abrahamic lineage, enslaving of Israel, exodus, a conquered nation, disloyalty, God's pleading, captivity, deliverance)

Bottom Level: Individual narratives (Joseph, David, etc.)

Every individual Old Testament narrative (bottom level) is a part of the greater narrative of Israel's history (middle level), which is a part of God's universal plan (top level).

When Jesus said, *the Scriptures bear witness of me* (John 5:27-29), He obviously was not speaking about every individual passage. He was speaking about the ultimate (top level) of the narrative in which His atonement was the central act and the subjection of all creation to Him was its climax.

What Narratives Are Not

Douglas Stuart makes four statements concerning Old Testament narratives⁷. Below we have summarized these and adjusted them so that they apply to all biblical narratives:

⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, 1993)

⁷ Fee and Stuart, pgs 81-83

1. Bible narratives are not just stories about people. They are stories about what God did to and through these people.
2. Bible narratives are not allegories with hidden meanings. They are historical records of actual events. They rarely give us a record of all that God did and we must be satisfied with that. When one tries to “read between the lines,” he usually reads into the story elements that just aren’t there.
3. Bible narratives usually do not teach directly. More often than not, they illustrate truths that are explicitly taught elsewhere. For instance, David's adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11), resulting in tragedy faced by the nation in later generations, is an illustration of the natural consequences of sin.
4. Each individual narrative or episode does not necessarily have a moral all its own. Some narratives are like parables, i.e., there is a single major point. In some other narratives, there is no point; it is just a story that is a necessary part of the record.

Caveats Regarding the Interpretation of Narratives

Stuart lists ten principles for interpreting Old Testament narratives.⁸ We have adjusted these and express them as caveats. As expressed below, these caveats apply to all biblical narratives.

1. A Bible narrative usually does not teach a doctrine.
2. A Bible narrative may illustrate doctrines expressed propositionally elsewhere.
3. Narratives record what happened, not necessarily what should have happened. Not every narrative will have a, "moral of the story."
4. What people do in narratives may or may not be an example for us to follow. Many characters in the Bible are far from perfect. The Holy Spirit does not hide the imperfections of those through whom God worked.
5. Often, we are not told whether good or bad is illustrated by a narrative. We must judge the events and behavior of people on the basis of teaching elsewhere in Scripture.
6. All narratives are incomplete. Not all relevant details are given. What is included is what the Holy Spirit considered to be important for us to know.
7. Narratives are not written to answer every theological question that relates to the episodes on the story. The stories have a limited perspective and deal only with certain issues.
8. Narratives may teach explicitly, but usually their teaching is done implicitly.
9. Ultimately, God is the hero in biblical narratives.

The Value of Narratives in Clarifying Doctrine

As noted above, "A Bible narrative usually does not teach a doctrine... A Bible narrative may illustrate doctrines expressed propositionally elsewhere." This is one of the most helpful uses of narratives. Narratives can help to clarify doctrine. The following example illustrates the process.

⁸ Fee and Stuart, pgs 83-84

How does one answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Many statements are made in the New Testament concerning salvation.

1. Some imply that "faith alone" is sufficient.

Romans 5:1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Acts 10:43 Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

Acts 16:30-31 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household."

2. Romans states that hearing the Gospel is necessary, in order to have faith.

Romans 10:14, 17 How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

3. Some verses speak of the importance of repentance.

Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke 13:3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Acts 2:37-38 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

4. Some verses state that confession of faith is what saves us.

Matthew 10:32 "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

Romans 10:10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

5. Some verses state that baptism is involved in salvation

Mark 16:16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Acts 2:38 *And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 22:16 *'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'*

Colossians 2:11-12 *and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

What are we to make of this? Is there a contradiction between these statements? One way to search for the answer is to read through *Acts*, the Early Church narrative. What was preached and practiced? There are nine salvation episodes recorded in Acts, in which sufficient detail is given to assist us in our search. We pursue our answer by preparing a chart.

	PREACHING/HEARING	BELIEF/FAITH	REPENTANCE	CONFESSION	BAPTISM
Pentecost Acts 2:1-41					
Samaritans Acts 8:4-24					
Ethiopian Acts 8:26-40					
Saul Acts 9:1-18 22:1-16					
Cornelius Acts 10:1-48					
Lydia Acts 16:25-34					
Philippian Jailer Acts 16:25-34					
Corinthians Acts 18:8					
Disciples of John Acts 19:1-5					

What happened in each case? The answer, as illustrated by the chart, will help us to know what we are to proclaim and practice.

In the effort to learn from narratives, *inductive reasoning* is used. There are two types of logic: *deductive reasoning* and *inductive reasoning*. A deductive argument claims that its premises provide *conclusive* evidence. A deductive argument is *valid* when its premises do provide conclusive evidence for its conclusion, i.e., it is absolutely impossible for the premises to be true without the conclusion's being true also.

Inductive reasoning on the other hand does not claim that its premises give conclusive evidence for the truth of its conclusion, but they provide evidence for it. Inductive reasoning deals with *probabilities* not *absolutes*.

1. **deductive reasoning**

- Here is an example of a valid argument that contains true premises (propositions):⁹

All whales are mammals
All mammals have lungs
Therefore, all whales have lungs

- Here is an example of a valid argument (because of its form), but the conclusion is false because the premises are not true:

All spiders have six legs
All six legged creatures have wings
Therefore all spiders have wings

- Here is an example of an invalid argument (because of its form) even though the premises and conclusion are true.

If I owned all of the gold in Fort Knox, I would be wealthy
I do not own all of the gold in Fort Knox
Therefore, I am not wealthy

This would be a valid syllogism if the primary premise were, "only the man who owns all of the gold in Fort Knox is wealthy" or "one must own all of the gold in Fort Knox to be wealthy."

There are doctrines that are arrived at, legitimately, by deductive logic. These have as their primary premise an absolute plenary propositional statement of Scripture.

⁹ In logic, a premise is a proposition used in an argument to substantiate a conclusion. Thus, propositions may be premises or conclusions, depending on their role in the argument.

- For example: *Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. (John 14:6)*

This could be restated, "The only way to the Father is through Jesus." The following syllogism would be valid and the conclusion true:

The only way to the Father is through Jesus
 Jack sought to reach the Father through Buddha, instead of Jesus
 Jack did not reach the Father

- Another example: *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)*

Thus, the following syllogism is valid and true:

All who do not believe the preached Gospel message are condemned
 Jack heard the Gospel and did not believe
 Jack is condemned.

There are rules of logic that make a syllogism valid or invalid, but the most common error is what is called, *the illicit process of the major*. This is when the major premise is treated as if it were a distributed statement (applying to all members of the class) when the statement is not so distributed.

Example: Some dogs have brown spots
 Jack is a dog
 Jack has brown spots

In this syllogism, *some* does not distribute the brown spots to *all dogs*.

Another common error is when the class in the second premise is not a part of the class of the major premise.

Example: All dogs have four legs
 My cat has four legs
 Therefore, my cat is a dog

Such illicit logic is not rare among people who *interpret* the Bible. Other examples could be given, but this illustrates the sort of logical errors that are committed when deductive logic is the process being used.

A deductive argument is said to be *sound* or *unsound*. It is sound if all of the premises are true and the argument is valid (by the nature of its internal structure). It is unsound if any of the premises are not true or if the argument is invalid (by the nature of its internal structure).

2. *Inductive reasoning*

Inductive reasoning refers to conclusions based upon experience with isolated cases. For example, if I bought Parrot Brand shoes from store X in 1995, 1996, & 1997, and all three pairs were very comfortable shoes, I conclude that if I buy a pair of Parrot Brand shoes from store X in 1998 that they will be very comfortable shoes. This is inductive reasoning, also known as *analogy*. It is like the child who burns his hand by touching the stove. Never again will he touch a stove, because he induced that touching a stove will result in a burned hand. This is the way that most of our everyday inferences are made.

Many conclusions reached in Bible study must be the result of inductive inference. The chart relating to the question, "What must I do to be saved," is an example of inductive inference. Inductive reasoning cannot prove anything with absolute certainty, but degrees of probability can be determined. The more examples of something that can be investigated, and the more agreement found in each of the cases, the greater the degree of probability. In the case of "What must I do to be saved," nine cases were studied. Faith and baptism were two elements that were present in all of them. Therefore, the degree of probability is extremely high that these are involved, somehow, in salvation.

Let's study another example. We frequently are told by certain teachers that the way to fight spiritual battles is through praise. Jehoshaphat's battle with Ammon, Moab, and Seir, recorded in II Chronicles 20:20-23, is cited as validation for this declaration:

And they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed." And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." And when they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely, and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

The weakness of this argument is manifold.

- First, remember the caveats concerning narratives (opening paragraphs of this section).
- Second, this conclusion ignores the earlier context.
- Third, this is only one example, an insufficient number to establish truth.

Note the preceding context:

V3 When the enemy hordes began moving toward Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat turned his attention to Jehovah and declared a fast, throughout all Judah

- V4 All Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord
- V5-6 They proclaimed who God is
- V7-8 They declared their relationship with Jehovah
- V9 They declared that they would rely on God
- V12 They declared their absolute dependence
- V13 They stood, silently
- V14-17 Jehovah responded through a prophet, "Don't be afraid; the battle is mine not yours; you do not need to fight, but station yourselves, stand and watch Me; don't be afraid."
- V18 In response to the prophetic word, all fell down in solemn worship.
- V19 They transitioned to praising God

Note that the thing that drew God into the battle was not praise, but their plea, their supplication, their declaration of dependence and faith. So, to say that this episode teaches us that to achieve victory in battle is to use "the weapon of praise," simply is not true. The act of sending praisers in front of the army had nothing to do with the outcome. Praise was Judah's response to God's guaranteeing the victory, in advance of the battle.

In an effort to find the answer to the question, "How do we handle a crisis," we can employ inductive inference by looking at several Old Testament examples.

One example is the battle in which Judah, led by king Abijah was attacked by Israel, which was led by wicked king Jeroboam. The record is in II Chronicles 13:13-18:

But Jeroboam had set an ambush to come from the rear, so that Israel was in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. When Judah turned around, behold, they were attacked both front and rear; so they cried to the LORD, and the priests blew the trumpets. Then the men of Judah raised a war cry, and when the men of Judah raised the war cry, then it was that God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And when the sons of Israel fled before Judah, God gave them into their hand. And Abijah and his people defeated them with a great slaughter, so that 500,000 chosen men of Israel fell slain. Thus the sons of Israel were subdued at that time, and the sons of Judah conquered because they trusted in the LORD, the God of their fathers.

What was the key to Judah's victory? It was neither the trumpets, nor the war cry. It was because Judah "trusted in Jehovah, the God of their fathers."

A second case study is 2 Samuel 5:17-25. David, who recently had been made king of all Israel, was challenged by the Philistines. Two battles are described:

FIRST BATTLE

When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek out David; and when David heard of it, he went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines came and spread themselves out in the valley of Rephaim. Then David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up,

for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand." So David came to Baal-perazim, and defeated them there; and he said, "The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like the breakthrough of waters." Therefore he named that place Baal-perazim. And they abandoned their idols there, so David and his men carried them away.

SECOND BATTLE

Now the Philistines came up once again and spread themselves out in the valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the LORD, He said, "You shall not go directly up; circle around behind them and come at them in front of the balsam trees. "And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall act promptly, for then the LORD will have gone out before you to strike the army of the Philistines." Then David did so, just as the LORD had commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

Notice in the first instance, David inquired of Jehovah. Jehovah told him to go up to battle, and He would give the Philistines into David's hand. This was a frontal assault, in which the Philistines were defeated.

In the second battle, David again inquired of Jehovah. This time, Jehovah told David to not go up in a frontal assault, but to circle around behind the Philistines. They were to wait until the sound of marching was heard in the tops of the trees, then to attack. The sound of marching in the tops of the trees was the signal that Jehovah had gone out before them.

