

INTRODUCTION TO PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

WHY STUDY THIS?

We Must Know How to Understand and Teach the Bible Properly

- That God has spoken in His Word is the very heart of Christianity; God has spoken!
- Thus, the primary need of hermeneutics is to determine what God has said in His Word; to determine the meaning of the Word of God
- The fact that God has spoken to us means nothing if we do not know what He has said

To determine what God has said is a high and holy task. With fear and trembling each should be ever so careful of that which he has adopted as his method of Biblical interpretation. Upon the correct interpretation of the Bible rests our doctrine of salvation, of sanctification, of eschatology, and of Christian living. It is our solemn responsibility to know what God has said with reference to each of these. This can be done only if we have carefully, thoroughly, and systematically formulated that system of Biblical interpretation which will yield most readily the native meaning of the Bible.

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 2.

- What are some wrong practices/doctrines that have resulted from improper interpretation of Scripture?

We Must Bridge the Gap Between the Original and Contemporary Audience

- The fact that we are separated today from the original setting of the writing of Scripture makes the task of interpretation more difficult
- We are separated by many “gaps”:
 - Time – we are separated by thousands of years from the biblical events
 - Language – the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (dependent on word endings not word order); to translate from the original language to English is not as simple as finding the equivalent English word
 - Culture – culture is all the ways and means whereby a people carry on their existence and this is much different today than in ancient times
 - Geography – since we are removed by thousands of miles from the lands in which Biblical events took place, we must understand the lay of the land
 - History – the understanding of most passages of Scripture is dependent on some understanding of history

There are Troubling Trends in Evangelical Hermeneutics

- Significant changes have taken place within evangelicalism in the last half a century
- The decades of the 1960’s and 1970’s particularly saw changes in the landscape of evangelicalism, resulting in a blurring of its distinctions

As Evangelicalism has emptied itself out theologically, novelty, experimentation and cultural trendiness have overwhelmed many of the historic, bedrock affirmations that once characterized evangelical faith... This is the cultural context in which the evangelical Church finds itself at the beginning of the new millennium. It is a moment which cries out for a countercultural declaration that there is truth, that God has secured that truth in his Word, that it is this Word that he has given to the Church for its instruction, nourishment, and encouragement, and that he still intends to use this biblical truth in regeneration and sanctification

David Wells, foreword to *The Eclipse of the Reformation in the Evangelical Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and R. Fowler White (Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), xvii, xix.

- These changes in evangelicalism have come about in an attempt to be more accommodating to the current postmodern culture
- Pragmatism, relevancy, and being culturally accepted have become the motivating factors behind the ever evolving face of evangelicalism
- The result is a loss of boundaries that once defined and characterized evangelicalism
- Paralleling this transformation within evangelicalism has been a corresponding change in hermeneutics
- Not surprisingly, as evangelicalism has morphed to adapt to its culture, the approach to hermeneutics has followed suit
- At the core of this method lies a skepticism concerning the veracity of the Biblical record.
- Anthony C. Thiselton's book *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* further illustrates hermeneutical changes that have accompanied changes in evangelicalism.

This 1980 work radically altered the way that many evangelicals interpret the Bible. The subtitle to Thiselton's book tells the story. It is a "philosophical description" of New Testament hermeneutics, a description that has radically influenced evangelical hermeneutical theory. Thiselton transformed the search for propositional truth into a search for subjective human bias. From the 1960's, home Bible studies had pooled the ignorance of untrained Christians as each participant shared "what the passage means to me." That sort of approach was now to be the basis for discussions at meetings of evangelical theologians

Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 18.

- Such integration of human philosophy and Biblical analysis characterizes the new hermeneutical approach, thereby distinguishing it from the older, traditional approach of seeking to uncover the author's intended meaning by the use of grammatical-historical guidelines.
- In this "new hermeneutic," there has been a departure from grammatical-historical principles and an embracing of subjectivism
- This is most evident in the fact that application has been incorporated as a step into the hermeneutical process
- Traditionally, the disciplines of hermeneutics and application have been separate from each other
 - Hermeneutics = the set of rules for biblical interpretation
 - Application = the practical implementation of those meanings yielded by interpretation
- But, recent trends in biblical interpretation are obscuring the line between hermeneutics and application, making accurate interpretation and valid application difficult to achieve
- The danger of this approach is that the biblical text can mean whatever the reader wants it to mean as it creates a human-centered, rather than a God-centered, interpretation of the Bible
- This approach finds its starting point in human beings; the result of trying to understand a text in relation to how it applies to people is that truth is easily relativized

DEFINITIONS

Hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics is the principles by which the Bible is interpreted
 - The English word “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuo* and the noun *hermeneia*
 - These words point to Hermes, the god in Greek mythology who transmitted what was beyond human understanding into a form that people could grasp; He was a messenger/interpreter of the gods who brought their message to mortals
 - So, *hermeneuo* came to refer to bringing someone to an understanding of something
 - The idea is “to interpret, to explain, to translate”
- Luke 24:27 ~ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained (dihermeneuo) to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*
- John 1:42 ~ He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated [hermeneuo] Peter).*
- Thus, hermeneutics constitute the principles under which we are to interpret Scripture and by which the meaning of the text is determined
 - Hermeneutics is both a science and an art
 - It is a science in that it can determine certain principles for discovering the meaning of a document
 - It is an art in that these principles can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill of the interpreter

Exegesis

- The act of using rules of hermeneutics to draw out the meaning of the text
- Exegesis is the determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts
- It is concerned with the actual study and interpretation of Scripture
- This is the work of interpretation done in private
- The primary concern here is an understanding of a biblical text
- Exegesis is applied hermeneutics...the implementation of valid interpretive principles

John 1:18 ~ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained (exegeomai) Him.

Acts 15:12-14 ~ All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating (exegeomai) what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related (exegeomai) how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

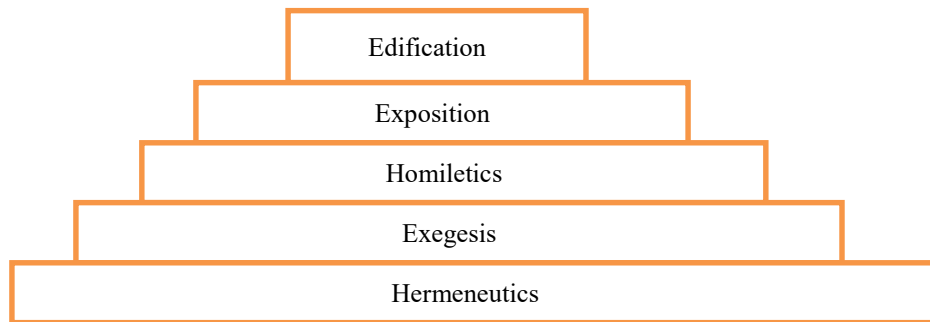
Exposition

- Exposition is the communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to its contemporary audience
- This involves the act of presenting the meaning of a text in public
- The primary concern here is the communication of the meaning of the text

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THESE ACTIVITIES

[Hermeneutics] stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule-book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules. Hermeneutics is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 11



- Hermeneutics is like a cookbook; Exegesis is preparing and baking of the cake; Exposition is the serving of the cake
- Thus, hermeneutics are essential in that if there are no instructions on how to go about the activity, there can be no progress

SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

Allegorical Method

- An allegory is a story in which the people and events of the story have hidden or symbolic meanings
- Those who interpret the Bible allegorically by-pass the clear, historical meaning of the text and make imaginative associations between their Christian experience and persons/events of the past
- This method finds the “hidden, more spiritual, symbolic” meaning of a text
- It places on biblical literature a meaning that, with rare exceptions, it was never intended to convey
- It assigns a higher-than-literal interpretation to contents of the Bible
- Example: One church father interpreted the parable of the Good Samaritan by making the following associations:
 - The traveler who was attacked represents a person seeking salvation
 - The robbers represent Satan
 - The Good Samaritan is Christ
 - The oil and wine the Samaritan administered to the injured man’s wounds picture the Holy Spirit and forgiveness
 - The donkey is the Gospel because it was the vehicle that carried the injured man to the inn
 - The inn is the church where the man recovered
- Origen’s allegorization (Alexandrian school)
 - Noah’s ark pictures the church and Noah represented Christ

