

A BASIC GUIDE TO INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Playing by the Rules

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This book will help the reader understand what is involved in the interpretation of the Bible. By helping readers acquire an interpretative framework that will help them understand better the meaning of biblical texts and how to apply that meaning to their own life situation.

Chapter 1 - Who Makes Up the Rules? An Introduction to Hermeneutics

The term “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek term *hermēneucin*, which means to explain or interpret. A noun formed from this verb, *Hermes*, was the name given to the Greek god who was the spokesman or interpreter for the other gods. The term “hermeneutics,” simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation.

In all communication three distinct components must be present. The *Author*, the *Text*, the *Reader*. Linguists say, the *Encoder*, the *Code*, and the *Decoder*. Still another way of describing this is: The *Sender*, the *Message*, and the *Receiver*. Unless all three elements are present, communication is impossible.

The main goal, of interpreting the Bible is to discover the “meaning” of the text being studied. Yet where does this meaning originate: Some interpreters argue that it comes from one component, whereas others argue that it comes from another.

Some have suggested that meaning is a property of the text. This view argues that a literary text is “autonomous.” It possesses semantic autonomy in the sense that its meaning is completely independent of what its author meant. As a result, reading a related work such as Galatians in order to help us understand what Paul meant when he wrote Romans makes little or no sense. Furthermore, what Paul actually meant when he wrote Romans is no more valuable in determining the actual meaning of Romans than any other person’s opinion. According to this view, the text is independent of and has no connection with its author. It possesses its own meaning(s). According to this view, when a work becomes “literature” the normal rules of communication no longer apply. This is a very popular approach among literary critics.

Meaning is a product of reasoning and thought. It is something only people can do. Whereas a text can convey meaning, it cannot produce meaning. Thus, the production of meaning can only come from either the author or the reader.

Some interpreters claim that the meaning of a text “actualizes: it. This should not be confused with thinking that the reader learns-deciphers-discovers-ascertains the meaning the text possesses in and of itself (the view described above). This view maintains that the person who reads the text determines its meaning. Each individual as he or she reads the text creates the meaning.

This view (sometimes called “reception theory,” “reader-response criticism,”) if different readers come up with different meanings, this is simply due to the fact that a text permits the reader to discern multiple meanings. This view assumes that there are many legitimate meanings of a text. The text functions somewhat like an inkblot into which the reader pours his or her own meaning.

The more traditional approach to see the meaning as being controlled by the author. This view, the meaning of a text is what the author consciously intended to say to his text.

The view argues that the Bible to be interpreted in the same way that we interpret other forms of verbal communication. This is essentially the commonsense approach to communication.

It has been argued that “literature” is to be interpreted differently from all other forms of written communication. Literature does not fall under the rules of written communication but of “art.”

But who determines what is “literature”? There is no rule, law, or consensus.

Second, no one has yet been able to prove that “literature” should be interpreted by a different set of rules than other writings.

To deny that the author determines the text’s meaning also raises an ethical question. Such an approach appears to rob the author of his or her creation.

Objections against the view that the meaning of a text is determined by the author. One of the most famous objections called the “international fallacy.” Made famous by Wimsatt and Beardsley, argues it is impossible to climb into the mind of an author and experience everything that was going through his mind as he wrote. As a result of such considerations, it is argued that the meaning Paul willed is inaccessible.

But the primary goal is not to experience or reduplicate Paul’s mental and emotional experiences when he wrote. Rather the goal is to understand what Paul “meant,” what he consciously sought to communicate to his readers by what he wrote. This objection confuses two different aspects of communication. A careful distinction must be made between what Paul wished to convey in his text and the mental, emotional, and psychological experiences he went through while writing. The goal of interpretation is not to relive Paul’s emotional and mental state, but to understand what he meant by the written text he gave us. The international fallacy appears to confuse the meaning of a text with the experiences of the writer as he wrote.

The intentional fallacy also argued an author may intend to convey a particular meaning but be incapable of adequately expressing this. The author may be linguistically incompetent. Authors could even mislead the reader by a poor or wrong choice of words. Those who write outlining this

problem usually think that they are sufficiently competent to express their thoughts adequately. Why then deny this competence to other writers?

For the Christian, the belief that the Bible is inspired introduces a component of divine enabling into the situation. The authors of the Bible were given a divine competence to communicate in their writing.

Another objection involves the psychological differences between the author and the reader. The reader is different psychologically. As a result, a reader can never understand what an author truly meant by his or text.

A related objection a modern reader is not able to understand the meaning of an ancient author such as Paul.

These objections should not be minimized. Far too often we tend to modernize ancient writers. Consequently we misunderstand them. On the other hand, we can also overemphasize these differences. After all we are not trying to understand the thoughts of worms or toads!

One final objection involves those texts in which an author appeals to a faith experience. How can an atheist or unbeliever understand? We must distinguish between understanding what the author means by these words and understanding the subject matter he is discussing. An atheist can understand what the psalmist means by his discussion of this issue. An atheist, however, can never understand the truth of the subject matter, the experience, of which the psalmist speaks.

What a biblical author willed by his text is anchored in history. What the author willed to communicate back then can never change. What a text meant when it was written, it will always mean.

Yet what an author such as Paul consciously willed to say in the past also has implications of which he was not necessarily aware. Those implications are also part of the meaning of the text.