Is there a pattern here? In both instances, David inquired of God and did what God told him to do. He was obedient and reliant on God.

Many other examples could be examined. For example I Chronicles 14:8-17; Isaiah 37:36ff; I Kings 20:11ff; Deuteronomy 1:41ff; etc. In all of these, there is a pattern of obedience and reliance upon Jehovah. There is a sufficient number of cases with consistent elements for us to say that godly people in the Old Testament followed the following pattern when successfully fighting enemies:

1. Seek direction from God
2. Rely on God, totally
3. Obey

We cannot say that the pattern for fighting battles is to wait for a sound in the trees, to send praises before the army, to attack the enemy up front, or to blow trumpets.

Since Romans 15:4 states, *For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*, a legitimate case could be made that these Old Testament episodes are examples for us to follow.

EPISTLES

Twenty-one New Testament documents are classed as *epistles*. In the late 19th Century, Adolph Deissmann, on the basis of vast papyrus studies, made a distinction between *letters* (which he called, "real letters") and *epistles*.¹⁰ Letters were not intended for public distribution, or for posterity, but were intended only for the person or group to which they were addressed. In contrast to the letter, epistles were an artistic literary form that was intended for the public.

Papyrus finds revealed the following pattern for letters written in the Greek world in New Testament times:

1. First was a form of salutation, usually containing both the names of the sender and the recipient (some analysts would make the sender and recipient separate elements)
2. Second was a greeting that contained a prayer wish or thanksgiving for the recipient (some analysts would make the greeting and prayer wish two separate elements)
3. Third was the body of the letter
4. Finally, there was a closing greeting and farewell.

According to the scheme outlined above, therefore, there were four elements in an Hellenistic letter (some would divide into six, based on dividing #1 & #2 into two elements each).

Notice how this pattern is displayed in I Corinthians:

1. *Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1)*
2. *To the Church of God which is at Corinth... (1:2)*
3. *Body of the letter*
4. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you; My love be with you all in Christ Jesus, Amen. (15:23-24)*

Item #2 does have some variety in the papyri. Sometimes it is a prayer wish (almost exactly like III John 2, *Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers*). There are times in which it takes the form of thanksgiving and prayer. There are other times in which prayer and thanksgiving are missing from the greeting.

Deissmann, like most people who discover a truth, sought to press the truth upon New Testament literature, categorizing all New Testament epistles as true letters or epistles. Other scholars have argued that we should not reduce all of the New Testament epistles to one or the other of these categories. Gordon Fee, for example, states, "...in some instances, it seems to be a question of more or less - the distinction is nevertheless a valid one."¹¹ Understanding this distinction is helpful in our understanding of New Testament epistles.

Whether a real letter or an epistle, there is one thing that all of them have in common: they are *occasional documents*. Occasional documents are those that are produced in response to and

¹⁰ G. Adolph Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Peabody, Mass, Hendrickson Publishers, 1988, reprint of 1901 T & T Clark publication) pgs 1-59

¹¹ Fee and Stuart, p 46

intended for a specific occasion. This is the most crucial thing to remember in dealing with epistles. A second crucial element is the fact that they were written in the First Century.

The epistles were occasioned by some circumstance from either the reader's side or the author's side. Most were occasioned by things from the reader's side. This is one reason why we have difficulty with some of the passages in the epistles. We do not know the questions or the problems that the author addressed. We have the answers, but not the questions. Some have compared this to listening to one end of a phone conversation. If we are eavesdropping on a phone conversation, we have to figure out what the person on the other end of the line is saying. Sometimes we can understand the answer without knowing the question. Unfortunately, there are New Testament passages which defy such resolution.

Another caution that must be emphasized is that epistles are not theological treatises. The theology in them is *task theology*. This means that theology was expressed because it applied to the task at hand. Thus, even though there is a lot of theology in the epistles, it never is a complete theology. The theology found in the passages relates to the topic being discussed and no more. This would be true even of Romans, which contains the theology related to Paul's special commission as the apostle to the Gentiles.

The first thing that must be done in exegeting an epistle is to become acquainted with the historical context. This is necessary in order to increase the probability of our accurate reconstruction of the occasion that called forth the epistle. For most of us, this will require outside help. Bible dictionaries, introductions to commentaries, Bible handbooks, and surveys will provide this material.

The next thing to do is to read the epistle through in one sitting. The reason for doing this is to get the feel of the epistle. For all of Paul's epistles except I Corinthians and I Thessalonians 4-5, the epistle forms one continuous argument. Often, the argument contains various parts and an occasional side comment. By reading the epistle at a single sitting, this is apparent and the argument can be followed. Even in I Corinthians and the section of I Thessalonians, where a succession of independent items are discussed, reading at a single sitting helps to get the feel for the setting that occasioned the letter.

After the first reading, read the epistle again and this time begin to formulate an outline of the sections or the flow of the argument of the epistle. By doing this, in I Corinthians, for example, it is clear that I Corinthians 13, "The Love Chapter of the Bible," is a part of Paul's argument for proper conduct relating to the gifts of the Spirit.

It is important to think paragraphs, not isolated verses. Note how the paragraphs relate to one another.

There always will be passages that we cannot understand or be certain about their meaning.

1. In many cases, the reason for the difficulty is because they were not written for us. The author assumes that his readers are in sync with his thinking. For example, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that he *used to tell them these things*. There is no possibility of

knowing what all of *these things* might be. We must be content with not knowing every answer and be honest enough to admit it.

2. Even though we cannot understand the details, we often can grasp the point of the passage. For example, no honest exegete will claim that knows beyond doubt what Paul meant by *baptism for the dead* in I Corinthians 15:29. However, the point of the passage is that there will be a resurrection.
3. We must ask ourselves what can be said for certain about these passages and what is not certain. Again, we must content ourselves with this uncertainty and be honest about it.
4. A good commentary is helpful with these passages. A good commentary will discuss all of the options.

The biggest challenge in exegeting epistles

In exegeting epistles, the constant question is, "how does this apply today?" The challenge for us is to determine what is cultural; thus something for that age and situation, versus what is abiding truth for all generations. For example, I Corinthians 11:14 says, *Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him.* Is this statement for all cultures, or is the *nature* mentioned something that arose out of culture? Most who argue for this as an abiding truth have no problem with a woman's cutting her hair, in contradiction to the principle of the next verse, *but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.* Thus, *nature* in these two examples came about by a visit or non-visit to the barber. Culture, to a large degree, dictates what is common sense or *nature* for most of us.

Gender roles, church order, caring for widows, and many other things must face the question, "Is the occasion that prompted this statement a cultural one, or is it an abiding principle?" Often, how the response is framed helps us, but not always. For example, the statement concerning women teachers in I Timothy 2:12-14 points to more than cultural circumstance. It points to the male/female relationship that began with the Garden of Eden:

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.

Prophesying with a covered head, on the other hand, may be cultural. In that day, a covered head meant submission. In our culture, a covered head means superiority (one takes his hat off in the presence of a superior).

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but

woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (I Corinthians 11:2-16)

Honest and accomplished exegetes may argue about what is cultural and binding in this paragraph. This is the issue that each exegete and each church must resolve.

Some basic rules

1. A text cannot mean what it never meant to its author or to his hearers
2. When we share comparable particulars with the First Century Christians, God's Word to them is God's Word to us.
3. When there are comparable situations and particulars, God's Word to us must be limited to its original intent. "Extended application" cannot lead us to truth. For example, the statement in I Corinthians 3:16-17 is a warning against destroying a local church: *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.* Some have sought to make an extended application of this passage, i.e., the Christian's body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit, so if we drink tea, coffee, sunbathe and get cancer, God will "get us." This is not a legitimate use of this passage.
4. An abiding principle sometimes can be found in situations where there are no particulars that are similar to our situation. For example, participating in idol feasts has no parallel in our society (I Corinthians 10). However, the principle about not participating in anything demonic would apply to spiritism, astrology, etc., things that are prevalent in our age.
5. We must recognize that items of "indifference and opinion" are not abiding truth. The epistles themselves indicate that food, drink, observance of days, etc., are matters of indifference (Galatians, Romans 14, etc.). Such matters differ from culture to culture, even among strong committed Bible believers. On the other hand, the lists of sins in the epistles never include any of the above categories (Romans 1:29-30; I Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; II Timothy 3:2-4, etc.).
6. It is important that we make special note of items where the New Testament has a uniform and consistent witness and where the New Testament reflects differences.
7. We must exercise Christian love with one another in these areas. There will be differences of opinion about what is cultural and what is not.

The great caution, then, is for us to do our exegesis well, so that we will be certain that what we are binding upon ourselves is generated from situations and particulars that are both theirs and ours.

THE GOSPELS

The Gospels are very unique. It is difficult to find another *genre* that is analogous to them. Although the Gospels record the Life of Christ, we know of nothing that Jesus Himself wrote, except for the message written in the sand, during the "woman taken in adultery" episode. Even that episode is based on a questionable text.

One of the unique things about the Gospels is that there are four of them and they don't always agree in every detail. Yet, they are inspired. Jesus' primary tongue was Aramaic. His teachings come to us through a Greek translation of his Aramaic statements. Many of his statements are found in two or three of the Gospels, and seldom is the wording identical in each account. Also, episodes do not always occur in the same chronological order. Some liberal theologians have tried to make an issue of this, arguing that these documents are totally human and full of errors. Other, theologians, equal in scholarship, have demonstrated the historical reliability of the material presented in the Gospels. In our day, we have a rather mechanical, tape recorder mentality, about how such things are recorded. However, this was not the way that such literature was produced in the time of Christ.

During the time of Christ, people did not take notes, as we do. They developed good memories and were able to quote, often verbatim, from speeches that they had heard. The first Gospel to be written (Mark) was written between 40 and 65 AD.¹² During the first decade of its existence, the Church relied on the verbal record of Christ's earthly sojourn. The early Church Fathers said that Mark wrote at Peter's instruction, while the two of them were in Rome. There also is strong evidence that Mark's Gospel was in circulation among the churches before the other three Gospels were written. Although written specifically for the Roman Christians, Mark's Gospel also had a larger distribution in view (1:37; 10:45; 12:9; 13:10).

Each of the four Gospels was written for a particular audience. Matthew and Luke "rewrote" Mark's Gospel for their audiences. Many years later, and totally independent of the earlier three, John wrote a Gospel of a different kind for another audience. So, the writing of the Gospels was motivated by two concerns:

- (1) to present the record of who Jesus was, what He said and did;
- (2) to present the Life of Christ to a world that did not speak Aramaic, but Greek, not Jewish but Gentile, not Palestinian rural but urban and pagan (this especially is true of Luke and John).

The desire to communicate the Gospel to a particular audience is what guided in the choice of what was reported and the emphasis of the document.

¹² Recently, conservative scholars are moving toward accepting the earlier portion of this period as the date of Mark's Gospel. If this view prevails, it will challenge the long held view that I Thessalonians was the first portion of the New Testament to be written.

The Gospels are not biographies. It is interesting that the Four Gospels were described by Justin Martyr (140 AD) as "the memoirs of the apostles." Memoirs are different from biographies.

In exegeting the Gospels, we seek to be aware of the historical setting of Jesus as well as the historical setting of the audience for which the Gospel was written. Thus, the Gospels are described as *two level documents*.

As with the epistles, the place to begin with the Gospels is to immerse ourselves in First Century Judaism. Again, as with the epistles, this will require outside reading. Among other things, the history of the region is very important to understanding the setting in which Our Lord taught. Some of His statements cannot be understood, fully, without this knowledge. Not only do the various religious and political parties need to be identified, but also it is important to know why they existed and believed what they believed.

Another thing that will be noticed is the form of Jesus' teaching. He followed the variety of forms that prevailed in His day: parable, hyperbole, proverbs, similes, metaphors, questions, irony, etc.