- Rebekah's drawing water at the well for Abraham's servant means we must daily come to the Scriptures to meet Christ
- In Jesus' triumphal entry, the donkey represented the Old Testament, its colt depicted the New Testament, and the two apostles pictured the moral and mystic senses of Scripture
- How do we evaluate this method?
 - The allegorical method obscures the true meaning of God's Word by ignoring what the writer actually said
 - Since the plain sense of the text is ignored, there is no means of checking whether an allegorical interpretation is true or not
 - An allegorical interpretation tells you more about the interpreter's imagination than it does about God's Word
- What about Paul's use of allegory in Galatians 4:24-26?
 - There is a difference in interpreting allegories so designated in the Bible and allegorizing much of Scripture
 - Paul clearly indicated what he was doing in using an allegory
 - Paul's allegory was an illustration or analogy in which he was pointing out that certain facts about Hagar correspond to non-Christians and that certain facts about Sarah correspond to facts about Christians

Neo-Orthodox Method

- This is the "what it means to me" method
- Modern theologians don't believe the Bible is infallible or inerrant
- They don't believe the Bible is itself the Word of God
- It is merely a record of how men in ages past experienced God
- Therefore it is suggestive, but not authoritative in our day
- Thus, the Bible becomes the Word of God when you have a significant experience while reading it
- Truth is not the concern; that is different for every person
- The issue is how the words strike you as you read them
- What the original author wrote is merely a tool that assists you in shaping your own concept of God
- This view is very popular in today's post-modern, everyone is right, no one is wrong atmosphere
- The reader's response determines the meaning, not the words themselves
- Thus in this method, only how it immediately strikes the reader matters
- How are we to evaluate this method?
 - It is based on an errant view of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility
 - This Bible is divine truth, not suggestive, non-authoritative, human experiences
 - These methods fail to recognize that the intent of the original author is what determines the meaning of a document
 - What the Bible meant to the human authors is what the Bible means
 - We don't impose our meaning on what God said; we work to discover the meaning He initially and eternally intended

Literal Method

- This is the right way to interpret the Bible – to read it carefully and normally as possible

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

- In this method, the Scriptures are to be interpreted with a literal, historical, grammatical method of interpretation
- Literal does not mean “letterism,” which fails to recognize nuances, plays on words, hidden metaphors, figures of speech, etc.
- The meaning of a word is determined by how the word was used in ordinary conversations
- This is the normal interpretation when we read any book, essay, poem
- We presume the literal until the nature of the document may force us to another level
- We must let the Scripture mean what it means based on what the words say

PRESUPPOSITIONS IN HERMENEUTICS

1. The Bible is God’s written revelation to man and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Cor 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
2. The Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed.
3. The Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Ps 19:7-11; Ps 119; Matt 5:18; Matt 24:35; John 10:35; John 16:12-13; John 17:17; 1 Cor 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
4. God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God’s Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matt 5:18; 2 Tim 3:16).
5. While there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; John 16:12-15; 1 Cor 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture.

QUALIFICATIONS IN HERMENEUTICS

1. Be Born Again - No one can fully comprehend the meaning of the Bible unless he is regenerate. The unsaved person is spiritually blind (Eph 2: 2)

1 Cor 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.

2. Have a Passion to Know God's Word

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.

3. Confess Sins

1 Pet 2:1-2 ~ Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

4. Be Willing to Work Hard

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

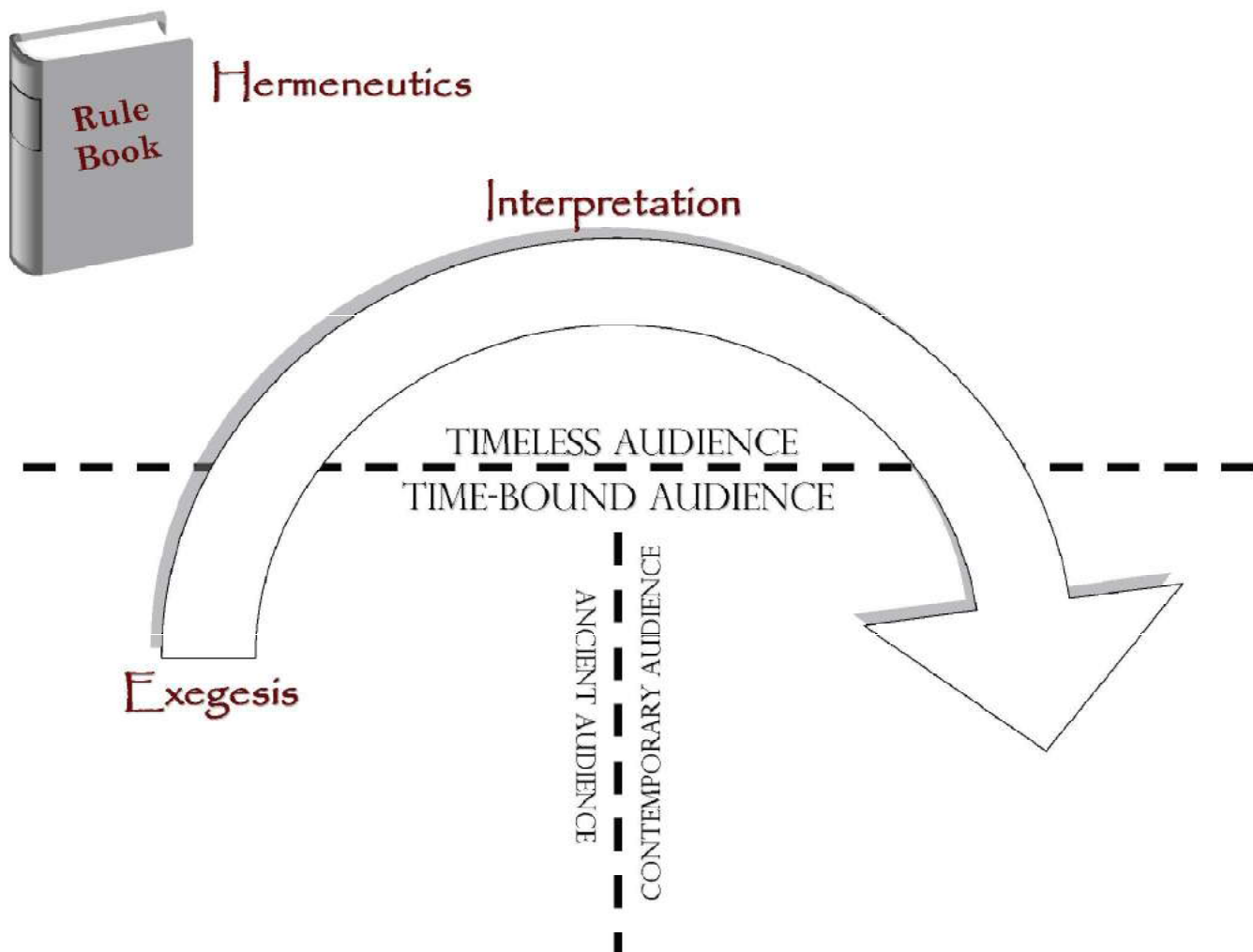
5. Be Utterly Dependent on the Holy Spirit