Paul gave a principle or pattern of meaning that has implications about not becoming drunk with beer, whiskey, rum, vodka, or champagne. These implications do not conflict with his original meaning. It is true that they go beyond his conscious thinking when he wrote, but they are included in the principle Paul wished to communicate in this verse.

The purpose of biblical interpretation involves not just understanding the specific conscious meaning of the author but also the principle or pattern of meaning he sought to communicate. If we understand Paul's command as a principle, it would appear this passage does prohibit the use of narcotics. The principle or pattern of meaning willed by Paul "Do not take into your body substances

like wine that cause you to lose control of your senses and natural inhibitions.” Every text has implications or unconscious meanings its author was not aware of but which fit the meaning willed in the text. The main concern of interpretation to understand what the legitimate implications of an author’s meaning are.

Consider whether Jesus was thinking along these lines when he said, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder . . .’ but I tell you . . .” Jesus describes the higher righteousness by bringing out the implications of Moses’ commandments. To understand the divine meaning of Scripture is to understand the conscious meaning of God’s inspired servants who wrote them. It is in, not behind or beyond, the meaning the author wished to share that we find the meaning God wished to share in the Scriptures!

Those who argue that the Bible must be interpreted literally at all times is an error. For it loses sight of the fact that the biblical writers used various literary forms in their works such as proverbs, poetry, hyperbole, and parables. They never intended that their readers should interpret such passages literally. Thus, the conscious willed meaning of Jesus when he said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26), is not that his disciples must literally hate their parents. It means rather that to be disciples of Jesus we must place him before everything. Similarly, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is to be interpreted as a parable, and thus according to the rules governing the interpretation of parables. It is not to be interpreted as a historical account. (Luke reveals this by the introduction “A certain man . . .” which is used in the Gospel to introduce parables. This is clearer in the Greek text than in most translations.

A text consists of a collection of verbal symbols, letters, punctuation marks, accents (Greek), or vowel pointing (Hebrew).

In writing, an author therefore creates a text that possesses “shareability.” Shareability is the common understanding of a text’s words and grammar possessed by both author and reader. Apart from this a reader cannot understand what an author wills to say. Thus, if we understand how the author’s intended audience would have understood the text, we, as readers today can also understand the meaning of that same text. We can learn words (vocabulary), grammatical construction (syntax), and context of the text.

Within the norms of language, however, words possess a range of possible meanings. Context narrows down the possible meanings to just one – the specific meaning found in the statement itself.

The sentence in which symbols occur, the paragraph in which they are found, the chapter in which he places them – reveals the specific meaning.

Be careful to focus our attention on the meaning rather than on various subject matters.

Perhaps the greatest need in reading the Bible is to distinguish the vast amount of information that we can learn from the biblical texts from the meaning the authors give to that information.

The reader begins with the knowledge that the individual building blocks of the text, the words, fit within the norms of the language of the original readers. Seeing how words are used in phrases and sentences, how sentences are used within paragraphs, paragraphs in chapters, chapters in the work, the reader seeks to understand the author's intent in writing this work. This process is called the "hermeneutical circle" refers to the fact that the whole text helps the reader understand each individual word or part of the text, at the same time the individual words and parts help us understand the meaning of the text as a whole.

A biblical author, other writings especially helpful in providing clues to the meaning of the words and phrases in his text. Other works written by people of similar conviction As a result, to understand what Paul means in a particular verse in Romans the reader should look at the way he thinks and writes in the verses surrounding that text, neighboring chapters, rest of that books, then in Galatians, then in 1 and 2 Corinthians, then other Pauline writing. The reader can also look elsewhere. Order of importance rest of the New Testament, Old Testament; intertestamental literature; rabbinic literature; early church fathers; contemporary Greek literature.

It is also important for the reader to understand the particular literary form being used by the author, for different forms of literature are governed by different rules. The careful argumentation of Paul in Romans must be interpreted differently from the poetic form in which the psalmist has expressed his meaning.

Once the reader knows the meaning of the author, he or she will need to seek out those implications of that meaning that are especially relevant. Although the meaning of a text never changes because it is locked in past history, its significance is always changing. This is why some people claim that the Scriptures have different "meanings." (The instances in which an author willed a "double meaning" pun are quite rare.) A text, however, has different "significances" for different readers. There is one meaning to a text, that meaning consciously willed by the author, but the particular way that meaning affects the readers, its significance, will be quite different.

Chapter 2 – Defining the Rules: A Vocabulary for Interpretation

One of the major problems encountered in interpreting the Bible is imprecise terminology. This chapter a precise hermeneutical vocabulary involved in the process of interpretation.

Meaning

***The meaning of a text is that pattern of meaning the author willed
To convey by the words (shareable symbols) he used.***

All three components of communication are present in this definition. *Author, text, reader*, the biblical author is the determiner of the text's meaning. The meaning of text can never change, it is locked in history.

Implications

***Implications are those meanings in a text of which the author was
Unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of
Meaning he willed.***

The goal of biblical interpretation is to understand not just the specific meaning of the authors of Scripture but also by understanding their willed pattern of meaning, to understand the various implications. The interpreter of Scripture ascertains or discovers these implications, but it is the author alone who has determined them. The miner seeks to discover the gold that God created and that lies in the mountain. Similarly, the interpreter seeks to discover the implications that the biblical author created and that lie in his willed pattern of meaning.