Many sayings of Jesus were repeated without the setting in which they were given. Paul for example, quotes Jesus three times without alluding to the setting in which they were given (I Corinthians 7:10; 9:14; Acts 20:35). The third of these (Acts 20:35) is not found in any of the Gospels, so we still have it without an historical context.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel writers took these verbal statements and recorded them into their documents. How they organized the material and the audience for which they were writing determined other specifics. All of these are different. We already have referred to Mark, who sought to explain the nature of Jesus as Messiah. He presents Jesus as the strong Son of God who moved with compassion, but with miraculous power. "Immediately," is the key word of Mark (unfortunately, the NIV has removed this word from Mark).

Matthew's concern seems to be with an audience that is more Jewish in its understanding. The language that he uses is Jewish. He also groups his material into topical sections, rather than writing with a chronological outline. He has five such collections, which end with, "and when Jesus had finished all of these sayings," or something similar. His collections are

Life in the Kingdom (Chapters 5-7)
 Instructions for Ministers in the Kingdom (10:5-42)
 Parables of the Kingdom at work (13:1-52)
 Relationships and Discipline in the Kingdom (18:1-35)
 Eschatology of the Kingdom (Chapters 23-25)

Note that the first part (10:5-12) of the Instructions for Ministers in the Kingdom is for the Twelve (go only to the lost sheep of Israel), but the last part is for a later time, since it speaks of being brought before governors and kings, etc.

These nicely arranged sayings are found all over Luke's Gospel. Luke's Gospel is the most chronological of the four.

Jesus probably gave the same teaching and said the same thing at different times and in before different audiences. Therefore, the emphasis or point would be different, even though the same saying might be repeated. Luke wrote after investigating (probably interviewing people, researching the genealogical record in the Temple, etc.) and then sought to give an orderly record, which was coupled with his second book, Acts. In a way, Luke/Acts should be considered as one book (as it was during one period of the early Church).

None of the Gospel writers intended for their Gospel to be read in conjunction with the others, but this is the way that we need to study them. Since God provided four Gospels for the canon, we cannot study one of them in isolation. A great help is a "Gospel harmony." In a harmony, all four Gospels are printed in parallel columns that allow them to be compared and coalesced.

One thing that must be in our minds as we study the Gospels is the concept of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. The basic framework of the New Testament is eschatological. Most Jews were eschatological in their thinking. They thought that they lived on the brink of time and that God was about to step into history and bring about the age to come. This age was considered to be Satan's age, with sin, sickness, demon possession, and evil men triumphing. The *Age to Come* was the Time of God's Rule, characterized by the presence of the Spirit, righteousness, health, and peace. The Messianic Age was referred to as, *the Kingdom of God*. John the Baptist announced that it was at hand. Jesus announced that it was at hand with His ministry. All the people watched Him to see if he would bring about that age. His crucifixion did not fit their hopes. The resurrection brought that hope back alive to the apostles, and so they asked just before the ascension, if He would *restore the kingdom to Israel*.

Howard Irvin has emphasized that the only Gospel that Jesus preached was the "Gospel of the Kingdom."

The early Christians came to realize that the coming of Jesus had not been to usher in the final end, but to inaugurate the beginning of the end. Thus, the end had come, but not yet fully come. So, the early Christians lived between the times. This kind of tension is a key to understanding much in the New Testament.

PARABLES

What is a parable?

The term, *parable*, is an Anglicization of the Greek term, *parabole* (parabol h), meaning, *something thrown alongside*. In literature, the term refers to something placed beside something else as a comparison or a parallel case cited in illustration. The parable was one of the most common tools of teaching used by the rabbis of the era in which Jesus ministered. Thus, following the accepted teaching style of His day, Jesus employed parables to such an extent that Mark commented, hyperbolically (Matthew seems to have copied Mark's comment),

and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. (Mark 4:34; Matthew 13:34)

Parables are simple stories that anyone can understand. Yet, because most modern Christians do not understand the nature of parables, they have suffered more misinterpretation than any other portion of Scripture (except perhaps, *Revelation*).

One reason that parables are misunderstood is the result of the comment that Jesus made following the Parable of the Sower,

And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that 'while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing they may hear and not understand lest they return and are forgiven.'" (Mark 4:10-12 [see also, Matthew 13:10-13; Luke 8:9-10]).

In this dialogue, Jesus paraphrased several Old Testament passages that spoke of the hardening of hearts (Isaiah 6:9ff; 43:8; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2). Some Bible teachers who lean toward a mystical approach to Scripture have developed the *Hardening Theory* as a hermeneutical approach to parables. According to this theory, parables are simple stories that can be understood by both believers and unbelievers. However, the real meaning of a parable consists of "mysteries" that belong to the church and can be uncovered only by Spirit-led prophetic allegory. Jesus' semi-allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower further encouraged those who put forth the *Hardening Theory*.

Since most of the parables clearly were not intended for an inner circle, the *Hardening Theory* is not a sound approach to parabolic interpretation. Note for example those instances in which the Gospels state that Jesus spoke parables *to* people. Here are three such examples from Luke:

NAS Luke 15:3 And He told them this parable, saying, (Greek- ei pen de prov autou He spoke to them)

NAS Luke 18:9 And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

NAS Luke 19:11 And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately (the parable was told to correct their understanding).

Jesus usually used parables to illustrate a point, and the parables were understood by His target audience. For example the Lawyer understood the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Pharisees and the chief priests conspired to kill Jesus because they understood the parable of the tenants (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-20).

Gordon Fee points out that one of the keys to understanding Jesus' statement, as recorded in Mark 4:10-12, is the realization that Jesus spoke Aramaic. His words were translated into Greek by the writers of the Gospels.

“If the parables, then, are not allegorical mysteries for the church, what did Jesus mean in Mark 4:10-12 by the mystery of the kingdom and its relationship to parables? Most likely the clue to this saying lies in a play on words in Jesus' native Aramaic. The word, *methal* which was translated *parabole* in Greek was used for a whole range of figures of speech in the riddle, puzzle, parable category, not just of the story variety called “parables” in English. Probably verse 11 meant that the meaning of Jesus' ministry (the secret of the kingdom) could not be perceived by those on the outside; it was like a *methal*, a riddle, to them. Hence His speaking in *mathelin* (parables) was a part of the *methal* (riddle) of his whole ministry to them. They saw, but they failed to see; they heard – and even understood – the parables, but they failed to really appreciate the whole thrust of Jesus' ministry.... Jesus was not trying to be obtuse; he fully intended to be understood.”¹³

Our exegesis of the parables must begin by noting the audience to whom they were spoken. We exegete parables on the assumption that Jesus expected to be understood.

Before exegeting parables, we must understand the nature of this genre. A *true parable* is a story. It has a plot, a beginning, and an ending. The Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Great Supper, are examples of true parables. Many sayings, which are sometimes called parables, are not parables, but other figures of speech. We will discuss these later.

A parable is not an allegory. In an allegory, every element in the story represents something, other than what it represented in the story. In most parables, the elements do not represent anything. They are scenery necessary for the point to be made. In some cases,¹⁴ a parable may come close to being an allegory, in which the elements of the story represent something. In such instances, it is obvious what the elements of the story represent and usually they are explained; there is no hidden meaning. Even so, parables are not allegories and should not be treated as such.

¹³ Fee & Stuart, p. 137

¹⁴ For example, the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-11; Matthew 21:33-44; Luke 20:9-18)

The purpose of parables

The purpose of parables is to call forth a response on the part of the hearer. In some ways, interpreting a parable destroys what it was originally. Parables are like jokes. The story is told in order to get to the punch line. In a joke, the punch line gets a response, hopefully, a laugh. When someone does not understand a joke, and it has to be explained, it no longer is funny, even though after the explanation one can understand why it was funny. A joke will not be funny if the audience does not have a relationship with the topic and elements in the story that lead up to a punch line. For example, telling an American joke in Russia frequently gets nothing but puzzled looks.

The same is true of parables. The audience understood the story; the elements were familiar to them. So, they were "caught" by the point at the end. In our era, it is difficult for us to capture the punch line of New Testament parables.

When one understands the elements of the story, his thinking is led down a path. Abruptly, as in a joke, there is an unexpected turn. The audience gets the point. The parable needs no interpretation. As a matter of fact, it would be ruined if interpreted.

Getting the point

We must find the *reference points* in the story, in order to get the *point* of the story. Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). There are only two points of reference: the man in the ditch and the Samaritan. The other details of the parable are used to build the effect. The story is told from the point of view of the man in the ditch (he watched the story play out).

First, we examine the context. The context is the section. The preceding verses explain **why** and **to whom** the parable was given. Here is the account.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; Do this, and you will live." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

We note the following:

- This parable was spoken to a lawyer, a Pharisee, who was testing Jesus.
- By outside reading, we can learn that the priestly types that passed by on the other side were of a religious order opposed by Pharisees. Thus when Jesus spoke of priests passing by without helping the man, the lawyer was thinking, "of course, what else would one expect from those priests."
- By reading elsewhere we also will learn that giving of alms was one of the Pharisees main traits. This is how they loved their neighbors as themselves. So, the lawyer

expected the next person to come down the road in the story would be a Pharisee who would help the man.

- However, the next man coming down the road was a Samaritan!
- When Jesus asked the lawyer who in the story was a neighbor to the man in the ditch, the lawyer could not bring himself to say, "Samaritan," but said, "the one who showed mercy."
- The Lawyer knew what Scripture said about loving one's neighbor. He was ready to justify himself by showing that he loved his neighbor by defining, "neighbor" in a way that would he would be justified.
- So, Jesus trapped him with a parable.

We can almost hear Jesus saying to himself, "Gotcha." For us to feel the impact of the story, we must substitute other individuals from our own milieu. Perhaps for us the Samaritan would be an atheist or someone else whom we might tend to detest.

In interpreting parables, the first question that we ask, after we have completed our preliminary work, is, "What's the point?"

We will miss the point of the parable if we fail to ask this question. For example, the so-called, Parable of the Prodigal Son is not about the prodigal son, but about the elder brother. That's the point.

The majority of the parables are *Parables of the Kingdom*. They tell us about the Kingdom of God. When they begin with, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." we must not take the individual elements as the point of the parable, but what is the point of the whole parable. Failing to do this has resulted in some rather bizarre views about the Kingdom.

LITERARY FIGURES AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

There are many literary figures and figures of speech used throughout Scripture, especially in the Gospels. Understanding such figures is a help in exegesis. We will note some of the better known figures. In all literary figures, the question must be asked, “What’s the point?”

I. Fable

A fable is literary figure in which human qualities are given to animate and inanimate objects. Fables are used to highlight some blunder made by men or human propensities and to present criticism in an amusing manner. Fables are not used to illustrate high moral truth.

Example: *The Fable of the Thorn Bush and Cedar:*

2 Kings 14:8-10 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face each other." And Jehoash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thorn bush which was in Lebanon sent to the cedar which was in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trampled the thorn bush. "You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has become proud. Enjoy your glory and stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you, even you, should fall, and Judah with you?"

The background of this fable is found in II Chronicles 25:1-13. Amaziah, King of Judah, sought to create a large army in preparation for going to war against Edom. To this end, he employed 100,000 mercenaries from Israel. Jehovah sent a prophet to Amaziah, warning him not to use Israelites in the upcoming campaign. Israel had become an apostate nation and Jehovah, would not bless any army that contained men from Israel. So, Amaziah paid off the Israelite mercenaries and sent them back home. The mercenaries were angered by this rejection and so they plundered the villages of Judah through which they passed on the way back to Israel. Amaziah was successful in his battle against Edom.

After the war, he adopted the idolatry of Edom. When he did get back home, he asked that the matter of bad faith be settled between the armies of Judah and the Israelites. This brought the reply of Jehoash in the form of the above fable.

The point is, “don’t get too proud of your success, leave well enough alone.”

A fable is not an allegory. Rather than seeking to find some meaning or message in each detail, the exegete’s goal is to discover the point that is being made by the use of the fable.