1 Cor 2:11-13 ~ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

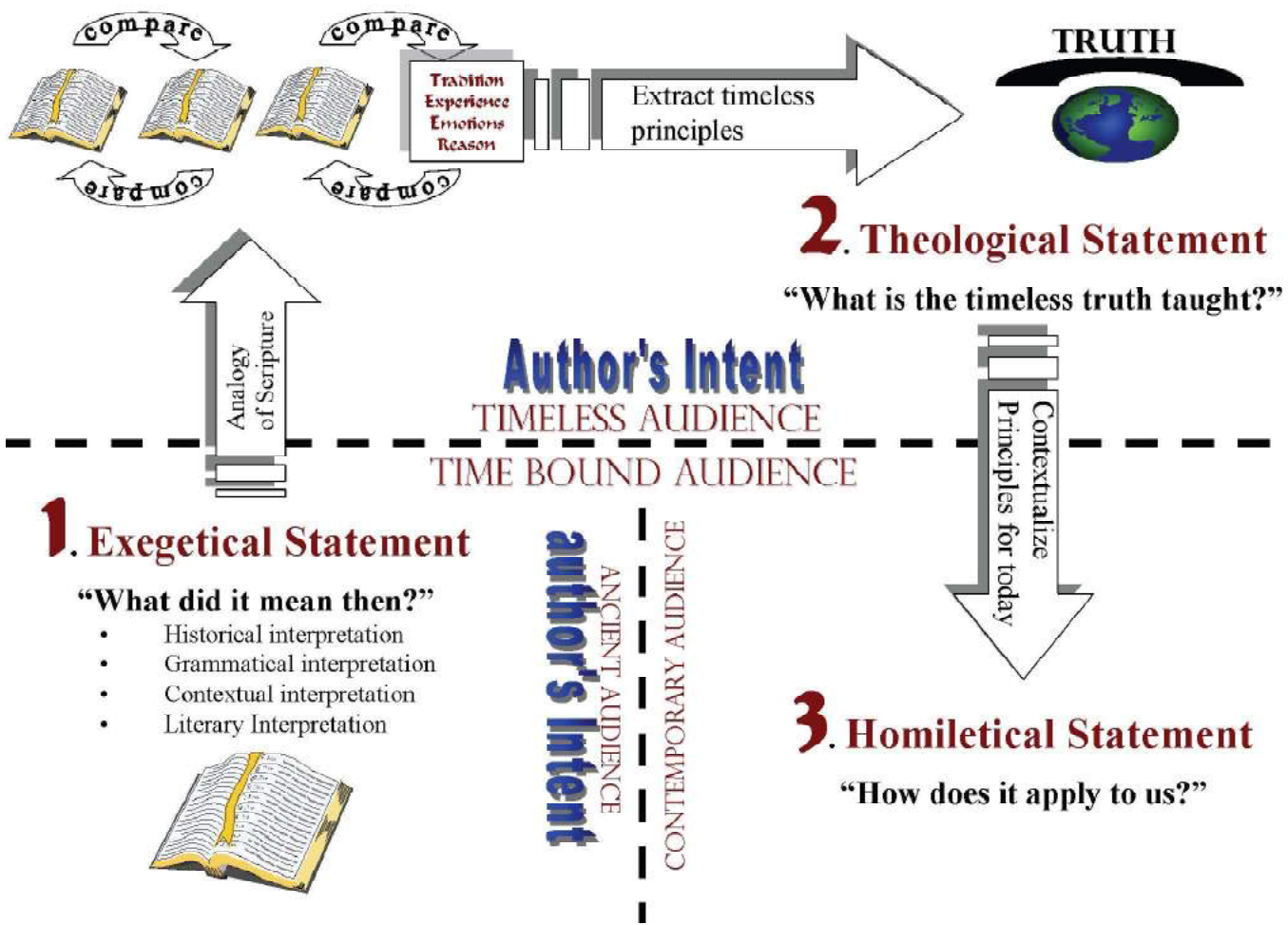
PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION¹

Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutics: The theory of hermeneutics which seeks to interpret the Scriptures by studying the text in its original historical-grammatical context in order to discover what the author's original intent was so that timeless principles can be discovered and applied to a contemporary setting.



¹ This section taken from *The Theology Notebook – Bibliology and Hermeneutics* found at [http://bible.org/assets/ttp/bh_notebook\(2005\).pdf](http://bible.org/assets/ttp/bh_notebook(2005).pdf)



“It is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”

—John Calvin

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

1. The Inspiration of Scripture

- Definition: The Holy Spirit wrote through the biblical writers using their own languages, culture and individual personalities, resulting in God's Word without error in the original.
- To say that the Scriptures are “inspired by God” then, means that they contain the very breath or words of God Himself

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*

- Inspiration emphasizes that Scripture is the product of the breath of God
- The usual translation of “inspired” may be somewhat misleading as it simply energizes the human writers
- Men did not write the Scriptures and then God breathed into them
- No, From the beginning they were breathed out by God

“Inspiration”	
-	<i>Theopneustos</i>
-	<i>Theos + pneustos</i>
-	<i>God + breathed</i>

2 Peter 1:20-21 ~ *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 context of vs. 16-21 is Peter on Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17)
- But the Word is “more sure” than that experience
- Verse 21 – “moved” = borne along; the same word is used in Acts 27:15, 17 of a ship carried along by wind filling sails
- Thus, the decision to write Scripture was not a private decision but God's work
- This inspiration extends to the very smallest parts of the letters which formed the original words

Matthew 5:18 ~ *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.*

- “smallest letter” = “jot” = Hebrew letter *yodh*(י)
- “stroke” = “tittle” = minute distinction between two Hebrew letters; like distinction between an O and a Q (Jvs. I)
- Thus, inspiration extends to the whole, the parts, the precise words, and the actual letters
- The implications of inspiration:
 - The Scriptures are Inerrant – Psalm 19:7; John 10:35; Matt 5:17-19
 - The Scriptures are Authoritative – 1 Thess 2:13
 - The Scriptures are Powerful – Hebrews 4:12
 - The Scriptures are Sufficient – 2 Timothy 3:17

2. The Clarity of Scripture

- Definition: This means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are clear enough for the common person to understand
- This has traditionally been known as the “perspicuity” of Scripture – namely that the Word of God is intelligible, understandable, easy to comprehend
- The Bible is an understandable book such that every Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, can comprehend in its pages all that is necessary for salvation and holy living
- Granted, there are some difficult passages; not all parts of Scripture are able to be understood easily
- Peter affirmed this about some of Paul’s writings:

2 Peter 3:15-16 ~ 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.

- But, generally the Scriptures are written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers
- Scripture itself testifies to the fact that it is understandable and clear:

Psalm 19:7-9 ~ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

- “sure” = certain, raised above all doubt, reliable, stable
- “pure” = clear, lucid

Psalm 119:130 ~ The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

- It is important to remember also that Jesus never blamed people’s problems on the Scripture being not very clear
- Christ always assumed that the blame for misunderstanding any teaching of Scripture is not to be placed on the Word of God itself, but on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written:

Matthew 12:3, 5 ~ But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions... Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?”

Matthew 21:42 ~ Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Matthew 22:29 ~ But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.

- Furthermore, most of the NT letters are written to entire congregations, not church leaders/scholars:

Philippians 1:1 ~ To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

Q – Why then do people misunderstand Scripture?

3. Accommodation of Revelation

- Definition: Scripture is the truth of God accommodated to the human mind so that it can be understood
- God the infinite communicates with man the finite and, thus, God uses items which are familiar to men in order to make truth understandable to them
- That God accommodates His revelation to people means that He unfolds its meaning through the use of illustrations, analogies, anthropomorphisms, etc.
- Examples:

Ps 34:15 ~ The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry.

Ps 19:1 ~ The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Ps 89:13 ~ You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted.

John 6:48 ~ I am the bread of life.

John 10:7 ~ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:11 ~ I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Mark 9:43-44 ~ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire,[where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.]

This anthropomorphic character of Scripture...is necessary for the communication of God's truth to man.

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 100.

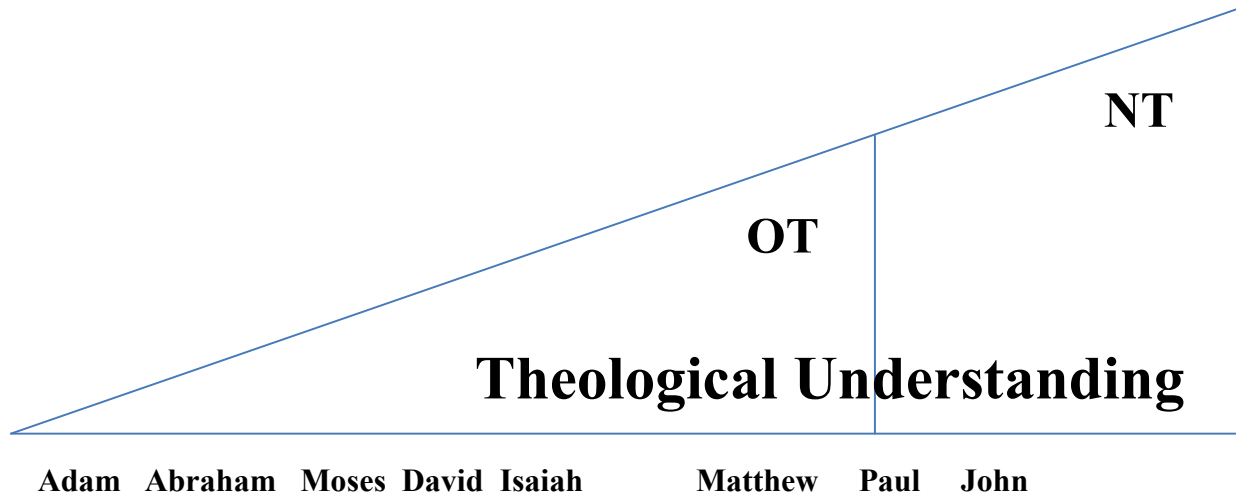
- Caution: we must be careful to not push the accommodating language about God and His nature to literal extremes (i.e. God does not have a body)