Luther saw buying indulgences or doing penance as a sixteenth century attempt to establish a relationship with God that depended on one's own actions. It was to renounce the biblical relationship that rests on God's grace and is mediated by faith alone.

Similarly, the commandment "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" Exodus 21:23-25, unconscious meanings. The intended pattern of meaning was the punishment should befit the crime.

The meaning, which an author wills, includes all the implications or unconscious meanings contained in the pattern (or type) he is teaching.

Significance

Significance refers to how a reader responds to the meaning of a text.

There is a close relationship between the significance and the implications. The reason is Christians attribute positive significance to the implications of such texts. Significance involves a person's attitude toward the meaning of a text. The effect that the text's meaning has on the reader.

Meaning belongs to the author; significance belongs to the reader.

Significance is multifaceted. The significance of a text for one person may be quite different than its significance for another.

The significance of a text's meaning must be distinguished from the implications of the text's meaning. Significance is something that readers do as they respond to the meaning of the text. Implications, however, lie outside the domain of the interpreter. They are determined by the author. They are only discovered or learned by the reader. However, to these implications the reader can say "Yes" or "No." He or she can obey or reject them. Significance refers to the response of the interpreter and involves the will. "Application" is sometimes used to describe "significance."

Subject Matter

Subject matter refers to the content or "stuff" talked about in a text.

The subject matter of a text involves the area of knowledge concerning which the text is speaking.

Genesis 1-3 – the creation of the world, ancient traditions about creation, the literary and oral sources used by the author, authorship, date, etc.

Psalms – Hebraic poetry, ancient Jewish liturgical formulas, Jewish worship, the classification of psalm forms, authorship, date, etc.

Proverbs – ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, the literary genre of proverbs, authorship, date, etc.

Gospels – the life of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, the literary relationship of the Gospels, the classification of the Gospel periscopes, the history of the oral traditions, authorship, date, etc.

The ones listed are all legitimate and interesting areas of study, but none of these involves the meaning of the text. Distinction must be maintained between subject matter found in the text and meaning the author gives to this subject matter.

The "text" is the meaning the author attributes to the "event" (subject matter).

Understanding

Understanding refers to the correct mental grasp of the author's meaning.

Since there is a single meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands this meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding. Thus every correct mental grasp of the author's meaning, or understanding, will be the same.

Because understanding is defined as a "correct" mental grasp of meaning, there cannot be an "incorrect" understanding; an incorrect mental grasp of meaning *misunderstanding*.

Interpretation

Interpretation refers to the verbal or written expression of a reader's Understanding of the author's meaning.

There are an almost infinite number of ways of expressing understanding. There are many ways of explaining the same perception of meaning. In this ministry Jesus taught that the kingdom of God had come, but he used several different parables to teach this. We can also rephrase and use different vocabulary to express the same thought or understanding.

"Unconscious meaning," "submeaning" "subtype" "implication." Here, these terms are synonyms.

Although understanding and interpretation are closely related, they are quite different. Understanding precedes interpretation. Understanding involves thinking and is "mental" whereas interpretation is "verbal."

Interpretation should not be confused with "translation." The latter is an attempt to express the conscious meaning of an author using the verbal symbols of another language.

Mental Acts

Mental acts refer to the experiences the author went through when writing the text.

Understanding what an author willed to convey by his words is quite understandable apart from knowing his mental acts while writing.

What authors consciously willed to convey to their readers we can know. Their willed meaning is available to us and can be understood, because we possess their texts. But their private experiences are not available. Unless an author chose to share such experiences with his readers, they are inaccessible, such investigation is highly speculative and of little value.

Norms of Language

The norms of language are the range of meanings allowed by the words (verbal symbols) of a text.

A word can possess a range of possible meanings.

Humpty Dumpty is correct. He can make a word mean whatever he wants it to mean. But – and this is critical – if he wants to communicate his meaning to others, then he must submit himself to the norms of language.

The reason why New Testament scholars study Greek and Old Testament Hebrew (an Aramaic) is because the biblical writers wrote and willed their meaning under the norms of these languages. And the reason New Testament scholars study koine Greek rather than classical Greek is that the New Testament authors assumed that their readers knew and would interpret their works according to the Greek of their day, koine Greek.

Norms of the Utterance

The norms of the utterance is the specific meaning that the author has given to a word, phrase, sentence, and the like in a text.

When an author uses a word in a text, it means only one thing. The task of interpretations is to discover this one specific meaning. The interpreter is seeking the norms of the utterance. The norms of language limit the number of possibilities. Through the context the biblical author gives, he assists his reader in narrowing down the possible meanings to the one specific meaning.

Literary Genre

Literary genre refers to the literary form being used by the author and the rules governing that form.

Apart from a correct analysis of the literary form of a text and an application of the rules governing that genre, a correct understanding of the author's meaning is impossible.

Context

Context refers to the willed meaning that an author gives to the literary materials surrounding his text.

The way an author helps his readers understand the meaning he seeks to convey is through context. Apart from the willed meaning of the author, the verbal symbols that make up the context possess no meaning. We must understand literary context as consisting of what the author means by the shareable symbols he used before and after the text being investigated. "Context," the shared pattern of meaning willed by the author in the words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters surrounding the text.

Good authors seek to assist their readers by providing a context whose meaning will be easily understood.