II. Simile

In a simile, something is likened to something else in one or another of its aspects. The terms, *as* and *like*, are the distinguishing marks of a simile.

Example: *The activity of God's Word is illustrated by the activity of rain and snow*

Isaiah 55:10-11 *"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

The point here is that those who trust the Lord according to His word will not be disappointed.

III. Similitude

A similitude is a drawn-out or extended simile. Often, a similitude contains several similes. A similitude does not consist of metaphors (to be defined below).

Example: *Building upon the Word of God, likened to building upon a solid foundation*

Matthew 7:24-27 *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. "And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."*

The point is that building one's life on the words of Jesus is wise. Building on anything else is foolish.

IV. Metaphor

A metaphor is a similitude reduced to a single word.

Example: *Jesus' term for Herod*

Luke 13:31-32 *Just at that time some Pharisees came up, saying to Him, "Go away and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.'*

That fox is a metaphor. Note that Jesus didn't say that Herod is like a fox, that would be a simile.

V. Metonymy

A metonymy is the employment of one name for another.

Example: *The use of a parent's name for children or descendants*

Genesis 9:25-27 *So he said, "Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant."*

It is clear that the curse is spoken in reference to the descendants of these men. Enlarging Japheth did not mean that he was going to grow in bulk, but that his descendants would be numerous.

Example: *Frequently, God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are mentioned, whereas the result of their efforts in redemption is the topic.*

For example, when Paul wrote, *But you did not learn Christ in this way* (Ephesians 4:20), he was referring to the teaching of Christ regarding conduct. This is called the *Metonymy of Cause*.

Example: *A metonymy occurs when the names of authors are used for works that they have produced.*

Luke 24:27 *And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

Example: *A metonymy occurs when the names of instruments are used for their effects.*

Matthew 18:16 *"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.*

The mouth (the instrument) is used for the testimony spoken by the mouth.

Example: *Metonymy of effect occurs when the effect is put for the cause.*

Deuteronomy 30:15 *"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;*

Life and prosperity, and death and adversity" are the result, "the effect," of serving God or refusing service. God presented to them a call to faithfulness. If they obeyed that call, life and prosperity would result. If they did not obey that call, death and adversity would be the result.

Example: *A metonymy occurs when the container is used for the contained.*

Genesis 6:11 *Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.*

Here, of course, it is not the physical earth that was corrupt, but the people that inhabited it.

There are many other types of metonymies, but these serve to illustrate the figure.

VI. Synecdoche

A synecdoche refers to a figure of speech whereby we speak of the whole by referring to a part, or refer to a part to refer to the whole.

Example: The Roman Empire and the whole world.

Romans 1:8 *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.*

This is an example of the whole for a part. Certainly, this could not have embraced more than the Roman world.

A synecdoche was displayed in the verses concerning salvation noted earlier. All of the conditions, believing, repenting, calling upon the name of the Lord, baptism, are indicated by the use of one, usually the first one, faith. It is common to have one of these mentioned without any statement as to the presence of the other.

A synecdoche occurs when some expression of time in general is used to refer to a part of time.

Example: This frequently occurs with the term, forever. This is an oriental form of expression that is found frequently in Scripture.

Numbers 25:13 *and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel.*

Phinehas was promised an everlasting priesthood, yet it ended centuries ago. Some, not understanding figures of speech, have been staggered by statements like this in Scripture. Some have concluded that God didn't say it, and others have concluded that *forever* is of limited duration. Not understanding the significance of a *time-synecdoche* has caused some to deny everlasting hell, etc.

To declare that everlasting cannot mean unending, in every instance, will not do because it limits the years of God himself. He is the same and His years will not fail, from everlasting to everlasting He is God. The truth is that in a *time-synecdoche*, "forever" exhausts the period to which it belongs. If one says to a king, "Oh King, live forever," it means that the king is being wished a long life, yet the lifetime of a man.

If we can know that the term, *forever*, relates to a period of time, we can know that it will exhaust the period. If we know that the entity to which it refers reaches beyond the precincts of time, then the term must have all of the meaning that we can attach to it.

Other common synecdoches are using the plural for the singular, the singular for the plural, the definite for an indefinite, a general name for a particular name, a special name or word for a general one.

VII. Irony

In irony, one says one thing while meaning something else. It is a form of ridicule, which exposes the faults of others while seeming to adopt, approve, or defend them.

Irony can be detected

1. by a statement made by the author; he sometimes states that he said certain things in mockery, rather than in sincerity;
2. it is apparent from the tone or accent, or manner of the speaker;
3. it will be recognized by the character of the address;
4. the extravagance of praise, when we know both the subject and the author, or the circumstances;
5. Sometimes there is nothing in the form of the words to denote ironical speech. Thus, a printed quote of something spoken orally may not have any clues to the irony.

Example: *Elijah's statements about Baal*

1 Kings 18:27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."

VIII. Sarcasm

Sarcasm is so related to irony that the two frequently are confused. However, sarcasm differs from irony in its severity and evident spitefulness. It is only used for reproof and condemnation, when one is so angry that bitterness cannot be kept secret.

Example: *The sarcastic words of Jesus' tempters*

Matthew 27:29 And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

IX. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an exaggeration to make a point. It is understood to be an exaggeration and so is not deception. For example, if I say, "Oh, everyone was there." That is an exaggeration. Everyone knows it. I am not lying. I am saying that everyone important to the speaker and hearer was present. Scripture is filled with hyperbole. This was a very common form of dramatic impact. Here are some familiar scriptural hyperboles:

John 21:25 *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they *were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself *would not contain the books which *were written.*

Psalm 6:6 *I am weary with my sighing; Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears. 7 My eye has wasted away with grief; It has become old because of all my adversaries.*

1 Samuel 13:5 *Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.*

X. Apostrophe

This occurs when the speaker turns from his auditor and addresses an imaginary listener. Sometimes this is done with inanimate objects, but not always.

Example: Jeremiah's addressing the sword of Jehovah

Jeremiah 47:6-7 *"Ah, sword of the LORD, How long will you not be quiet? Withdraw into your sheath; Be at rest and stay still. "How can it be quiet, When the LORD has given it an order? Against Ashkelon and against the seacoast-- There He has assigned it."*

One of the most interesting apostrophes in the Bible is Isaiah 14:9-20, in which the prophet is addressing the king of Babylon, then begins talking to a man who has not yet been born and whose end was 200 years in the future.

XI. Personification

This is a figure of speech in which inanimate objects are spoken of as if animated or when animated non-human beings are given human characteristics.

Matthew 6:34 *"Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Of course, "tomorrow," the day, will not take care of anything. We who are in tomorrow will take care of things.

There are other less important figures of speech, but these are the most common in Scripture.

PSALMS: POETIC PRAYERS

Psalms is a collection of inspired Hebrew prayers and hymns. The problem that most people have with interpreting the psalms is the result of failing to understand their nature. Much of the material in the Psalms is not God's word to us, but words spoken by men to God or about God. Yet, these are God's word. They have intentional purpose for us.

Psalms are not propositions, or instructional narratives, they are prayers and hymns. Yet, they are profitable to us when used the way that God intended for them to be used: (1) to express ourselves to God; (2) to consider His ways.

The Psalms are of great benefit to the believer expressing joys and sorrows, successes and failures, hopes and regrets. Even so, the Psalms often are falsely applied because they are misunderstood. For example, the 23rd Psalm is easy for us to understand, but what about Psalm 137:8-9, which expresses the desire that Babylonian infants be dashed against the rocks? In order to understand the Psalms, we must understand their *nature*, their *types*, their *forms*, and their *function*.

The most important thing to remember about the Psalms is that they are poetry. The mind is reached through the emotions. Therefore, we must not over-exegete the Psalms by finding some meaning in every phrase where the poet may have intended none.

Hebrew poetry has rhythm of thought, rather than the rhythm of rhyme. This is expressed through parallelism. The most common form is *synonymous parallelism*, in which second line repeats or enforces the first line. This is the same pattern that is used in classic *blues*.

*Yeah, when you talk to me, baby,
if it's just by the telephone
Won't you please talk to me, baby,
if it's just by the telephone*

*Just let me tell you how I miss you, baby
And how it feels to be alone*

*So, fellah, if you've got a good woman,
Man, you better take my advice
Say, fellah, if you've got a good woman,
You better take my advice*

*You better treat her like an angel
And keep her home at any price-
(B.B. King, *Blue Shadows*, London, 1971)*

The same type of parallelism is one of the most common traits of Hebrew poetry. Consider Psalm 19:1-2

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.*

Here in two sets of synonymous parallelisms the inspired poet glorifies God as Creator. In prose, the poet could have said, "God is revealed in His creation, especially in the heavenly bodies". However, plain prose is colorless compared to the magnificent poetry of the psalm. Note that the four lines are not trying to say four different things, the four lines speak of a glorious reality.

A second thing that must be remembered is that the Psalms are not just poetry, they are musical poetry. A musical poem cannot be read the same way that an epistle or a narrative is read. It is intended to evoke feelings, rather than propositional thinking. It is intended to stimulate a response beyond cognitive understanding of the facts.

A third thing to remember is that the vocabulary of the Psalms is purposefully metaphorical. Mountains skip like rams, is a wonderful way to sing about the miracles of the Exodus. Enemies spew out swords from their lips is a very dramatic way to express what many have experienced. When reading the Psalms, it is important to listen to the metaphor and understand what they signify, but not press them too far nor take them literally. For example, in Psalm 23, we must not assume that God wants us to act like sheep.

There are several types of Psalms:

Imprecatory Psalms are those in which bitterness or anger is expressed. They provide a vehicle for being honest with God about how we feel in these moments. Whether our feelings are right or wrong, Psalms provide a vehicle for catharsis. By addressing our feelings to God, and allowing Him to minister to them, we might "be angry, but sin not" (Ephesians 4:25-26).

Laments constitute the largest group in the Psalter. They help us to express struggles, suffering, or disappointment. Some are corporate laments and some are personal

Thanksgiving Psalms express joy to the Lord, when something has gone well. They always are in response to circumstances.

Hymns of Praise without reference to any circumstances, past or present, center on the praise of God for who He is.

Salvation History Psalms review God's saving work among the people of Israel

Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation serve several purposes. One purpose is the renewal of covenants. One group of Psalms praises God for His choice of the David lineage, which provide the background for the Messianic heritage. There are royal psalms, which deal with the kingship. There are enthronement psalms, which were used when the king was enthroned. There are songs of Zion. Jerusalem as God's choice receives special celebration in these psalms.

Wisdom Psalms praise the merits of wisdom and a wise life. Interestingly, Proverbs 8 is a wisdom psalm.

Songs of Trust center their attention on the fact that God can be trusted.

There are three ways that Psalms can be used, appropriately by Christians:

1. As a guide to worship
2. An example in how to be honest to God about our feelings
3. The importance of reflection and meditation upon things that God has done for us

THE LAW

The Old Testament contains over 600 commandments which the Israelites were expected to keep as evidence of their loyalty to God. Only four of the 39 books of the Old Testament contain these laws:

- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Although Genesis does not contain any of the Law, it still is considered to be a part of the Israelite legal system. Thus, there are five books that are called, *books of the law*. The four that do contain the commandments also contain a lot of other material, mostly, narrative. These five books, known as the Pentateuch, also are sometimes referenced as if they were a single book, the Book of the Law (Joshua 1:8).

The New Testament occasionally refers to the entire Old Testament as *the Law* (Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 16:17; Titus 3:9). However, when the Bible uses the term, *the Law*, it usually is referring to the material contained in Exodus 20 (the giving of the Ten Commandments) through Deuteronomy 33.

For the most part, the law section of the Old Testament is easy to understand. For example, even though we don't know what the Urim and Thummin looked like (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21, etc.), nor how inquiry was made of them, their purpose is clear. The hermeneutical problem for us is discerning the present day relevance of this section.