4. Progressive Revelation

- Definition: God does not reveal Himself all at one time but does so gradually over the course of time
- The Word of God is to be understood from the Old Testament to the New Testament as a flower unfolding its petals to the morning sun
- God initiated revelation, but He did not reveal His truths all at one time...it was a long and progressive process
- As the books of the Bible were written, God progressively revealed more truths about many subjects
- What was partial was added to
- This does not mean that the Old Testament is inferior to the New Testament or that the Old Testament doesn't contain any mature ideas
- Rather, it points to the general trend that while there were truths that were only partially revealed, discussed, or developed in the Old Testament, in the New Testament those truths have been more completely understood
- This does not mean that biblical revelation progressed in an evolutionary sense
- It does mean that in later Scriptures God added to what He had given in earlier portions
- It means that what was initially given as partial information was then added to later so that the revelation was more complete
- Themes in the Bible become clearer the farther we move from Genesis to Revelation

Hebrews 1:1-2 ~ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- Verse one shows that Old Testament revelation was uneven in its progress through time. Revelation came sporadically with the method of revelation varying greatly.
- By contrast, in verse two, God has spoken his final word through His Son and so brought into existence His full revelation in the New Testament



- Examples:
 - What Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and others prophesied about the end is elaborated on in the book of Revelation
 - What is said about death in the OT is expanded in the NT
 - The Trinity in the OT is presented in fuller statements in the NT
- Progressive revelation means that some commands were changed later
- Examples:
 - Circumcision, given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant (Gen 17), was later rescinded (Gal 5:2)
 - The law of Moses has been superseded (2 Cor 3)
- The importance of this principle for interpretation: We must take into account the then-current state of revelation to properly understand a particular passage
- We must be careful to not read the NT back into the OT; to not force NT meanings into the OT
- Examples:
 - Can't read the statements in the NT about the church being included into the New Covenant as evidence that the church has replaced Israel

5. *Scripture Interprets Scripture (The Cross-Reference Principle)*

- Definition: One or more Scripture passages help interpret the right meaning in another text
- Or another way to say it: Obscure passages in Scripture must give way to clear passages
- We may rest assured that God did not reveal an important doctrine in a single, ambiguous passage
- All essential doctrines are fully and clearly explained - either in the immediate context, or somewhere else in the Bible

The entire Holy Scripture is the context and guide for understanding the particular passages of Scripture...Essential truth is not tucked away in some incidental remark in Scripture nor in some passages that remains ambiguous in its meaning even after being subjected to very thorough research.

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 105.

- Not every verse or passage of scripture will be immediately clear or obvious to the interpreter
- The meaning of some passages may be easier to understand than others
- In fact, some verses or passages may be very difficult for the interpreter to understand
- The principle of cross reference or scripture interprets scripture is fundamentally an appeal to context
- It is an appeal to context in its broadest sense
- Two important principles of Scripture interpreting Scripture can be noted
 1. A difficult or obscure passage should never be interpreted in a way that contradicts a clear or easily understood passage
 2. A complex, novel, or ingenious interpretation for a passage should not be given preference over a more simple or natural explanation of the passage
- Examples of difficult or obscure passages

1 Corinthians 15:29 ~ Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

John 3:5 ~ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

 - What is the water referred to here? Water baptism? Water of the Word? Water in physical birth?
 - Other passages like Ezekiel 36 and Titus 3:5 shed light on this passage
- Watch out for the dangers of using cross-references:
 - Not allowing a passage to speak for itself
 - Assuming the meaning of a word or passage is identical to another word or passage
 - Not thoroughly studying the nearer context to understand the meaning of the passage

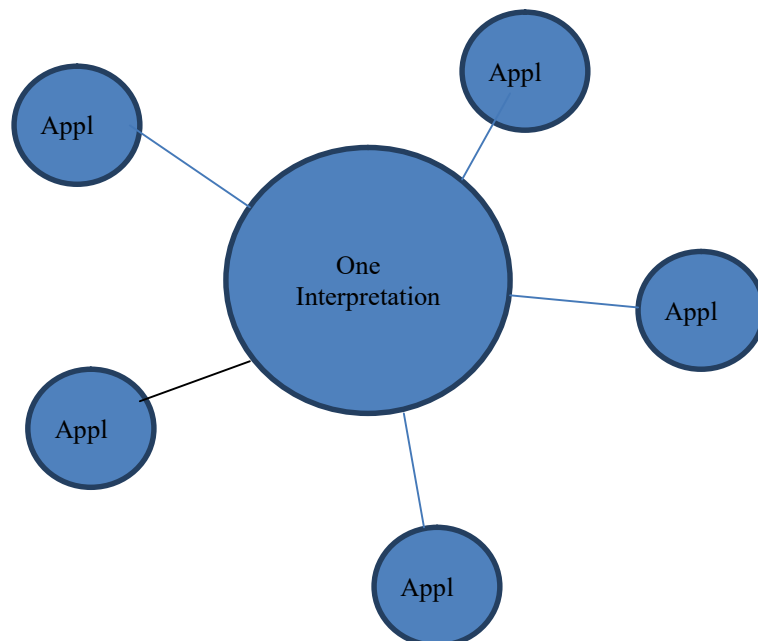
6. Analogy of the Faith (The Harmony of Scripture Principle).....

- Definition: There is one, unified, consistent, harmonious system of belief in the Bible such that no point when correctly understood will contradict another
- This principle is similar to the previous one but there is a legitimate distinction - The analogy of faith is not the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, but that *all Scripture is in agreement and will not contradict itself*.
- Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by nearly 40 authors, it agrees with itself
- In this principle, we see what the Scripture harmoniously teaches on some subject or on related facets with a total unified picture. Once we see this on the subject, we realize that there is overall agreement as the parts fit into the picture, each in its own contribution
- There is one system of truth contained in the Scripture and, thus, all doctrines must agree with each other

- Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other scriptures must be ruled out from the beginning
- Proper application of hermeneutical principles will resolve **apparent** conflicts
- Because the Scriptures were spoken by the perfect God who knows everything and never lies, the Bible does not contradict itself
- The foundation of this principle is the inspiration of the scriptures and it bears upon the character of God as the divine author of the Bible. Any position which allows for contradictions in the teaching of the Bible allows for errors in God
- Examples:
 - 2 Sam 24:1 vs. 1 Chron 21:1
 - Romans 4:1-5 (shows that men are justified by faith apart from works) vs. James 2:14-26 (shows that those who are saved by faith will have works that are the fruitful manifestation of real faith)
- These passages are not cross references for each other (in the sense of the previous principle); however, they are harmonious sections of Scripture
- Two passages may not teach the same essential thing; yet the two things two different passages teach will fit harmoniously within a system in unity; they will coordinate and not contradict
- This principle is the foundational assumption of *systematic theology*!
- There is a danger lurking in this principle: We must avoid the practice of determining what we believe based on one text and then forcing every other passage to “harmonize” with that view

7. The Single Meaning of Scripture

- Definition: Although a text may have many different applications, it has only one meaning – the meaning intended by the original human author, moved by the Holy Spirit
- There is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study, but a given text may speak to a number of issues
- “Interpretation is one, application is many”



A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.

Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 205.