The immediate literary context surrounding a text is the most valuable context available. Other literary contexts are of value to the degree that their authors thought like and used terms and grammar like the author. What biblical writers believed, wished, and meant by their texts can only be known by the texts they have written and the literary contexts they have provided.

Great confusion can result if we do not pay careful attention to context. For instance, Paul (Romans 4:1-25) and James (2:14-26) use the term "faith."

Chapter 3 – Can Anyone Play This Game? The Spirit and Biblical Interpretation

Throughout the entire process of interpreting the Bible, the Holy Spirit is intimately involved. He was involved at the very beginning, as the cause of the inscripturation of the biblical materials. It was through his divine inspiration that the biblical authors wrote the Scriptures. He was involved in the recognition of which books were inspired and to be included in the New Testament (development of the New Testament canon). The Spirit is also involved at the end of the interpretative process, as the believer seeks to apply the biblical teaching to his or her life.

The Bible is the product of divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is the Word of God and reveals what Christians are to believe (matters of faith) and how they are to live (matters of practice). Terms "infallible" and "inerrant" often used to describe the reliability of the Bible. The former focuses on the doctrinal reliability of the Bible; the latter on its factual reliability. These terms meaningless apart from an explanation of "what" is infallible and inerrant.

The terms “infallible” and “inerrant” are judgments of propositions. They are evaluations of statements of meaning. The Christian claim that the Bible is infallible or inerrant means in essence that “what the authors of Scripture willed to convey by their words,” their proposition or pattern of meaning is true with regard to what they willed to convey. “Infallibility” means that what the authors willed to convey with regard to matters of faith (doctrine) and practice (ethics) are true and will never lead us astray. “Inerrant” means that what the authors willed to convey with regard to matters of fact (history, geography, science, etc.) are also true and will never lead us astray. Determinative at all times, however involves what the author, led by the Spirit, sought to convey by his text.

The “what” of inspiration involves the Spirit’s guiding the authors of Scripture as they wrote. As they wrote they were “carried along” (2 Peter 1:21) by the Spirit, so that their writings are for the Christian the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Various passages reveal divine superintendence extends to the very words (“verbal symbols”) used by the authors (cf. Matt. 5:18; Gal. 3:16). “How” the Spirit guided the authors in their writing is far from clear. A vision, a voice.

“Canon” is a Greek word that referred to a staff or straight rod used as a means of measurement. The term soon came to mean a “rule” or “standard.”

The process of recognizing which of the various books were part of the canon a number of actors played a role. The church did not “make” these books into the Word of God but merely “recognized” which books were in fact the Word of God. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the books of the New Testament became the Word of God. Thus the canon of the New Testament was “closed” when the last book of the New Testament was written.

One of the factors in recognizing books of the New Testament canon was apostolic authorship or association with an apostle. Thus, Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine epistles were assumed to be part of the canon due to their being apostolic. This was true also of the Gospels of Matthew and John. Luke – Acts was associated with Paul; Mark with Peter; and Hebrews with Paul. Another factor was antiquity and continuous usage throughout the church. Still another factor was the unity and agreement of these books with the rest of Scripture. The Spirit could not have inspired works that contradicted.

God’s Superintendence and Spirit’s Guidance

Another important factor was the divine superintendence of this process by the Holy Spirit. Through his leading the church recognized which books belonged to the canon of Scripture. God sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. The New Testament teaches that God through his Spirit then went on to inspire the recording and interpretation of that great redemptive event. Thus, not only the birth

life-death resurrection of God's Son was sovereignly ruled over by God but also the interpretation and recording of that event. The church was led by the Spirit to recognize which books were divinely inspired and the infallible rule of faith and practice of the church.

Although it cannot be "proven," God likewise saw to it that those inspired texts would not be lost or corrupted in any major way.

Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers reflected on how the Spirit was involved in the interpretation of Scripture, they spoke of the inward work of illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Spirit we cannot "fully" or "truly" understand the Bible. The Spirit helps the reader understand the pattern of meaning that the author willed and convinces the reader as to the truth of that teaching.

Textual support for this view seen in 1 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul states, "The man with the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Apart from the Spirit, a person cannot "understand" the meaning of biblical texts.

What does Paul mean, apart from the Spirit these things are "foolishness"? Does he mean that a person without the Spirit will not be able to come to a correct mental grasp of what the biblical text means? Is Paul saying the apart from the Spirit the biblical teachings are incomprehensible?

"Foolishness" is best understood by observing how Paul uses it elsewhere. The term "foolishness" in 1 Corinthians 3:19 refers not to what we have called "understanding" but rather to "significance." In 1 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Corinthians 2:14 as well as 3:19, Paul uses the expression "foolish" to refer to the significance God attributes to something (this world's wisdom).

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 what Paul is saying is not that unbelievers cannot arrive at a correct mental grasp of the things of the Spirit, they can and do, but they attribute a negative significance. They reject it as "foolishness."

In a similar way the terms for "understand" in 1 Corinthians 2:12 and 14 are best understood as meaning something different than acquiring a correct mental grasp of meaning. It refers rather to embracing as true these biblical truths. "Does not accept," "foolishness," and "cannot understand",

referring to various ways in which the unbeliever critiques the divine revelation. Understanding of the text is rejected in several different ways: it is not accepted, welcomed, because it is opposed to human wisdom. (1 Cor. 1:18-25); it is judged as foolishness, it is not believed as being true because only the Spirit can convince us of the truth of the gospel message.