As we have noted, the Law is God's covenant with Israel. It is not a covenant with Christians. Some of the stipulations in the law were renewed in the New Covenant (all of the Ten Commandments except Sabbath keeping). Most were not renewed. Even so, the Old Testament Law is God's Word *for* us; it is not God's Word *to* us. By this, we mean that it contains all sorts of things that God wants us to know, but the laws are not binding upon us today.

Many elements in the Old Testament Law are found in the laws of other societies. Some of these predate Moses. Two well-known examples are the *Code of Hammurabi* (1726 BC) and the *Laws of Eshnunna* (1800 BC). This does not mean that Moses copied from these earlier well-known laws. It means that God had established certain things in the hearts of men and the history of nations. When these elements were made a part of the Mosaic Law, they became a part of the covenant between God and Israel.

Even though there are similar elements found in all of these codes, the tenor of the earlier codes and the one given to Moses are quite different. God gave Moses a code that expressed mercy and respect for every living human. The earlier codes lacked this. For example, consider the following passage from Deuteronomy 15:12-17:

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. And it shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. And also you shall do likewise to your maidservant.

Compare this with the *Laws of Eshnunna*

*If a free man has no claim against another free man, but seizes the other free man's slave girl, detains the one seized in his house and causes her death, he must give two slave girls to the owner of the slave girl as compensation. If he has no claim against him but seizes the wife or child of an upper class person and causes their death, it is a capital crime. The one who did the seizing must die. (Eshnunna, laws 23,24 cf. J.B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition; Princeton: University Press 1969, p 162)*

and the *Law Code of Hammurabi*:

*If a free nobleman hit another free nobleman's daughter and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus. If that woman died, they must put his daughter to death. If by a violent blow he caused a commoner's daughter to have a miscarriage, he must pay five shekels of silver. If that woman died, he must pay 1/2 mina of silver. If he hit a free nobleman's female slave and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay two shekels of silver. If that female slave died, he must pay 1/3 mina of silver (Hammurabi, laws 209-14, cf. J.B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition; Princeton: University Press 1969, p 175)*

Notice the class distinctions built into the two secular codes, as contrasted with that of Moses. In the secular codes, slaves and women are treated as property. The Law of Moses regards every living person as a human being. Note the egalitarian attitude in the Law of Moses statements on murder.

You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13). Anyone who strikes someone and kills him shall surely be put to death (Exodus 21:12).

Also, the status of slaves in the Mosaic Law was very different from that in the secular codes quoted above:

And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth. (Exodus 21:27)

You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him. (Deuteronomy 23:15)

Furthermore, in contrast to the *Code of Hammurabi*, the Old Testament Law did not allow a child to be killed for the crimes of the father. The Mosaic Law states,

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deuteronomy 24:16)

The *Code of Hammurabi*, quoted above, has a different standard.

If a free nobleman hit another free nobleman's daughter and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus. If that woman died, they must put his daughter to death.

The Old Testament law was given as a blessing to Israel. It is an example of God's mercy to His people. The food laws, for example, protected Israel from many diseases that would tend to carry disease in that climate. Interestingly, the food laws also forbade foods that were uneconomical to raise in that setting, and were foods that were associated with idol worship. For example, *Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk* (Deuteronomy 14:21) was a protection against the Canaanite fertility cult practices. The Canaanites believed in "sympathetic magic." They thought that boiling a kid in its mother's milk would guarantee fertility in the flock. The same was true about mixing seeds and mixing different kinds of material in weaving garments.

Most of the laws were given with a promise of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience. The regular tithe and other special tithes guaranteed that there would be money to help the poor. The tithe was God's money and stealing it guaranteed a curse.

Douglas Stuart lists some dos and don'ts, related to Old Testament laws:¹⁵

1. **Do see** the Old Testament law as God's fully inspired Word *for* you.
Don't see the Old Testament law as God's direct command *to* you
2. **Do see** the Old Testament law as the basis for the Old Covenant, and therefore Israel's history.
Don't see the Old Testament law as binding on Christians in the New Covenant except where specifically renewed in the New Covenant.
3. **Do see** God's justice, love, and high standards revealed in the Old Testament law.
Don't forget to see that God's mercy is made equal to the severity of the standards.

¹⁵ Fee and Stuart, p. 163-164

4. **Don't see** the Old Testament law as complete. It is not technically comprehensive.
Do see the Old Testament law as a paradigm - providing examples for the full range of expected behavior.
5. **Don't expect** the Old Testament law to be cited frequently by the prophets or the New Testament.
Do remember that the *essence* of the Law is repeated by the prophets and renewed in the New Testament.
6. **Do see** the Old Testament law as a generous gift to Israel, bringing much blessing when obeyed.
Don't see the Old Testament law as a grouping of arbitrary, annoying regulations limiting people's freedom.

PROPHETS

There are more books of the Bible that come under the general heading of prophecy than any other heading. In the Old Testament there are seventeen, Isaiah through Malachi, written between 760 and 460 BC (approximate). The first five are called "major prophets" and the last twelve are "minor prophets." These names apply to length of the books, not to their relative importance.

It is absolutely essential that the exegete become acquainted with the historical and cultural setting in which the prophets prophesied. Again, this will require outside reading. The reason that this is essential is because of the nature of prophecy. In contemporary English, "to prophesy," means to predict. This is not the primary meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words that we translate, "prophet," and "prophecy." The Hebrew word that we translate, "prophet," is *nabhi* (נָבִי). The term is derived from the Semitic word, *nabhu*, which means, "to call." The prophets responded to a divine call. Almost every prophetic book and the narrative account of non-writing prophets, record the prophet's call to ministry. If someone decided to be a prophet, without first being called of God, he was a false prophet (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:21). Prophets were God's spokesmen. Note that the most common form of their message is first person, since God spoke through them, i.e., *I (God) declare...* Often the prophets punctuated their prophecy with, *Thus says the Lord*. Peter wrote,

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (II Peter 1:20-21)

Peter thus declares that the prophets were not good news analysts, who saw what was happening and accurately interpreted the events. They were men and women who spoke what God gave them to say.

The Greek term from which we get the English word, "prophet", is *prophetes* (προφήτης). The verb origin of the word is *profemi* (προφημι), which has as its basic meaning, "to speak forth, to speak out." Thus, neither the Hebrew term, *nabhi*, nor the Greek term, *prophetes*, have "foretelling" as an essential element in their definition.

- The role of the prophet was to openly declare the word of God to those to whom God sent them.
- In the Old Testament, their function was to be enforcers of the covenant by speaking forth God's word concerning the covenant.

This understanding of their role is essential to the interpretation of their writings. They spoke and wrote to a distinct people and to an existing situation. When their prophecy did include prediction, it was in the context of their mission of proclamation. Sometimes, the word that they were given to proclaim was not one that they wanted to proclaim. Jeremiah is the prime example of this. He had the task of declaring to the people of Judah that they should submit to their enemy, Babylon, if they wished to be pleasing to God. Because of this, he was declared to be unpatriotic, and was mistreated in terrible fashion (Jeremiah 12:21-23; 20:1-11).

Sometimes, the prophets are portrayed as radical social reformers. This is an incorrect characterization. The messages that God gave them were the same message that God had given in the covenant. They called the people back to faithfulness to the covenant. They did, however, address serious social issues. Amos, for example, brought a message of doom to Israel because the nation had substituted a man-made worship center and liturgy in place of the Temple and liturgy which Jehovah had sanctioned and commanded. The nation was trusting in religious ceremonies to make them righteous, rather than living righteous lives. The nation was led by officials who took bribes, and oppressed the poor, while the officials themselves lived in opulent luxury. The average citizen pursued prosperity as his goal, rather than righteousness. They lived in violation of the terms of the covenant. The social evils thus produced are addressed by Amos. The various predictions, including a coming locust plague, are a part of Amos' addressing these conditions in Israel. Amos cannot be understood without some knowledge of what was going on at that time.

Even the Messianic prophecies are not new to the prophets. In the Law, God had promised, in a nascent way, the coming of Christ, *I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him* (Deuteronomy 18:18). The Jews understood this prophecy has having Messianic implications (John 1:21,25; 6:14; 4:25; Luke 24:44). So, when the prophets delivered Messianic prophecy, they were not injecting anything new.

In a longer book, such as Isaiah, there are a number of situations into which God spoke. Again, outside sources will inform us of what was happening at the time that each prophecy was spoken. In each instance, the Jews faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the covenant is the fulcrum on which the story turns.

In addition to the written prophets, there are Old Testament prophets that did not write a book. Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and others were prominent prophets who were *oral prophets* but not *literary prophets*.

Some prophets spoke at a variety of places and in different situations. The literary prophets often record oracles spoken at different times without an obvious division marker in the text. This requires the exegete to ask, "Was this statement a part of what goes before or what follows?" Sometimes, it is a daunting task to sort out these things. Some prophetic books date their oracles (Haggai and the early chapters of Zechariah).

Since the isolation of individual oracles is important to our understanding the prophets, it is important to know some of the different forms that the prophets used when composing their oracles.

1. *The Lawsuit*. An example is Isaiah 3:13-26. The full lawsuit form contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict. Sometimes these are implied instead of implicit.
2. *The Woe*. "Woe" was the word that Israelites used at funerals or when facing disaster. God used this device when speaking through the prophets. No one could miss the gravity of a word from God that began with, *woe*.

3. *The Promise*. This form is recognizable when these elements are present:

- reference to the future
 - mention of radical change
 - mention of blessing.
- (Amos 9:11-15 is an example)

Another characteristic of the prophets is their use of poetry and poetic prose. This form helps the hearer to remember what he heard.

The prophet as a foreteller

Prophets were used of God to predict the future. Most of the time this was to predict calamity and blessing. Also, many, perhaps most, of the events foretold by the prophets are now in the past. The division of the Kingdom, the destruction of the Temple, the various captivities, and the return from captivity, are the events most frequently foretold by the prophets. We can look back and see that they did indeed occur. There are, of course, predictions of the Church and the New Covenant age (Ezekiel 37:15-28), but strange results often are produced by too much zeal for identifying New Testament events and current events in prophetic oracles.

If we handle the Scripture responsibly, it usually is apparent when a prophecy is something still in the future. Usually, the prophecies concerning things in the future are quite figurative. We should get the point of the overall truth, rather than trying to sort out details of exactly what will happen.

One of the problems faced in interpreting the prophets is the prophetic view. This might be illustrated by picturing ourselves 25 miles from the first mountains in a mountain range. As we look at the range, all of the peaks look close *together*. However, when we get to the first one, we realize that the next one may be 50 miles away. This is how many of the prophecies in the Old Testament are given. Thus, the first and second coming of Christ are presented in a way that they appear as one. Joel's prophecy as quoted by Peter on Pentecost is an example:

'and it shall be in the last days,' god says, 'that I will pour forth of my spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. 'and I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 'the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. 'and it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' (Acts 2:17-21)

Note that Joel saw the "last days" events as one unit, with the events that began the era and the events that closed the era as being simultaneous. However, the pouring forth of the Spirit and its result, are separated from the end of the last days events (*wonders in the sky above etc.*) by millennia.

Another example: Jesus launched His ministry in Nazareth by going to the synagogue and reading Isaiah 61:1-2. Notice that He did not read the entire prophecy. He stopped in the middle of verse 2:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn... (Isaiah 61:1-2)

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD." He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:17-21)

(Note that Luke 4:18-19 is not a word for word quote of Isaiah 61:1-2. The Isaiah passage, quoted above, is a translation from the Hebrew text. Luke, however, in writing his gospel account, would have quoted the Septuagint, which was the common version in use in his day, especially among Greek speaking people. The Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament, was a free reproduction of the Hebrew and this quote in Luke is a free reproduction of the Septuagint. Some scholars consider the possibility that the version read by Jesus may have been an Aramaen version. It seems that Luke also imported one phrase from Isaiah 58:6, *To set free those who are downtrodden*, his purpose being to describe in all respects the work of Jesus. In any event, the quotation in Luke is equivalent to a Living Bible paraphrase of the Isaiah passage.)