- Thus, the goal of all Bible interpretation is to uncover the singular intent of the original author
- This is arrived at by a proper use of context, word study, cross reference, knowledge of manners and customs, historical background, and other hermeneutical rules
- We must seek to arrive at the meaning most natural, most fitting, most in harmony with factors of the context, word study, cross reference, etc.
- We must be wary of a meaning that is strained, arbitrary, contrived, artificial, etc.
- Example:
 - David's 5 stones for the fight with Goliath do not mean 5 stones of physical substance to use in striking down the enemy **PLUS** a second, deeper meaning such as purity, integrity, wisdom, courage, and righteousness. The so-called deeper, mystical meaning is read in arbitrarily from the imagination of the interpreter, foisted on the text. It is imposition, not exposition...eisegesis (read into the text) not exegesis (led out of the text)
- This principle of single meaning does not rule out the use of Inspired SensusPlenior Applications (ISPA's) in the NT
 - It is "inspired," because along with all Scripture, the NT passage is inspired by God
 - It is "*sensusplenior*" in that it gives an additional or fuller sense than the passage had in its OT setting
 - It is an "application" because it does not eradicate the literal meaning of the OT passage, but simply applies the OT wording to a new setting.
- At times, the NT writer goes beyond the grammatical-historical meaning of an OT passage and assigns it an additional meaning in connection with his NT context but this does not violate the principle that every OT passage must receive its own grammatical-historical interpretation regardless of how a NT writer may use it
- Example:
 - Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15 – In its historical, immediate context in Hosea, the idea is that God called his corporate "son," the nation of Israel, out of Egypt during the book of Exodus; but in Matthew 2, the Holy Spirit through Matthew opens up a new vista to use of the fuller meaning He recognized in Hosea 11:1, namely that Christ is the "son" whom God called out of Egypt
 - One sense; multiple referents
- The ISPA type of usage does not grant contemporary interpreters the right to copy the methodology of NT writers
- That a single passage has one meaning and one meaning only has been a long-established principle of biblical interpretation
- Recently, however, there have been multiple violations of this principle in contemporary hermeneutics
- Examples:
 - *The Hermeneutical Spiral* – Grant Osbourne
 - "widespread use of double meaning" in the Gospel of John
 - *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* – Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard
 - "an author may intend a text to convey multiple meanings or levels of meaning"

- *How to Read a Bible for All Its* – Fee and Stuart
 - hermeneutics is the “narrow sense of seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts”

8. Interpretation as Distinct from Application

- Definition: Though closely related, interpretation and application are not the same; Interpretation
- Many errors and wrong interpretations of God’s Word have unfortunately occurred because of a failure to recognize the principle that *interpretation* and *application* are distinct
- The incorporation of application into the hermeneutical process leads inevitably to multiple meanings for a single passage
- Certainly, the application of the scripture is essential to the proper study of God’s Word; indeed, the application of the Bible is the reason why God gave it to us; He did not intend for us to simply study His Word academically but never allow it to change our lives; on the contrary, we should be eager to change our thinking and behavior as a result of studying and hearing the Word; so, application is a very important part of Bible study
- But the interpretation of the Bible is the foundation upon which application can stand securely
- This truth may be seen in several distinctions we make between interpretation and application:

A distinction in **number**

A distinction in **authority**

A distinction in **order**

- Example:
 - David’s 5 stones were physical stones plucked from the ground to fell the enemy with a sling
 - An application from this could be that when we, like David, go forth trusting God, God can use the resources He permits us to utilize to work out for victory as He did for David
 - Another application could be that however small and inadequate our available supplies may be at the moment, our trust in God’s help can be honored by success against seemingly insurmountable odds
 - This interpretation is one basic meaning; the applications may be many
- Interpretation and application must always be kept separate; here is one way to do that:
 - Assume you are studying Romans 12:1-2
 - Start by stating what Paul actually said...this is interpretation and from that you can develop appropriate applications for your present situations
 - Romans 12:2 ~ do not be conformed to this world
 - Wrong approach – “To me that means we shouldn’t watch TV; in fact, this verse means all TV is evil; if you own a TV, you might not be a Christian; that’s what Paul said to the Romans, you know:
 - Right approach – Interpretation: Paul said the Roman believers should not follow the same patterns of thinking and living unbelievers do; Application – something that influences me to think like an unbeliever is watching TV; to keep from being conformed to worldly thinking, I should be more discerning about what I watch

9. *Normal/Literal Interpretation*

- Definition: When interpreting Scripture, assume the most natural, obvious meaning of a word or phrase taking into consideration the history, culture, and author
- The definition of “literal” in *Webster’s New International Dictionary* is: “the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of words; not allegorical or metaphorical.”
- Thus, we take the Bible at face value – we read the Bible following the reading practices we would consider normal for any other important document
- This is the common sense approach since we generally take everyday things in life as literal or at face value

If I send my wife a note telling her that I would like to have lunch with her on Tuesday and that I would like to meet her at 12:30 pm at Logan's Roadhouse, she does not read a mystical, secret meaning about spiritual appetite into it.

- So, the golden rule of interpretation is: “When the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”
- This is the usual practice in interpreting literature and only in literal interpretation is there a control check, or curb on the abuse of Scripture by eisegesis
- Therefore, take every word at its primary, usual, meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.
- At first, this may seem like a fairly simple concept; however, when we realize that the meaning of words is determined largely by common usage, the idea becomes much more complex
- Any given word can have a number of distinct meanings depending on how it is used
- So, the “ordinary” or “normal” meaning of a word can only be determined by looking at a number of factors including context, cultural/historical situation, and genre
- What do we not mean by literal interpretation?
- We do not mean by this principle a strict, wooden-headed literalism or letterism which does not take into account figures of speech, figurative language, and allegories
- For example, Christ as the door in John 10 does not intend us to see Him as a literal doorway of mahogany, oak, cedar, etc., but a doorway as valid in the spiritual realm as a literal, material doorway is in the physical realm
- Principles by which we can determine if something is literal:²
 - a. Always understand a passage literally unless there is good textual reason for taking it otherwise**
 - For instance, in Revelation 7:4-8 the apostle John prophesies that 144,000 Israelites will be sealed with 12,000 coming from each of the 12 tribes of Israel

²Taken from Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill., p. 146.

- There is no reason to take these numbers figuratively or in any way other than in the literal sense.
 - However, in verse 9 John says that he saw a great multitude standing before “the Lamb”
 - This lamb is clearly a reference to Jesus (Cf. John 1:29) and should be taken figuratively
- b. Always understand a passage literally unless the literal sense would involve an impossibility**
- For instance, when the Lord told Jeremiah that He had made him “an iron pillar and a bronze wall,” this was obviously figurative (Jer. 1:18).
- c. Always understand a passage literally unless the literal sense results in an absurdity**
- When Isaiah refers to “the trees of the field” clapping their hands (Isa. 55:12), this is obviously not to be taken literally.
- d. Always understand a passage literally unless the literal sense demands immoral action**
- For example, in John 6:53-58 when Jesus talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He must be speaking figuratively because cannibalism is immoral
- e. Note if there is an explanation in the context indicating that an expression is to be taken figuratively.**
- For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 speaks of saints who die as those who have “fallen asleep,” but he means death based on verse 16
 - Also, when Paul referred to the Ephesians as being “dead,” he didn’t mean actual physical death as is made evident by the following phrase (Eph. 2:1)
- f. Sometimes a figurative word or phrase will be accompanied by another word or phrase which indicates that it is no to be taken literally.**
- See the following examples: “true bread” (John 6:32), “living stone” (1 Pet. 2:4), “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), and “the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12).

10. Genre

- Definition: Genre is a literary term having to do with the category or "genus" of literature under consideration
- Proper interpretation must take the general literary category of any given passage into consideration
- Are we dealing with poetry or prose? Are we dealing with history or prophecy?
- It is important that when we interpret the Word of God, we understand as much as possible the author's intent
- For example, if the author is writing history - the genre of the Pentateuch of Moses - it would not be proper to interpret a single reference (such as the speech of Balaam's donkey) as a poetic personification, unless a variety of contextual markers compelled us to do so

- Here are some books of the Bible and their respective genres:
 - Psalms – Poetry
 - Proverbs - Wise Sayings
 - Isaiah - History and Prophecy
 - The Gospels - Biography and History
 - The Epistles - Teaching and Doctrine
 - Revelation - Eschatology and Prophecy

11. Priority of the Original Language

- Definition: This principle simply means to consult the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek to find first-hand what really is said
- Part of the accommodation which God employed when He communicated His Word to mankind was the use of written human languages, including a specific vocabulary, grammar, and any of a number of literary devices
- You are probably well aware of the limitations of a translation - Whether it is a spoken translation or a written one, there are nuances of language and communication that are lost in a translation

The interpreter who interprets Scripture only in his modern language is always working with a linguistic veil between himself and original texts. And he never knows how thin or how thick this veil is.
Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 117.