Non-Christians can arrive at a correct mental grasp of the meaning of the Bible. Otherwise why try to explain the gospel message to them? A Christian apologetic and defense of the faith to unbelievers is based on the assumption that they are capable of understanding the teachings of Scripture.

Where then does the work of the Spirit come into play? Revealing the “implications” of the author’s pattern of meaning?

It is quite apparent that evangelical Christians do not have a corner on understanding the Bible. I have frequently learned more from reading the works of nonevangelicals than those of evangelicals. Even without the Spirit, they are able to describe accurately and well what the authors of Scripture meant in their texts, and we can benefit from their labors.

How do the fall and the resulting depravity of humanity affect the ability of people to understand divine revelations? Without minimizing the effect of the fall, we must guard against exaggerating its effect as well. The ability to understand what an ancient author meant has not been lost. We can understand the writings of other people. We can also understand the meaning the biblical writers sought to share. Sin may cause us not to want to accept/believe what they say, but this involves significance and not understanding. There is nothing in Scripture that tells us that the regenerating work of the Spirit transforms the mental abilities of people. What it does affect is our value system, the significance we attribute to the meaning of biblical texts.

What are the implications of this for the study of the Bible? Several, one, the role of the Spirit in interpretation is not an excuse for laziness. All the prayer in the world cannot substitute for a Bible dictionary, if we do not know the meaning of a biblical word. For understanding the biblical text, no replacement for looking up how the author uses such terms elsewhere. The Holy Spirit brings to the believer a blessed assurance of the truthfulness of the biblical teachings, but he cannot be manipulated to cover for laziness in the study of the Word of God.

On the other hand, to pray that the Spirit would help us recognize the truth of the text or to show which of the implications apply particularly to us and our situation is both highly appropriate and devout.

Chapter 4 – Different Games in the Same Book: Different Forms of Scripture

Within the Bible, there exist two main kinds of language “referential language” and “commissive language.” Referential language, main goal is to pass on information. This form seeks to describe. It seeks to be nonemotional in nature. It seeks to pass on facts.

Commissive language has as it’s main goal evoking decisions, conveying emotions, eliciting feelings, and arousing the emotions. Referential language appeals to the “mind,” commissive language appeals to the “heart.” We read an automobile manual in a different way than we read a love letter.

Automobile repair manuals are meant to be taken literally, and are referential in nature. Love letters are interpreted figuratively, metaphorically, for they are commissive in nature.

It should not be concluded that referential language cannot convey emotions or that commissive language cannot convey information. Some information by its very nature will elicit feelings.

Similarly, a love letter, despite its commissive nature, nevertheless conveys information.

“Referential” and “commissive: are not exclusive in nature. They reflect the primary purpose of the language being used.

“Referential” and “commissive” extend to the very words used within those forms. Smart advertisers, preachers, and propagandists are well aware of how the choice of the right word can affect people.

The biblical writers consciously chose to use words and literacy forms that would best convey their meaning. Thus we find in the Bible various letters such as those of Paul, Peter, and John. At other times the narrative form was used to share information that we primarily historical in nature.

Other forms of literature tend to be more commissive in nature, certainly the Psalms and the Song of Solomon. Some biblical literature tends to contain elements of both kinds of language. Proverbs and prophecy are examples.

It is clear that there are various kinds of literary forms in the Bible. Each possesses its own rules of interpretation. Authors consciously submitted themselves to the rules governing these forms in order to share their meaning. If we are not aware of the rules under which the biblical author wrote, misinterpretation almost certainly will take place. Unless we understand the rules under which the game is played, what is taking place is bound to be misinterpreted.

Are the Beatitudes to be understood as entrance requirements for salvation or as ascriptions of praise and congratulations to those who already possess salvation? The Beatitudes are to be understood as blessings pronounced upon those already within the kingdom. The grammatical form is that of a pronouncement. Matthew 5:3 and 10 both end with “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” interpreted as blessings pronounced upon God’s people.

The following chapter will look at the rules governing various forms of biblical literature. Norms of language involved in proverbs; prophecy; poetry; idioms; hyperbole; parables; biblical narrative; epistles, covenants; laws and commandments; and psalms.

Chapter 5 – The Game of Wisdom – Proverbs

Proverb is a short pithy saying, frequently using metaphorical language, which expresses a general truth. Sometimes called “maxims: or “aphorism.” The proverb a popular form of Jesus’ teachings also scattered throughout the rest of the Bible.

It is apparent that proverbs are less than absolute in their applicability. Proverbs cannot be considered absolute laws, there are exceptions to them. They are true in general.

Proverbs are not even “promises.” They are general observations learned from a wise and careful look at life. Not limited to the Bible but is found throughout ancient Near, Eastern, Greek, and Egyptian literature. Yet the biblical proverbs have an added dimension formulated by observing life in the light of divine revelation. Thus biblical proverbs reveal the best of human wisdom filtered through the revelation of Scripture and recorded under the direction of the Spirit.

A proverb, general truth concerning life. A biblical proverb, general truth concerning life from a divine perspective. Exceptions in no way refutes the truth of the proverb, what the proverb says is true in the majority.

Book of Job wrestles with this very problem.

In the case of Job, proverbs do not fit. He is an exception. His misfortunes are not due to his sin. Some proverbs can be universal in scope, but a proverb need not be universal, as long as it involves observations of what generally happens in life. Wise and memorable observations, usually found in poetic form, provide inspired principles upon which believers can and should build their lives.