Jesus stopped reading in the middle of verse 2 (*to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord*) because only this part of the prophecy was "fulfilled in your hearing." The last part of verse 2 (*And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn*) would occur at the end of the age. From Isaiah's point of view, however, the whole prophetic vision appeared as one.

A major thing that the prophets can do for us is to sensitize us to the fact that God is God. He keeps His word and expects us to keep faith with Him. God is interested in enforcing His covenant. For us who are under the New Covenant, that involves loving God and loving one's neighbor.

WISDOM LITERATURE

Three Old Testament books are commonly known as "wisdom literature": Ecclesiastes, Job, and Proverbs. Some of the Psalms also would fall under this category. Some would class the Song of Solomon in this realm.

The biblical definition of wisdom is, "the ability to make godly choices in life." The key to this definition is, "godly choices." In the ancient secular world, wisdom literature was very common. The difference between the secular wisdom and biblical wisdom is the focus.

- Non-Israelite wisdom literature had as its goal the making of the best choices that would enable one to achieve the best life.
- Biblical wisdom literature takes the point of view that the only good choices are godly choices. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" is a basic theme of Proverbs.

When one makes a concrete decision to present his life to God, then the general direction will be correct, while one learns specific rules and perspectives. James makes a contrast between the godly wisdom and the worldly wisdom, whereby one seeks to get ahead of others:

Who among you is wise and understanding? let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. but if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. this wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. for where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. but the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)

In ancient Israel, there were wise men who were teachers and counselors. In time, they came to occupy a place in Israel that was similar to that of priest and prophet (Jeremiah 18:18). This special class of wise men was a part of the royal retinue.

Poetry, once again, is seen as a vehicle. This is because it is easy to remember. "A stitch in time, saves nine," is much easier to remember than, "anticipating a problem and dealing with it before it occurs will save time later on."

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is "cynical wisdom." Most of the book, in the words of the "teacher," say that life is meaningless; therefore one should enjoy it while he can. Until the very last verses, the message is that life is meaningless and that the finality of death means that life has no value. This is the very same message proclaimed by some modern philosophers (i.e., enjoy life while you can, because this life is all that God has provided for you). Even the good advice in Ecclesiastes (5:2-3; 5:11-15; 12:1-8) is given to help make one's meaningless life more pleasant and comfortable. Notice how the theme of meaninglessness flows through the book:

1:2 *Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

1:14 *I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.*

2:15 *Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."*

3:19 *For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.*

5:16 *And this also is a grievous evil-- exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?*

8:14 *There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.*

9:9-10 *Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.*

11:8 *Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.*

This is a very common form of ancient wisdom literature. It exists as a foil for the balance of Scripture. When one relegates God to a position distant from us, Ecclesiastes is the result. The book thus drives us to look for further answers because the view of the "teacher" is so discouraging. The concluding verses point us away from the mood of Ecclesiastes to the rest of Scripture, especially, the Pentateuch.

12:13-14 *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*

Job

Job also contains a lot of advice as a foil for God's truth. It contains all sorts of bad advice and wrong conclusions as Job's "comforters" give advice. Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz, and Elihu seem to like to hear themselves talk. The book is in the form of a highly structured dialogue. The goal of the book is to establish in the mind of the reader that what happens is not always because God desires it, nor because it is fair. The message of Job, from God's perspective, is, "Trust Me, don't try to understand Me."

Job's comforters take the opposite view of Ecclesiastes. Instead of viewing God as a distant, uninvolved deity, Job's comforters insist that God is intimately involved and is imposing all of Job's troubles on him. They insist that God is doing this because Job is a sinner and is hiding his sin. Job, a godly man, knew that he had done nothing to deserve the wrath of God. He declared his innocence and expressed bewilderment at the horrors that he is suffering. His comforters declared him to be guilty of blasphemy because of his declaration of innocence. "God is doing this because He sees your sin and God can't be wrong," was their attitude.

Finally, after the final comforter, Elihu, spoke, God Himself spoke. He vindicated Job. God agreed that life is not fair; His allowing of suffering does not mean that He does not know what He is doing; His right to do what He does should not be questioned.

Proverbs

Proverbs is a book of "prudential wisdom." That is, it has principles that people can use to help themselves make responsible choices in life. It is a book of practical wisdom. Proverbs contrasts a life of wisdom with a life of folly.

In order to understand Proverbs, we must understand the nature of proverbial literature. In Hebrew, the proverbs are called, *meshallim*, which means, "figures of speech," or "contrived sayings." A proverb is a brief, particular expression of truth. The greater the brevity, the less likely is it to be universally applicable.

As was said above about poetry, the same is true of proverbs. Short catchy sayings are easier to remember. They are learnable guidelines for the shaping of selected behavior. Thus, a proverb should not be taken too literally or too universally if its message is to be helpful. For example, consider Proverbs 16:3:

Commit your works to the LORD, And your plans will be established.

Not realizing that proverbs tend to be inexact statements pointing to a general truth, someone might take this to be a promise from God, always applicable. If someone dedicates his plans to God, they always must succeed. This, of course, is not true. Someone could dedicate a perfectly selfish act or idiotic scheme to God. A hasty marriage, a rash business decision, could be dedicated to God and result in misery. "God didn't keep His word," might be the response.

A proverb is not a categorical, always applicable, ironclad promise, but a general truth. It is more advice than promise. A proverb is:

- a general truth, which, in most circumstances, all things being equal, tends to be correct.
- a proverb is not a precept.

A precept is an authoritative pronouncement from God. A proverb, on the other hand, is a wise saying that has come from the experience of living. A precept is from God's perspective. A proverb is from man's perspective. "I have lived long upon the earth and I have seen," is the basis of proverbs. The difference between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs is the perspective of the

seer. Proverbs sees life through the eyes of faith. Ecclesiastes sees life through the eyes of one who has no perspective beyond that which happens between the cradle and the grave. Both are inspired by the Holy Spirit to be used according to their design.

Even though proverbs are not a contract with heaven, they are good advice. The Holy Spirit oversaw the collection of Proverbs. A wise person is aware of the proverbs and follows their advice in making life-style decisions.

Here is a list of considerations for interpreting proverbs.

1. Proverbs often are like parables, pointing beyond themselves to a single truth
2. Proverbs are practical, rather than theological
3. Proverbs are stated in a way that makes them easy to remember, rather than being technically precise
4. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior, but just the opposite
5. Proverbs reflect a culture different from ours and may need a "translation" (i.e. *dwelling in the corner of a roof*) in order to make sense to us
6. Proverbs are not guarantees from God, but poetic guidelines for good behavior
7. Proverbs may use specific language, exaggeration, or any other literary form to make their point
8. Proverbs give good advice for certain aspects of life, but are not exhaustive in their coverage
9. Wrongly used, proverbs might justify crass, materialistic lifestyle. Rightly used, they provide practical advice for daily living.

Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon (also called, Song of Songs) is a lengthy love song. It is an extended ballad about human romance, written in the style of an ancient Near-Eastern lyric poem. Why did God put eight chapters of love poetry in the Bible? Whom to love and how to love are the two issues with which the song is concerned and the ability to make godly choices with regard to these two crucial decisions is vitally important to every believer.

Sex is a part of humanity. God created it and called it "good." Unfortunately, any good can be corrupted by ungodly choices. Any human desire can be employed in wrong ways. This especially is true with love and sex. Can a person choose to follow romance wherever it leads, regardless of the consequences? Absolutely. Can a person engage in sex in ways that dishonor God? Certainly. Can romance be manipulative and harmful? By all means. On the other hand, romance and sex can be employed for God's glory in accordance with His original design if the right choices are made.

The Song has a long history of misinterpretation, based on two hermeneutical mistakes:

- totality transfer
- allegorizing.

Totality transfer refers to the view that a word or concept has the same meaning every time it is used. For example, the statement, "God so loved the world," could totality transfer into a romantic statement (God is in love with the world), as if the word, "love," refers to romance every time it is used. The folly of totality transfer is seen in the following statements:

- I love peanut butter
- I love to sing
- I love to sleep
- I love my wife

In the case of the Song of Solomon, the totality transfer was made from other biblical love songs. When people looked for something in the Bible that was similar to the language of the Song, the closest thing that could be found were some of the prophetic figurative analogies. In these figurative passages, God's love for Israel is cast in the form of a love song in Isaiah 5:1-7 and Hosea 2:2-15, and in longer prose form in Ezekiel 16 and 23. The key element is that in the prophetic figures, the text makes clear that God is addressing His people through a figure. No such indicator is present in the Song of Solomon.

In the age when allegorizing was the rage (see Section Two), Origen and others came to the conclusion that the Song of Songs could be nothing other than an allegory of God's love for the Church. The underlying basis for this was totality transfer. This interpretation caught on and prevailed until recent years. Even on the surface, it is clear that this is not what the Song is about. As stated above, it does not contain the "keys" that are present in the allegorical love songs. It does not contain the clues relating to Israel's history, nor is it laden with the national symbolism. Instead, it concentrates on love between two individuals. Nothing in the prophets reads like,

*How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves behind your veil;
Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Mount Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes
Which have come up from their washing,
All of which bear twins,
And not one among them has lost her young.
Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
And your mouth is lovely.
Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate Behind your veil.
Your neck is like the tower of David Built with rows of stones,
On which are hung a thousand shields,
All the round shields of the mighty men.
(Song of Solomon 4:1-4)*

This is the language of a man's adoration for his loved one. He compares her appearance to all sorts of beautiful images in life. He is not speaking of things that are similar in appearance in every case, but things that are similarly impressive, visually.

Nothing in the prophetic allegories compares to the account of a dream the woman had about how she was asleep and could not get out of bed and move fast enough to keep from missing the man she loved, when he called for her.

*I was asleep, but my heart was awake.
A voice! My beloved was knocking:
'Open to me, my sister, my darling,
My dove, my perfect one!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of the night.'
I have taken off my dress,
How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet,
How can I dirty them again?
My beloved extended his hand through the opening,
And my feelings were aroused for him.
I arose to open to my beloved;
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the bolt.
I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and had gone!
My heart went out to him as he spoke.
I searched for him, but I did not find him;
I called him, but he did not answer me.
(Song 5:2-6)*

There just isn't anything like this in the prophetic figures.

The Song presents an overall ethical context. Monogamous, heterosexual marriage was the proper context for sexual activity, according to God's revelation in the Old Testament. God-fearing Israelites would regard the Song in this light. The attitude of the Song itself is the very antithesis of unfaithfulness, either before or after marriage. Marriage consummates and continues love between man and woman. That is what the Song points toward. Our culture emphasizes sex techniques, whereas the Song emphasizes virtuous romance. Our culture urges people to fulfill themselves, whatever their sexual tastes; the Song is concerned about how one responds faithfully to the attractiveness of his mate and how to fulfill the needs of another. In the Song, romance is something that should continue throughout and even characterize marriage.

REVELATION: APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, as the book labels itself, is the best-known example of the genre known as *apocalyptic literature*. Apocalyptic literature usually was produced in times of persecution and oppression, as a means of encouraging those who were suffering for their faith.

Apocalyptic literature is characterized by:

- an intense despair of present circumstances and an equally intense hope of divine intervention in the future;
- by the use of symbolic language, dreams, and visions;
- by the introduction of celestial and demonic powers as messengers and agents in the progress of God's purpose;
- by the prediction of catastrophic judgment of the wicked and of a supernatural deliverance for the righteous;
- frequently, by the pseudonymous ascription of the writing to a prominent character of the past, such as Ezra (*II Esdras*) or Enoch (*The Book of Enoch*).

Apocalyptic literature expresses the view that the world is past saving and that there must be an escape from it or some drastic divine intervention to completely change it. The book of Revelation possesses all of these characteristics except the name of the author. In Revelation the author gives his name and assumes that he is known, rather than some past celebrity.