- At this point we need to be careful not to give the impression that someone who does not understand biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek cannot interpret the Bible
- This is not true! - However, the depth, accuracy, and certainty of one's interpretation of God's Word can be greatly enhanced when one can read the Bible in the language in which it was originally written.
- It should be noted also that many tools have been developed that enable the modern reader to gain insights into the original languages of the Bible even if he does not know those languages
- These resources include exegetical commentaries, word study dictionaries, individual word studies in theological periodicals, concordances, Bible study software, and interlinear Bibles
- Examples of insight from the original languages:

John 21:15-17 ~ So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo) Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileo) Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

1 John 3:6 ~ No one who abides in Him sins (present tense); no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Matthew 28:19-20 ~ Go (participle) therefore and make disciples (main verb) of all the nations, baptizing (participle) them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching (participle) them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

12. Context

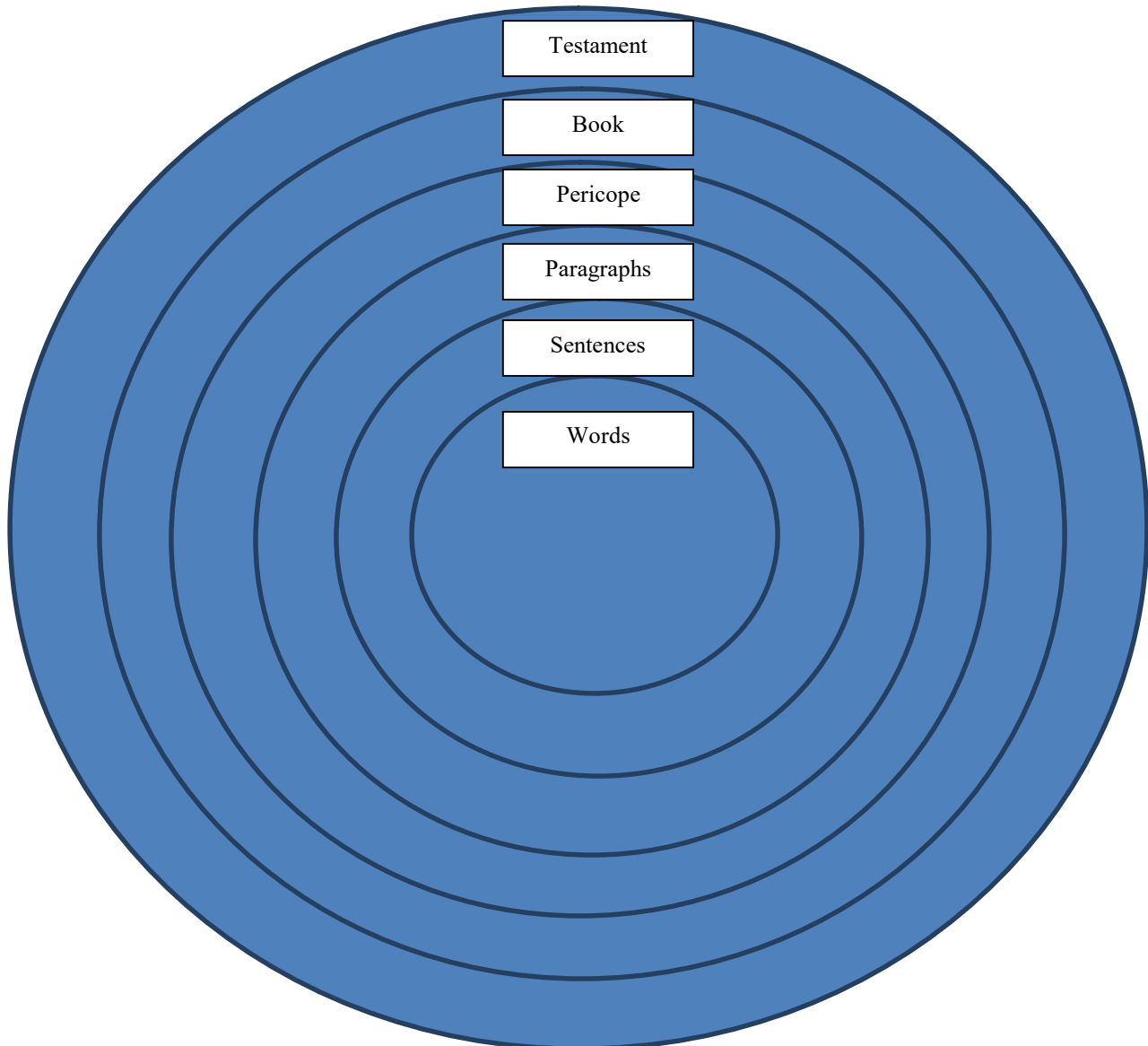
- Definition: A text of Scripture is given its true meaning only when it is considered in relationship to the words around it
- “A text without a context is a prooftext” – this means that a verse or phrase is taken out of context to “prove” a particular view
- Examples of frequently “prooftexted” verses:

Matthew 18:19-20 ~ Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Philippians 4:13 ~ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me

Revelation 3:20 ~Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

- Context determines meaning since each text is found within a context
- Since the Word of God is a perfect unit which all hangs together, we must consider the verses immediately before, after, and around the passage
- We must consider the book of the Bible and the section of the Bible in which the passage occurs



- Here are some questions you can ask to grasp the context of a particular passage:
 - Who is speaking or writing?
 - To whom is he speaking or writing?
 - Is there a specific situation addressed in the text that shapes the interpretation?
- Let's apply those questions to Jeremiah 29:11 – a favorite “sound bite” for Christian posters and calendars

Jeremiah 29:11 ~ For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

- This verse is often quoted as if it were a general promise to all believers
- However, even a cursory examination of Jeremiah 29 shows that this was part of a letter sent by Jeremiah to the Jews in Babylon
- Reading further, you find that this promise was part of God's plan to restore the nation of Israel in the future
- The ones to whom Jeremiah was writing and the specific situation – exile and promised restoration – limits the meaning of the verse
- It is definitely not a sweeping promise that believers will have an easy and calamity-free life (Jeremiah himself was hated, thrown in prison, kidnapped, and martyred for his faithful preaching – it certainly did not apply to him!)
- Context determines meaning

13. Historical Appropriateness

- Definition: Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in light of biblical history; thus, we must interpret a passage in such a way that our treatment of it is fitting, appropriate, or in harmony with the historical situation at that point in Scripture
- The Bible was composed in a specific culture at a particular point in time...while they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding culture and history into account
- This principle is related to the principle of progressive revelation – what would they, given the light God allowed them to possess at that point, have most naturally understood a statement to mean?
- The importance of this principle:
 1. The meaning of words depends on history/culture
 2. The meaning of idiom/figures of speech depend on history/culture
 3. Understanding the historical and cultural situation of the author will help us understand his mind
 4. Keeps us from reading our own cultural understandings into the text
- Example:
 - 1 Cor 15:20 ~ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep
 - Knowing what “first fruits” were and their importance in Israel is important to understanding the meaning of this text

- Areas of historical/cultural study: Politics, Clothing, Legal, Religious, Architectural, Domestic, Economic, Agricultural, Geographical, Military, Social
- Historical issues to consider:
 1. Author: Who wrote the book?
 2. Date: When was it written?
 3. Audience: Who was it written to?
 4. Circumstances/Purpose(s): What was going on at the time? Why was it written?

- How do we know if a passage is culturally conditioned or not?
- Following are some principles which may help us distinguish between transferable and non-transferable situations, commands, or precepts
- The principles can be summarized in the following way:³

1. Permanent things - Some situations, commands, or principles are repeatable, continuous, or not revoked, and/or pertain to moral and theological subjects, and/or are repeated elsewhere in scripture, and therefore are *permanent*. These don't seem to have any specific cultural attachment to them.