The authors of the biblical proverbs wanted their readers to interpret them as general truths and to understand the meaning he willed to convey through them.

Chapter 6 – The Game of Prediction – Prophecy

Prophecy is found throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Frequently a distinction is made between “prophecy” and “apocalyptic.” The former is usually associated with “this” worldly events, whereas the latter is associated with “other” worldly events. Overly simplistic, for, prophecy frequently uses cosmic terminology in its depiction of “this” worldly future events. In this chapter not distinguish between prophecy and apocalyptic.

Within this literary genre some rules are not clear to us today, and this causes serious difficulties in interpreting this kind of literature.

One of the rules of prophetic literature that most readers are unaware of involves prophecies of judgment.

This rule concerning judgment prophecies, is found in Jeremiah 18:7-8: “If at any time I [the Lord] announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.” Similarly, “if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it: (vv. 9-10; cf. Ezek. 33:13-15).

The rule is that judgment prophecies are conditional. Judgment prophecies always assume that if the hearers repent, the judgment will not take place.

Another aspect of prophecy, the interpreter must reckon involves the vocabulary used by the prophetic writers. Much terminology in prophecy makes use of customary imagery used in this genre.

Because of the cosmic imagery found in prophecy, many interpreters assume that it is referring to the end of history.

Such terminology, however, was part of the imagery and symbolism available to the prophets when they sought to describe God’s intervention in history and his sovereign rule over the kingdoms of the world. Such imagery was not meant to be interpreted literally. The imagery, was understood by the prophet as stock terminology used in this kind of literature to describe God’s intervention into history.

The Figurative Nature of Prophetic Language

We must not confuse the metaphorical nature of the language the prophet uses with the meaning he wills by that language. (Other examples of figurative terminology in prophecy: Isa, 3:24-41, 34:1-17; Jer. 4:23-31; 15:8-9; Nah. 1:4-5; Hab. 1:6-9; Mark 13:14-16.)

There are times when a prophetic text appears to have a fulfillment other than what the prophet himself apparently expected.

It seems arrogant to assume that our knowledge is sufficiently greater than that of the inspired prophets that we can know something about their words of which they were totally unaware. Two errors, one demeans divine inspiration, the other elevates human reason to the extent that the latter is greater than the former!

Whereas in Isaiah's day the prophet means that a maiden would give birth to a son who was named "Immanuel," that willed meaning also allows for a virgin one day to give birth to a son who would be Immanuel. Whereas God showed his covenantal faithfulness by leading, his "son," his children, back from Egypt to the promised land in Moses' day so also did he lead his "Son," Jesus, back from Egypt to the promised land.

I would suggest that the ancient prophets "painted" their prophetic message along the lines of nineteenth-century impressionists as Monet and Renoir than in the manner of the Flemish and Italian schools of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In the interpretation of prophetic literature remember meaning is determined by the author. The author sought to share divinely revealed meaning by means of this particular literary form. Submitted to the rules governing this form of literature.

We must interpret his work within the historical and literary context of his day. If we tear prophecy out of this context and neglect those rules, we will treat his prophetic message as predictive inkblots into which we will pour our own meanings. As a result, the prophetic message will no longer be a "word from God's inspired prophet" but rather a "word from a confused reader."

What was a future prediction "then" may no longer be a future prediction "now". Numerous prophetic predictions have already found their fulfillment. The birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Isa. 4, 7, 9, 11, 40, 53; Jer. 23, 33; Mic. 5; Zech. 3); the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Jer. 31; Joel 2). Others still await fulfillment such as the coming of a great tribulation (Matt. 24; Mark 13; 2 Thes. 2); the glorious appearing of the Son of Man (Matt. 24; Mark 13; 1 Thes. 4; 2 Thes. 2); and the final judgment (Matt. 25; Rev. 20).

Chapter 7 – The Game of Rhythm – Poetry

One of the literary forms found most frequently in the Bible is poetry. What distinguishes biblical poetry from prose is not one single feature as a combination of them. The most important feature is “parallelism” or rhythmic balance between different lines. Another feature is “terseness.” Poetry lines tend to be much shorter in comparison to prose. The lines also tend to be of “equal length.” Poetry also tends to be “disinclined to use conjunctions and particles.” Poetry is far more inclined to use “figurative language.”

Poetry was not clearly distinguished from prose in older translations such as King James. Yet even in the prose sections of the Bible, we find major sections of poetry (see Gen. 3:14-19; 4:23-24; 49; Exod. 15; Deut. 32-33; Judges 5).

The use of poetry in ancient times, indicates writer is less concerned with precise description or scientific accuracy than with evoking emotions and creating certain impressions. Poetry is “commissive” rather than “referential.” We are fortunate in the Bible at least two places where prose and poetic accounts of the same event appear side by side. They function in different ways.

In the fourth chapter of Judges the author describes in prose form the defeat of the Canaanite commander, Sisera, by the Israelite tribes. The battle is described in the straight forward manner of a historical narrative in verses 12 – 16, as is the death of Sisera in verses 17-22. A historical summary concludes the account in verses 23 – 24. In chapter 5, however, the account is quite different. The solid black prose of chapter 4 has given way to the broken, uneven “white” space of chapter 5. Chapter 5 consists of poetry. The writer even tells us this in verse 1 when he states, “On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam *sang this song.*”

When we compare the poetic description of the battle in chapter 5 with that of chapter 4, we notice several differences.