There are four schools of interpretation that dominate the study of Revelation:

1. *The Preterist View*. The Preterist asserts that Revelation was written to the First Century Church. Its message is confined, for the most part, to that generation. The Preterist points out that the name of Nero is found coded in the book. To those who hold this view, the book is about the war between the Roman Empire and the Church. The language is viewed as highly figurative:
 - The Seven Seals refer to the awful horrors that are about to fall on the empire and the Church's safety through it all.
 - The Seven Trumpets are further judgments on the empire and the continued safety of the Church.
 - The Beast is the Roman Empire.
 - The False Prophet is the priesthood organized to enforce Emperor Worship;
 - Babylon is the City of Rome.
2. *The Futurist View*. This view holds that the outline for the book is found in 1:19,

Write therefore the

- *things which you have seen,*
- *and the things which are,*
- *and the things which shall take place after these things.*

Using this outline,

- The things which John has seen, are those things that he is seeing at the time that Jesus is speaking to him.
- The things which are, refer to the era of Church History, which is described in the seven letters to the seven churches (Chapters 2-3), each of these churches represents seven ages of Church History. The Church, according to this view, is raptured at the beginning of Chapter Four.
- The rest of the book, through Chapter 20, deals with a seven-year period immediately preceding the Lord's Second Coming.

The understanding of the significance of the figures during this seven year period are:

- The Seven Seals contain an outline of the seven-year period. In this period, the Antichrist will reign. There will be evangelistic activity in which many Jews will be saved.
 - The Seven Trumpets are the awful tortures to which the earth is subjected during the period. The descriptions are literal
 - The Beast is the Antichrist, an international dictator, at the head of a ten-kingdom empire. Babylon is the seat of the Antichrist. It will be a literal World-city.
 - The Seven Bowls are the catastrophes that will befall the earth during the reign of the Antichrist.
 - The Millennium will be a real thousand years in which Christ, with his saints, will reign upon the earth.
3. *The Spiritualist View.* This view states that the book does not refer to any historical events. Instead, it is a pictorial representation of certain religious truths to be realized in the experience of the Church. Some of these would be
- Great principles in constant conflict
 - The moral forces that are working out the destiny of the world
 - An assurance of the unfailing justice of God
 - The conflict that ranges between good and evil, described in terms of the First Century. This is capable of infinite application
 - The ultimate supremacy of good over evil
4. *The Historical View.* This view considers Revelation to be a sublime panorama of Christ's march through history. Terms, such as, "The Vision of the Ages," "Pre-written History," "A Traveling Manual for the Church," etc. are used to describe the book. There is much variety of opinion as to what events and epochs are foreshadowed by the book. One point of disagreement among those who hold this view is whether the visions are parallel or in chronological succession. In general, those who hold this view are more confident in speaking of events of the past and their place in Revelation, than they are about speaking of events in the future.

Here is one of the most commonly held Historical interpretations, as displayed in Milligan's, *The Vision of the Ages*:

- 1st seal: Era of prosperity within the Roman Empire 100-200 AD
- 2nd to 4th seals: Disaster in the Roman Empire 200-300 AD
- 5th seal: Era of persecution 100-300 AD
- 6th seal: Revolution; Christianization of the Empire 313-400 AD
- 1st to 4th Trumpets: Fall of the Roman Empire 400-476 AD
- 5th Trumpet: Rise of Mohammedanism 637-786 AD
- 6th Trumpet: Rise of Turkish Power 1057-1453 AD
- Little Book Open: Era of the Open Bible 1500- AD
- Measuring the Temple: Era of Church Reformation 1500- AD
- The Two Witnesses: Church and Bible 1500- AD
- The Beast: World-power vested in the Papacy 600-1800 AD
- False Prophet: Apostate Church in power 600-1800 AD
- Babylon: Papal Rome 600-1800 AD
- 1st to 5th Bowls: Judgments that broke Papal power 1600-1900 AD
- 6th Bowl and After: yet in the future

Most pre-millennialist eschatologies are based on the Futurist View. Most post-millennialist eschatologies fall within the Historical View.

The study of Revelation is not an easy study. Anyone approaching this book must do so with humility. One thing to notice is that this apocalyptic/prophetic book is presented in the form of a letter. 1:4-7 and 22:21 fit the letter template. Also, John speaks to his readers in the first person/second person formula. In its final form the Revelation is a letter from Jesus, through John, to the seven churches of Asia Minor. It also, at least in part, was occasioned by the needs of these seven churches.

The most difficult part of the exegetical task in Revelation is in understanding the images. Here are some helps:

1. The chief source of the images in Revelation is the Old Testament and ancient mythology. These were familiar to John's audience. The images do not necessarily mean what they meant in the sources from which they came. They have been broken and transformed by the Holy Spirit into this new prophecy.
2. Apocalyptic imagery is of several kinds.
 - Some imagery is set, like the donkey and elephant in American politics. It always means the same thing. A beast out of the sea seems always to refer to a world empire, not to an individual ruler.
 - Some imagery is fluid. For example the woman in Chapter 12 is a positive image, but the woman in Chapter 17 is evil. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" turns out to be a Lamb (5:5-6)
 - Some imagery refers to specific things. The seven lampstands in 1:12-20 are identified as the seven churches. The dragon in Chapter 12 is Satan.

3. When John interprets an image, this interpretation must be held to firmly and this is the starting point for further interpretation. There are six of this category:
 - The One like the Son of Man is Christ (1:17-18)
 - The golden lampstands are the seven churches (1:20)
 - The seven stars are the seven angels or messengers of the churches (1:20)
 - The great dragon is Satan (12:9)
 - The seven heads are the seven hills on which the woman sits (as well as seven kings, thus being a fluid image) (17:9)
 - The harlot is the great city, clearly indicating Rome (17:18)
4. The visions should be seen as wholes, rather than allegories in which every detail is pressed for meaning. In this way, the visions are like parables. For example, many exegetes believe that the sun turning black and the stars falling like figs (6:12-14) probably do not "mean" anything. They simply make the vision of the earthquake more impressive.
5. Some visions, such as the locusts with crowns of gold, human faces, and women's long hair (9:7-11) fill out the picture in such a way that the readers instinctively would have identified these as the barbarian hordes at the outer edges of the Roman Empire.
6. All of the visions must be seen within the general message that God is in control of history and the Church.

The main themes of the book are clear:

- the Church and state are on a collision course;
- the state will win at first;
- suffering and death lie ahead for the church;
- it will get worse before it gets better;
- the Church should not surrender in times of suffering.
- God is in charge.
- Christ holds the churches in His hands, even in times of suffering.
- The Church triumphs, even in death.
- God, finally, will pour out wrath on those causing suffering to the Church and bring eternal rest to His people.

Two terms need to be identified:

- *Wrath* refers to judgment to be poured out on those who persecute the Church. The Church will not experience the consequences of this wrath.
- *Tribulation* refers to what the Church is suffering and will suffer throughout history.

My own preference for studying this book is to avoid all of the concerns about what will happen, historically. Instead, I prefer to look into the book for truths that are unmistakable. For example, consider the title that the book claims for itself, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. If one uses this

title as a theme for the book, then surveyed the book to see how Jesus is revealed therein, here is what one discovers:

- Jesus is revealed to us as the glorified being (1:12-17a)
- Jesus is revealed as the one who holds the keys of death and hades (1:17-18)
- Jesus is revealed as the judge of the churches (Chapters 2-3)
- Jesus is revealed as being worthy of the same praise as God the Father (Chapters 4-5)
- Jesus is revealed as the one who releases upon the earth the forces of life and death - the seasons of history - the ebb and flow of nations: (Chapters 6-16)
- Jesus is revealed as the one who is at war with and ultimate victor over Satan (Chapters 17-19)
- The Lamb is revealed as the judge, when the curtain rings down on history (20:11-15)
- After Jesus reveals himself in these figures, he closes the book with a challenge: *behold I come quickly* - three times (22:7; 22:12; 22:20)

This is the sort of study of Revelation that can benefit all believers and not get into disputable eschatology.

ADDENDA A

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANON

Not long after the close of the New Testament age, it is apparent that the writings of the Apostles were being read in the Sunday services, along with the Old Testament. For example, Justin Martyr, writing around 140 A.D., describes the typical Sunday service. He states that the “memoirs of the Apostles,” were read along with the “writings of the prophets,” before the church participated in weekly communion.¹⁶ The memoirs were the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The available evidence would indicate that Paul’s letters were first gathered into a single collection, next were collected the Four Gospels, then the other New Testament documents. When a church received a letter from Paul, it often made a copy that was circulated to surrounding churches. Note that Paul gave the Colossians instructions to send a copy of his Colossian letter to Laodicea and that the Laodiceans would send them a copy of the one that he wrote to Laodicea (Colossians 4:16). Some of Paul’s letters were not written to a particular city, but to the churches of a geographical area (Galatians, for example), so they would have been distributed throughout the region.

Somewhat complete lists of the New Testament Scriptures did not appear until the last half of the Second Century. One of the earliest is “The Muratorian Fragment” (also called, “The Muratorian Canon), so called because it was discovered by L.A. Muratori in 1740. Scholars are universally agreed that this list from the late Second Century. The list is mutilated at the first and possibly at the end, so it is not complete. The list begins with Mark, followed by Luke and John. However, it designates Luke as the third Gospel and John as the Fourth. The mention of Matthew obviously was in the mutilated section, since the list speaks of four Gospels and lists three in the same order as we have them in our Bibles. The Muratorian Fragment explains why certain documents are included and some are not. After the Gospels, follow Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, Jude, two letters of John, and Revelation. The only books of our New Testament not found in the list are Hebrews, James, I & 2 Peter, and possibly 3 John. The way that the list is composed, it is possible that 3 John is included in the two letters of John, already noted. Even with these omissions, the Muratorian Fragment provides a list very close to our New Testament. The fragment does include as Scripture one book that we do not have in our Bibles, The Wisdom of Solomon. It includes The Apocalypse of Peter in its list, but notes that “some of our people” do not accept it as being authentic Scripture. The list also mentions other writings, some of which are acceptable for private reading, but not to be read in the worship service because they are not Scripture. Others are approved for reading, but not while reading Scripture. Some are listed as being popular among Christians, but they are to be outright rejected because of dubious origin.

Two lists composed by Origin (ca 185-254) are extant. Origin is reputed to have composed 6000 scrolls on biblical themes. In one of these he lists all of the books that we have in our New

¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Section 66 and 67; see also James Garrett, *The Meeting*, 1999 Conclave paper, page 27

Testament, but expresses hesitation about some. He quotes from Hebrews several times, but says that some churches do not accept it. He says that Second Peter is possibly from Peter but that some dispute this. He says that John may have composed a second and third epistle, but that not everyone considers them genuine. In another of his works, *Homilies on Joshua*, Origen lists the same twenty-seven books that we have in our New Testament.

The list included in an Easter letter from Athanasius of Alexandria, written in 367 A.D., is identical to the twenty-seven books that we acknowledge today.

It is important for us to remember that these lists, prior to that of Athanasius, were not authoritative lists, setting down a precept for the churches. They were lists that recorded the general consensus of the churches in the area where the author lived.

ADDENDA B

THE EARLIEST EVIDENCE OF A NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Peter's applying the designation, "Scripture," to the Epistles of Paul, presume that Paul's epistles already were distributed, collected to some degree, and given authority in the First Century Church (II Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, at least a canon of Paul's epistles was acknowledged before the death of all of the apostles.

Another piece of evidence is I Timothy 5:18, in which Paul quotes both Deuteronomy 25:4, *You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing*; AND Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7, *for the laborer is worthy of his wages*

Paul called both quotations, the one from Deuteronomy and the one from the Gospels, "Scripture." Paul wrote I Timothy between 64 and 67 AD.. Matthew and Luke both were written around 60 AD. So, between 4 and 7 years after their being written, these Gospel accounts were regarded as Scripture.