Example: Capital punishment (Gen 9:6; Rom 13:1-4)

2. Not Transferable - Some situations, commands, or principles pertain to an individual's specific non-repeatable circumstances, and/or non-moral or non-theological subjects, and/or have been revoked, and are therefore *not transferable* to today.

Example: Paul's instructions to Timothy to bring his cloak and scrolls (2 Tim 4:11-13)

3. Partially Similar, but Principles Transfer - Some situations or commands pertain to cultural settings that are only *partially similar* to ours and in which *only the principles are transferable*.

Example:

- Greet each other with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20) – normal form of greeting then, but not today; but the principle of expressing friendliness and love to others is to be followed
- Teach children God's Word (Deut 6:4-9) – the principle of parents teaching their children the Word is for today, but writing its truths on “the doorframes of your house” is not

4. Not Similar, but Principles Transfer - Some situations or commands pertain to cultural settings with *no similarities* but in which *the principles are transferable*.

Example: women wearing head coverings (1 Cor 11:2-16) – cultural setting isn't relevant for our day (i.e. women don't demonstrate submission to their husbands via head coverings); however, the principle of women submitting to their husband is

➔ What about 1 Timothy 2:11-15?

³Taken from Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill., p. 92-95.

14. Word Study

- Definition: To understand a passage of Scripture, key words within that passage must be defined accurately
- The detailed and thorough study of the individual words of a passage can yield amazing fruit in our understanding of a text
- Words are the most basic building blocks of communication
- Words themselves can communicate complex ideas or simple grammatical concepts, but one of the most important steps in understanding an author is to understand the meaning of the words he uses
- There are at least three factors that we can observe to determine with precision and depth the meaning of a word in the Bible:
 1. Etymology - refers to the root derivation and development of the word; it deals with the origins of the word (i.e. where did it come from?, what did it mean originally?, how did it progress to reach its current meaning?).

For example:

- The Greek word *episkopos* comes from *epi* (over, upon) and *skopeo* (to look); hence an “overseer, elder” is one who “looks over the church”
- The Greek word *parabole* comes from *para* (beside) and *bole* (to throw); hence a parable is an earthly story “thrown alongside” to teach a spiritual reality

2. Usage (comparative study) – The study of how a word is used throughout the Bible is very helpful in understanding how a particular author is using the word in any given verse; studying the many different contexts in which the word is used will give the interpreter a fuller and richer understanding of the meaning of the word

For example:

- The Greek word *cosmos* (world) means the world of people God loves (John 3:16) but also the world system that is evil, headed by Satan, and which leaves God out, the world true Christians are not to love (1 John 2:15-17)

3. Synonyms and antonyms

Synonym examples:

- *heteros* – another of a different kind
- *allos* – another of the same kind

John 14:16 ~ *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever*

- Today there are many excellent, usable lexicons, theological word books, and commentaries that provide scholarly explanations of biblical words for the average Bible student; use them!
 - Theological Wordbook of the OT – R. Laird Harris
 - Theological Dictionary of the NT –
 - Expository Dictionary of OT/NT Words – W. E. Vine
 - New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology – Colin Brown
 - Word Pictures in the New Testament – A. T. Robertson
 - Synonyms of the New Testament – R. C. Trench

15. Grammar and Syntax

- Definition: Grammatical interpretation deals with the arrangement of words into sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books
- If words are the units of language, then sentences are the units of thought - a sentence is a complete thought, and when sentences are organized and arranged in a paragraph, very complex and profound thoughts can be expressed
- The human authors, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have arranged the sentences, paragraphs, etc. in such a way that the exact meaning that God intends is found in the text
- Therefore, in order to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures, the grammar of the text must be understood correctly
- Basic grammatical categories:
 - Nouns, Pronouns, and Articles
 - Verbs – Note the tense, voice, whether singular or plural, and look up the verb in the lexicon so that you can observe its meaning

1. Tense – the portrayal of action with regards to its progress

6 tenses in Greek

Aorist—Undefined

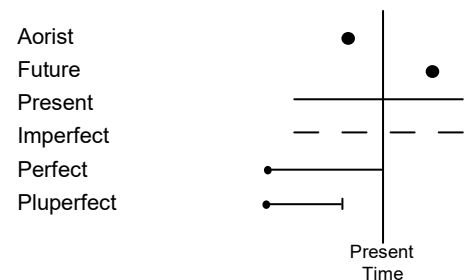
Future—Undefined in future time

Present—Continuous Action

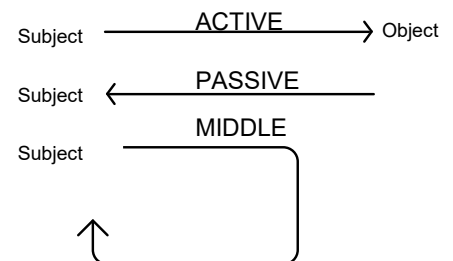
Imperfect—Continuous Action in past time

Perfect—Completed Action with results that continue to present

Pluperfect—Completed Action with results that continue for a time



2. Voice - Indicates how the subject is related to the action expressed by the verb



3. Mood – indicative, imperative, subjunctive (mood of possibility)

4. Person/Number

- Adjectives and Adverbs
- Conjunctions - “and, but, therefore, for”

Ephesians 2:4 ~ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Romans 12:1 ~ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- Prepositions

- Other grammatical things to look for and understand:
 - Patterns in context – look for similar verb forms in the passage, such as five 3 participles:

*Ephesians 5:18-21 ~ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, **speaking** to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and **making melody** with your heart to the Lord; always **giving thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and **being subject** to one another in the fear of Christ.*

- Repeated words – Note words that are repeated within a verse or within a context
 - 49 of the 152 occurrences of “believe” are in the gospel of John
- Words a given writer uses
 - For example, Matthew is the only gospel writer who uses the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” to accommodate to his Jewish audience
- Contrasts

Psalms 1 ~ 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. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

Proverbs 10:2-5 ~ Ill-gotten gains do not profit, But righteousness delivers from death. The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger, But He will reject the craving of the wicked. Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.

- Comparisons

Phil 1:23 ~ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better

- Exhortations/Commands

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

16. The Checking Principle

- Definition: It is good for a student to check his understanding of a passage against the interpretations of Bible scholars from the ages of Christianity
- It is impossible for us to know all of the geographic, historical, and interpretational issues in a passage – information Bible scholars spend a lifetime accumulating
- Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other Bible study tools can shorten that process considerably
- Notice that this principle is last on the list – there is a reason for that
- As a rule it is best to do your own study on a passage and then compare it with someone else’s

SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

1. Figurative/Symbolic Language

- Definition: A figure of speech may be an phrase of a complete sentence in which the author expresses himself in a special way that goes beyond ordinary methods of assertion (Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, 143)
- Modern uses of figurative speech:
 - Get on the bandwagon
 - It's raining cats and dogs
 - I'm so hungry I could eat a horse
 - That's not my cup of tea
 - He's really flipped his lid
 - He kicked the bucket
 - Honey, sugar (said to your sweetheart)
- Over 200 kinds of figures have been distinguished in the Bible
 1. Simile – a formal comparison between two different or unlike things in order to communicate some resemblance or likeness, normally using the words “like” or “as”

Example: He is like a bull in a china shop

Psalm 102:6 ~ I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I have become like an owl of the waste places.

Matthew 23:27 ~ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

2. Metaphor –similar to a simile, but it does not use “like” or “as;” a comparison by actual representation

Example: He is a clumsy ox

Psalm 23:1 ~ The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 84:11 ~ For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

John 15:1 ~ I am the true vine

3. Allegory – an extended metaphor which continues a comparison by representation or by implication; it is a fictitious narrative which may or may not be true to life, containing direct personifications or representations, each with a metaphorical meaning

John 15:1-7

Galatians 4:21-31

4. Ellipsis – a figure intentionally leaving out words for the purpose of emphasizing other parts of the sentence not omitted (...)

Example: Joe studies banking, Tom baking

Romans 8:5 ~ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, [supply words here – set their minds on] the things of the Spirit.

5. Paradox – the expression of two propositions which appear to be contradictory in terms but which may be harmonious when the true sense of each is properly understood and related to the other

Matthew 10:39 ~ He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

6. Irony – the statement of a thought in a way that conveys an idea that is just the opposite; often expressed with sarcasm or contempt

*1 Kings 18:27 ~ 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.”*

7. Hyperbole – using intensified and exaggerated expressions to convey a thought with more force

Example: You scared me to death

*Deuteronomy 1:28 ~ Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, “The people are bigger and taller than we; **the cities are large and fortified to heaven**. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there.”*

Psalms 6:6 ~ I am weary with my sighing; Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears.