A final illustration of the poetic nature of chapter 5 can be seen by comparing the description of the death of Sisera in 5:24–30 with that in 4:17–22.

Another example in which we find a poetic account standing side by side with a prose account of the same event is found in Exodus 14 and 15. Chapter 14 is prose because of its solid black paragraphs, chapter 15 is clearly poetry because of the unevenness of its paragraphs and amount of “white space.”

In Colossians 1:15-20 we have an example of New Testament poetry that is quite troubling. The poetic character of this passage is not delineated in the English translations, but it is in the Greek New Testament.

The difficulty in interpreting this passage is due to 1:20. At first glance this verse appears to reach universalism, that in the end all people will be saved. God has revealed elsewhere in numerous places that, when people die without having repented and having put their faith in Jesus Christ, the result is eternal separation from God, hell. The basic problem with this passage is that it appears to conflict with what Paul and the Scriptures clearly teach elsewhere.

Interpreting 1:20, takes into consideration the poetic nature of this passage. The word “all” is used eight times in the Greek text. In the Jewish and Greek literature of Paul’s day, the term “all” appears with unusual frequency in statements describing God’s role in creation. The poetic nature of the passage should caution us against demanding a literal interpretation of this term. “Poetic license” might require its use in this passage even if the author did not want the term to be interpreted literally.

All things were created by him and for him (1:16d)

And through him to reconcile to himself all things (1:20a)

In light of this poetic parallelism, we need to be careful not to press this language too literally, Colossians 1:15-20 is best understood as a joyous, poetic statement (it may even be a song) that celebrates the creative and redemptive work of Jesus as the Redeemer and Lord of all creation.

The meaning of Colossians 1:15-20. What Paul meant to reveal in this poem is that Jesus Christ is divine, that he is the one who is to inherit the rule of the world and that it is through his sacrificial death that God has brought about reconciliation with the church. To require these statements be interpreted literally in each instance, is to violate the norms of language involving poetry under which the apostle worked.

What is essential to biblical poetry is “parallelism.” This means that the lines of Hebrew poetry have a similar cadence or rhythm. Rhythmic parallelism can occur in different forms.

Synonymous Parallelism

Various lines express a thought that is similar to what has preceded. It may strengthen or develop that thought. Sometimes the same thought is repeated.

In synonymous parallelism the number of line varies. These must be at least two. By knowing that these lines are an example of synonymous parallelism, we are able to understand the less clear from the more clear.

Antithetical Parallelism

In this form of poetry, the second line contrasts with the first. This is the most common form of parallelism in the Bible. Jesus' teachings have over 130 examples. In Proverbs there are entire chapters that are devoted to this literary form (10-15).

Antithetical Parallelism is usually limited to two lines.

It should be remembered that in interpreting antithetical parallelism we are dealing with poetry and not prose.

Step or Climatic Parallelism

In this form of parallelism the second line picks up the thought of the first line. It advances the thought an additional step. As a result, although the two thoughts are related, the second raises the first to a higher level and brings it to a kind of climax. This form does not occur frequently in the Bible.

Chiastic Parallelism

In a chiasmus we have an inverting of parallel statements in the form of a b / / B A. The first statement consists of two parts (a and b); the second consists of two parts as well, in reverse order (B and A).

The world of the biblical writers was one in which people sought to express their thoughts using emotive and picturesque language, clearly seen in the poetry of the Bible.

Another reason why poetry appears in such abundance in the Bible audiences were oral societies. A speaker could not expect his audience to take notes or to record his words. As a result he placed his message in easy-to-remember forms. The rhythmic nature of poetry assists greatly in memory.

We need to remember the nature of poetry in contrast to prose (its use of non-literal language), and the particular form of the poetry. To interpret poetry as if it were prose can only lead to misunderstanding. We are still seeking to understand what the author meant. However, the rules for one literary form are different than the rules governing the other.

Chapter 8 – The Game of Jargon – Idioms

The most difficult form of literature to interpret is idioms. The reason, in idioms the literal meaning of the words does not convey what an author meant by the use of these words. Frequently the meaning is different even contrary to the normal use of these words. We can only know if a combination of words is an idiom by finding this same combination in different places and noting from the context that its meaning is different from the normal meaning conveyed by these words. These words belong together as a unit and must be interpreted as such.

The phrase “It is really bad” an idiom whose meaning was radically different from the literal meaning of those words.

Similarly, the expression “God bless you” is not a command addressed to God demanding that he bless you. Rather, it is either a prayer such as “I pray that God may be gracious to you and bless you” or more likely “Gesundheit,” something we say after a person sneezes. Idioms are good examples of the fact that the “meaning” of words is not determined by what the words mean in and of themselves but rather by what the author willed by those words.

In the Bible we encounter various idioms. One of the most troubling Malachi 1:2-3:

“I have loved your,” ...but Esau I have hated ...”

Paul in Romans 9:13, refers to God’s election, quotes this passage and says, “Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’” How can a God who loves the world (John 3:16) hate Esau? Only when I came to understand the idiomatic nature of the love-hate contrast that these passages finally made sense. The key passage that helped me see this was Genesis 29:30-31: “So Jacob...*loved* Rachel *more* than Leah...When the LORD saw that Leah was *hated*...”. To love someone (Rachel) more than another (Leah) is in the Hebrew idiom to love one (Rachel), and hate the other (Leah)! Surely the writer of Genesis knew that Jacob did not hate Leah. We know this because he describes their relationship as producing six sons and a daughter. Jacob did love Leah, *but* he loved Rachel more.