We have to conclude that as soon as the document left the pen of an apostle, the Church received it as Scripture.

There are many instances in the writings of the early Church that either quote or mention New Testament Scripture. In some documents, even though Scripture is not cited or overtly quoted, the language is so similar to scriptural language that it is obvious that Scripture is in the mind of the writer. These facts demonstrate that the Ante-Nicene Church considered the apostolic documents to be more than the product of spiritually superior individuals. To define something as "Scripture," is to declare it to be a product of the Mind of God, and thus authoritative in the Church. The following are examples of such incidences in the writings of the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers.

Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (95-96 AD)

CHAPTER 47

Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you.

This is a clear reference to I Corinthians

Polycarp to the Philippians (c 125 AD)

CHAPTER 3

For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you...

This is a reference to Paul's letter to the Philippians

Ignatius to the Ephesians (c110 AD)

CHAPTER 12

I know both who I am, and to whom I write. I am a condemned man, ye have been the objects of mercy; I am subject to danger, ye are established in safety. Ye are the persons through whom those pass that are cut off for the sake of God. Ye are initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy, at whose feet may I be found, when I shall attain to God; who in all his Epistles makes mention of you in Christ Jesus.

In five of Paul's epistles, Ephesus is mentioned.

Ignatius to the Philadelphians (c110 AD)

CHAPTER 4

Wives, be ye subject to your husbands in the fear of God; and ye virgins, to Christ in purity, not counting marriage an abomination, but desiring that which is better, not for the reproach of wedlock, but for the sake of meditating on the law. Children, obey your parents, and have an affection for them, as workers together with God for your birth [into the world]. Servants, be subject to your masters in God, that ye may be the freed-men of Christ. Husbands, love your wives, as fellow-servants of God, as your own body, as the partners of your life, and your co-adjutors in the procreation of children.

These lines are a summary of Ephesians 5-6

Fathers, "bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;"

This is a quote of Ephesians 6:4

For "in Christ there is neither bond nor free."

This is a quote of Galatians 3:28

Let not the widows be wanderers about, nor fond of dainties, nor gadders from house to house;

This references I Timothy 5:11-13

JUSTIN MARTYR (c 150 AD)

Justin was a prolific writer and defender of the faith who was executed for his faith in 165 AD. His extensive writings provide us with many evidences of the mid-Second Century Church's view of Scripture. The following quotations are examples of such quotations and references to Scripture.

Justin Martyr First Apology

CHAPTER 61

For Christ also said, "Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all..."

This is a quote of John 3:5

Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho the Jew

CHAPTER 63

The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek,'

This is a quote of Hebrews 5:6; 7:17; Psalm 110:4

CHAPTER 81

For as Adam was told that in the day he ate of the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand years. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.

This is a reference to the Book of Revelation

CHAPTER 100

But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, 'Be it unto me according to thy word.'"

This is a reference to Luke 1

CHAPTER 103

And the expression, 'They opened their mouth upon me like a roaring lion,' designates him who was then king of the Jews, and was called Herod, a successor of the Herod who, when Christ was

born, slew all the infants in Bethlehem born about the same time, because he imagined that amongst them He would assuredly be of whom the Magi from Arabia had spoken; for he was ignorant of the will of Him that is stronger than all, how He had commanded Joseph and Mary to take the Child and depart into Egypt, and there to remain until a revelation should again be made to them to return into their own country. And there they did remain until Herod, who slew the infants in Bethlehem, was dead, and Archelaus had succeeded him.

This references Matthew Chapter 1

For this devil, when [Jesus] went up from the river Jordan, at the time when the voice spake to Him, ‘Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee,’ is recorded in the memoirs of the apostles to have come to Him and tempted Him, even so far as to say to Him, ‘Worship me;’ and Christ answered him, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan: thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’

This refers to Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4

For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them, [it is recorded] that His sweat fell down like drops of blood while He was praying, and saying, ‘If it be possible, let this cup pass:’

This refers to Matthew 26:36ff; Mark 14:32ff; Luke 22:40ff

JUSTIN MARTYR’S FREQUENT REFERENCE TO THE MEMOIRS OF THE APOSTLES

Although in one instance Justin used the term, *Gospels*, to refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, his usual term for these four documents was the *Memoirs of the Apostles*. Other early writers (Papias and Eusebius, for example) used this term in the same manner. The following are instances in which Justin uses these terms.

Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho the Jew

CHAPTER 100

but also **in the Gospel it is written** that He said: ‘All things are delivered unto me by My Father;’ and, ‘No man knoweth the Father but the Son; nor the Son but the Father, and they to whom the Son will reveal Him.’

For [Christ] called one of His disciples — previously known by the name of Simon — Peter; since he recognized Him to be Christ the Son of God, by the revelation of His Father: and since we find it recorded **in the memoirs of His apostles** that He is the Son of God, and since we call Him the Son, we have understood that He proceeded before all creatures from the Father by His power and will

CHAPTER 101

For they that saw Him crucified shook their heads each one of them, and distorted their lips, and twisting their noses to each other, they spake in mockery the words which are recorded in the **memoirs of His apostles**: ‘He said he was the Son of God: let him come down; let God save him.’

CHAPTER 102

in short, all your nation’s teachers that questioned Him, had a cessation like a plentiful and strong spring, the waters of which have been turned off, when He kept silence, and chose to return no answer to any one in the presence of Pilate; as has been declared in the **memoirs of His apostles**, in order that what is recorded by Isaiah might have efficacious fruit,

CHAPTER 103

For this devil, when [Jesus] went up from the river Jordan, at the time when the voice spake to Him, ‘Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee,’ is recorded in the **memoirs of the apostles** to have come to Him and tempted Him, even so far as to say to Him, ‘Worship me;’ and Christ answered him, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan: thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’

For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them, [it is recorded] that His sweat fell down like drops of blood while He was praying, and saying, ‘If it be possible, let this cup pass:’

CHAPTER 104

And this is recorded to have happened in the **memoirs of His apostles**. And I have shown that, after His crucifixion, they who crucified Him parted His garments among them.

CHAPTER 105

For I have already proved that He was the only-begotten of the Father of all things, being begotten in a peculiar manner Word and Power by Him, and having afterwards become man through the Virgin, as we have learned from **the memoirs**.

For when Christ was giving up His spirit on the cross, He said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,’ as I have learned also **from the memoirs**. For He exhorted His disciples to surpass the pharisaic way of living, with the warning, that if they did not, they might be sure they could not be saved; and these words are recorded in the memoirs: ‘Unless your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’

CHAPTER 106

He had mentioned to them that He must suffer these things, and that they were announced beforehand by the prophets), and when living with them sang praises to God, as is made evident in the **memoirs of the apostles**.

And when it is said that He changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and when it is written in the **memoirs of Him** that this so happened, as well as that He changed the names of other two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means sons of thunder;

Accordingly, when a star rose in heaven at the time of His birth, as is recorded in the **memoirs of His apostles**, the Magi from Arabia, recognizing the sign by this, came and worshipped Him.

CHAPTER 107

“And that He would rise again on the third day after the crucifixion, it is written in the **memoirs** that some of your nation, questioning Him, said, ‘Show us a sign;’ and He replied to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and no sign shall be given them, save the sign of Jonah.’

Justin’s first apology

CHAPTER 66

For the **apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels**, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;” and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, “This is My blood;” and gave it to them alone.

CHAPTER 67

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the **memoirs of the apostles** or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then,

PAPIAS’ TESTIMONY AS TO THE ORIGIN OF NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE (died ca. 130 AD)

Papias was a young contemporary of John the Apostle. He was born about 70 AD and probably knew not only John but also Philip the evangelist and other early disciples who survived the destruction of Jerusalem. Papias’ writings were extant as late as the Thirteenth Century, but they were lost shortly thereafter. We know his writings only from extensive quotes, chiefly from Irenaeus and Eusebius.

Eusebius was leader in the Palestinian Church from 315 until his death in 340 AD. His *Ecclesiastical History* was the first history of the church to be written. It is valuable for many reasons, one of which is the light that it sheds on the canon. The following are Eusebius’ quotes from the writing of Papias that relate to the canon.

Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, Chapter 39 THE WRITINGS OF PAPIAS

...This shows that the statement of those is true, who say that there were two persons in Asia that bore the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day is called John’s. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second, if one is not willing to admit that it was the first that saw the **Revelation, which is ascribed by name to John.**

...**The Book of Acts** records that the holy apostles after the ascension of the Savior, put forward this Justus, together with Matthias, and prayed that one might be chosen in place of the traitor Judas, to fill up their number. The account is as follows: “And they put forward two, Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias

But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted the tradition which he gives in regard to **Mark, the author of the Gospel**. It is in the following words: “This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” These things are related by Papias concerning Mark.

But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.” And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise.

EUSEBIUS’ COMMENTS ON THE CANON

Eusebius himself made extensive comment on the canon as was viewed in the early Church. Note that Eusebius lists four classes of literature that was abroad in the early Church:

- Writings clearly accepted as Scripture
- Writings that were accepted by some but not by others
- Writings that were valuable, but rejected as Scripture
- Absurd and impious writing, chiefly the product of heretics
-

Ecclesiastical History, Chapter 25 **THE DIVINE SCRIPTURES THAT ARE ACCEPTED AND THOSE THAT ARE NOT.**

Since we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings.

Among the disputed writings, which are nevertheless recognized by many, are extant the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, also the second epistle of Peter, and those that are called the second and third of John, whether they belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name.

Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books. And among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books.

But we have nevertheless felt compelled to give a catalogue of these also, distinguishing those works which according to ecclesiastical tradition are true and genuine and commonly accepted, from those others which, although not canonical but disputed, are yet at the same time known to most ecclesiastical writers — we have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings. And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious. Let us now proceed with our history.

THE MURATORIAN CANON (170 AD)

The oldest known document from the Roman Church is a fragment of a document, dated 170 AD, called *The Muratorian Canon*. It is so called because it was discovered and published by Muratori in 1740. It is in Latin and seems to be a translation of an older Greek document. Therefore, the age of the original document is not known, although the translation into Latin was around 170 AD. Because it is but a fragment of a document, we cannot know how much of the list is missing. The document begins with Mark, passes to Luke, which it lists as *the third Gospel*, then to John, Acts, *thirteen* Epistles of Paul, mentions *two* epistles of John, one of Jude, and the *Apocalypses* John and Peter; thus omitting James, Hebrews, Third John, First and Second Peter, mentioning an apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter, but adding that “some in our body will have it read in the church..”

MANUSCRIPTS

The two oldest manuscripts of the Greek New Testament both date to the time of Eusebius and Constantine, c. 350 AD. Of these, Sinaiticus, contains all of the twenty-seven books of our present New Testament. The other, Vaticanus, in all probability contained the same twenty-seven books, but the final portions of this manuscript are lost. Thus, Vaticanus lacks the last

chapters from Hebrews (11:15 – 13:25 are missing), the Pastoral Epistles (First & Second Timothy and Titus), Philemon, and Revelation.

MARCION

Marcion was the son of an overseer in Sinope of Pontus. Early on, probably because of his heretical opinions and contempt of authority, he was excommunicated by his father. Marcion quickly drifted into a relationship with the Syrian Gnostic, Cerdo. In time, Marcion developed his own form of Gnosticism and formed his own canon of Scripture. He rejected many of the New Testament books. Marcion abridged and mutilated the Gospel of Luke, then included ten of Paul's epistles as his canon, a total of eleven books. He rejected the pastoral epistles because they condemned the forerunners of Gnosticism, the Epistle to Hebrews, Matthew, Mark, John, Acts, the pastoral epistles and Revelation. Much of this rejection was because he rejected the supernatural and sought to demonstrate that there was conflict between Paul and the other apostles.

Marcion is valuable in the study of the canon because his rejection of various books is evidence that they were viewed as Scripture by the Church, against which Marcion reacted.