8. Synecdoche – expression in which the whole of something is spoken of for the part or the part for the whole

Example: All hands on deck (just the hands?); I like your wheels (just the wheels?)

Micah 4:3 ~ And He will judge between many peoples And render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they train for war. (the abandonment of these 2 weapons represents complete disarmament during the Millennial Kingdom)

Philippians 3:19 ~ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (appetite is representative of all carnal lusts)

9. Euphemism – figure of speech in which the speaker substitutes a gentle, soft expression in the place of a more brutal, hard, or offensive one; used to be less shocking and more prudent

Example: Sanitation engineer (instead of garbage man); Having an affair (rather than adultery)

Genesis 4:1 ~ the man knew Eve

Acts 1:25 ~ Judas turned aside to go to his own place

Acts 7:60 ~ Stephen fell asleep

10. Metonymy – the exchange of one noun for another because the two nouns are often associated together or because one may suggest the other; an object is replaced by a related object

Example: Step on the gas (where “gas” = accelerator); He really used his head (where “head” = brain)

Prov 12:18 ~ the tongue of the wise brings healing. (tongue = words)

Prov 29:15 ~ The rod and reproof give wisdom (rod = discipline)

Luke 16:29 ~ Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ (Moses/Prophets = Word)

- Principles for Interpreting Figurative/Symbolic Language
 1. Consider the context of the passage
 2. Cross reference
 3. Interpret literally and identify the analogy that transfers over
 4. Recognize that the spirit and not the strict letter of a statement is the intended idea

2. Parables

- Definition: A figurative narrative, true to life, designed for the purpose of conveying some specific spiritual truth
- *parabole* comes from 2 Greek words: *para* (“beside”) and *ballo* (“to throw”)
- A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning
- Features of Parables:
 - 1) They deal with things which are true to life. Things are exactly what they profess to be: loaves are loaves, lamps are lamps, etc. The terms used are obvious and clear, drawn from common experience.
 - 2) Not every detail is always intended to convey some definite truth in itself. Sometimes there is but one central point and details simply serve as convenient, necessary drapery.
 - 3) If an interpretation is given in the text itself, it is given apart from the parable, either before it or following it. For example, in Matthew 13, Christ explains two of His parables after giving them.
- Purpose of Parables:
 - Why did Christ speak in parables? → Almost no parables had been spoken before Matthew 13 but Christ began speaking in parables then because the Pharisees attributed his works to Satan, committing the unpardonable sin
 - Thus, Christ began to speak more discreetly in response to the Pharisee’s rejection of Him
 - When Christ began to use parables, the disciples were curious and asked “Why are you teaching in parables?”
 - He answered:

- 1) To fulfill prophecy (Matt 13:14-15)
- 2) To conceal truth from those who are not responsive to truth (Matt 13:10-13)
- 3) To reveal truth to those who are responsive to truth (Matt 13:10-13)

- Rules for Interpreting Parables

- 1) Determine the problem, question, or situation that prompted the parable – this is usually found in the immediate context

Example: The problem that occasioned the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 was the lawyer's questions: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and "Who is my neighbor?" (vs. 25, 29)

- 2) Determine the main truth being illustrated by the parable – try to find the one great and comprehensive idea of the parable. This is important since it will anchor your interpretation within a defined area so you are not like to wander off into your own interpretation. Simply note the story's natural meaning.

Example:

- The main truth of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is that "your neighbor" is anyone you come across
 - Main point of parables in Luke 15 is that Jesus seeks sinners
 - Main point of parables in Matt 13 is what the kingdom in the present age looks like
- 3) Be careful to not force a meaning on all the little details of the parable – we must not make the parable say more than it says

Example: The Parable of the Good Samaritan is not to be interpreted as one church father did by making the following associations:

- The traveler who was attacked represents a person seeking salvation
 - The robbers represent Satan
 - The Good Samaritan is Christ
 - The oil and wine the Samaritan administered to the injured man's wounds picture the Holy Spirit and forgiveness
 - The donkey is the Gospel because it was the vehicle that carried the injured man to the inn
 - The inn is the church where the man recovered
- 4) Validate the main truth of the parable with direct teaching of Scripture
 - 5) Note the actual or intended response of the hearers

3. Narrative

- Narrative portions of Scripture record God’s dealings with His people in the unfolding of progressive revelation and the historical events surrounding it
- Principles for interpreting Biblical narrative:
 - 1) Read the whole account through a number of times to get a good grasp of the story
 - 2) Look for the overall theological message of the story – what was the author’s purpose for writing? Rarely (if ever) was it merely to provide a record of historical events.

4 ways to find the author’s overall theological message:

- a. Check to see if the message is clearly stated in the introduction or conclusion of the narrative

Example: John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:13

- b. Consider what historical information the author chose to include and exclude – his choice to include some details and exclude others tells you the theological message he was trying to communicate

Example:

- Why did the Gospel writers include so little about Jesus’ childhood and you and so much about the final week of His life? → The first one (His youth) is a curiosity; the second (His death/resurrection) is the heart of the Gospel message. What the Gospel writers excluded and what they included point you to the overall message of the Gospels: Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sinners
 - Why did Jonah include that funny little section about the gourd and the worm in chapter 4? → Jonah’s compassion on the plant is contrasted with God’s compassion on sinners, highlighting Jonah’s message which is God’s compassion
- c. Consider why the author put the material in the order he did – biblical narrative is not always strictly chronological
 - d. Look for repeated words or concepts that suggest the theme of the narrative

Example: Notice how the often-repeated phrase in Acts “and God was adding to their number” demonstrates the theme of the book (2:47; 4:33; 5:14, 42; 6:17; 8:4; 11:9-21; 12:24; 28:30-31). The faithful preaching of the gospel by the early church and the resulting increase in converts is the message of Acts.

- e. Take note of key connecting comments included by the author as he ties together parts of the story

3) God is always the main character of biblical narrative

Example:

- Jonah isn't about a naughty prophet and a hungry whale. It's about God and His compassion on sinners
- Daniel 4 is not about Nebuchadnezzar and his bad dream. It's about God who can humble the proud

4) Traps to avoid

- a. Do not merely focus on a good or bad behavior in the narrative. Fit that incident into the larger theological message
- b. The ethical principles (do this...don't do this) you draw from biblical history must be clearly taught in a teaching section of Scripture

Example: There is much in David's life NOT to imitate

- c. Exercise caution when developing doctrine out of a narrative section. Didactic or teaching sections always take precedence. Too often a narrative is twisted to "prove" something it was never intended to teach.

Example: Is Elijah's "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) normative for today?

4. *Types*

- Definition: A type is an OT person, animal, object, event, or institution which first has its place and design in an actual historical situation itself but at the same time is specifically intended by God to pre-figure some greater future reality. This is usually and most prominently with regard to Christ in His person and/or work.
 - A. It is an Illustration – it serves as a picture of the greater reality yet to come. The analogy should be obvious, not obscure, direct, not round about...the central idea should be easily recognized and not contrived
 - B. It involves a person, object, event, or institution – i.e. Melchizedek, Passover lamb, brazen serpent, the Passover, the tabernacle
 - C. It is rooted in history – whatever the type was, it can be interpreted by the literal method as serving some real function that was meaningful in its own day and recognized by the people
 - D. It (the type) pre-figures something future which is greater (the antitype) – it is truly historical but beyond that is also a foreshadowing of a future reality

- Examples of Types:
 - **Melchizedek** > Christ's perpetual priesthood; Heb. 7:3, 15-17
 - **Aaron** > Christ's priestly ministry; Heb. 5:4-5
 - **Passover feast** > Christ our sacrifice; 1 Cor. 5:7
 - **Feast of Unleavened Bread** > Believer's holy walk; 1 Cor. 5:7-8
 - **Sabbath** > The Christian's spiritual rest; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:3,9, 11
 - **Serpent lifted up in the wilderness** > Christ on the cross; John 3:14-15

- Caution: We must be careful about drawing too many spiritual truths where the Scriptures do not designate it