The idiomatic nature of the love-hate contrast is also seen in Deuteronomy 21:15-17.

The idiom speaks of one wife being loved “more” than the other. This does not mean that the less-loved wife is hated and loathed. However, the way that this was expressed in the Hebrew of that day was by the idiom of one wife being loved and the other hated.

The same idiom also appears in Proverbs 13:24, Luke 14:26. Parallel in Matthew 10:37. Luke provides a “word-for-word” translation of Jesus’ actual words, Matthew has given us a “thought-for-

thought” one. Followers of Jesus must always place their love and commitment to Jesus before their love for family. Jesus demands not lesser love for family but greater love for him and love for family will increase continually even as our love for him increases.

Another idiom that has caused great difficulty Psalm 13:8-9. “O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seized your infants and dashes them against the rocks.” The idiomatic nature of the saying means something different than a desire for bloodthirsty vengeance. What the psalmist is describing, however, is not a wish for vicious revenge upon Babylon but a desire for God’s justice to be accomplished. He wishes for God’s righteous judgment to fall upon the evil kingdom of Babylon. The author is longing for the divine justice to manifest itself in the overthrow of this evil empire.

Other idioms found “our hearts melted”; for the loss of courage; the stars, sun, and moon not giving light; for divine intervention in history; becoming “as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand of the seashore”; for a large number, “weeping and gnashing of teeth”; for experiencing severe sorrow and loss; “not a man was left”; for winning a great victory.

Chapter 9 – The Game of Exaggeration – Hyperbole

The Bible contains a great deal of hyperbolic language. Proverbs, poetry, and prophecy by their very nature use exaggerated language as do most forms of commissive language. In the minds of some, exaggeration is a synonym for falsehood.

The use of hyperbole or exaggeration, however, is a perfectly acceptable literary form when shared by writer and reader. It is a powerful form that enables the writer and reader. It is a powerful form that enables the writer to convey not just factual information but also feelings and emotions. It is very difficult to communicate certain things apart from exaggeration. In the communication of lovers, whether between a man and a woman or between the psalmist and his God, hyperbole is necessary.

Unless shared, this form of language is deceitful and dishonest.

Exaggeration can be subdivided into two types: overstatement in which what is said is exaggerated but literally possible, and hyperbole in which what is said is so exaggerated that it is literally impossible. The issue is not so much “if” there is exaggeration in the Bible but how to detect it.

Most people are intuitively able to determine hyperbole. They just “know” that such passages should not be interpreted literally. Yet in the history of the church there have been numerous examples where individuals have not recognized the presence of the literary form.

Helpful rules enable us to recognize if a statement in the Bible contains exaggeration.

1. The statement is literally impossible. The authors expected their readers to recognize the non-literal quality of these statements and to interpret them as expressive examples of certain truths.
2. The statement conflicts with what the speaker says elsewhere.
3. The statement conflicts with the actions of the speaker elsewhere. Thus, if Jesus makes a statement that conflicts with his actions, this may be an indication that his statement contains hyperbole.
4. The statement conflicts with the teachings of the Old Testament. It is clear that Jesus saw his teachings as being in harmony with and in fulfillment of the ethical teachings of the Old Testament. Thus, Jesus' saying about hating parents, which clearly violates the teachings of the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments is an example of hyperbole.
5. The statement conflicts with the teachings of the New Testament. The thinking of the New Testament writers was also similar to that of Jesus. If we find a statement of Jesus to conflict with that of the New Testament writers, cause us to question an example of hyperbole in the statement.
6. The statement is interpreted by another biblical writer in a non-literal way. Luke was led to provide his readers with a literal translation of Jesus' saying. He did so by using a "word-by-word" translation. Matthew, however, was led to give a "thought-for-thought" translation of Jesus' teaching. Both sayings properly understood; convey the same meaning of Jesus. One (Luke) does so by retaining the original hyperbole in the saying; the other (Matthew) does so by eliminating the hyperbole and interpreting for his readers what Jesus meant by his hyperbole.
7. The statement has not been literally fulfilled.
8. The statement would not achieve its desired goal. It is apparent that if some sayings were carried out literally, they would not achieve what the speaker intended. Removing an eye would not solve the problem of list. Jesus knew that such self-mutilation would not bring about the goal he sought. As a result, this must be an example of hyperbole.
9. The statement uses a literary form prone to exaggeration. Such as proverbs, prophecy, poetry, ad idioms, which are prone to exaggeration.
10. The statement uses universal language. Although the terms "all," "everyone," "no one," and the like can be used in a literal sense there are times when the unqualified use of such terms suggest the

possibility that what is being said may be hyperbolic in nature. The use of universal language would warn us of the possibility what is being said is being said hyperbolically.

The use of hyperbole in the Bible is evident. The degree is not always acknowledged, but it is more extensive than most people realize. At times the meaning of the saying is self-evident, once we recognize that it contains exaggeration. At times we are assisted by the immediate context or by the larger context of the author's teaching.

Once we have understood the meaning of the hyperbolic statement, we must also ask why this meaning was framed in this particular literary form. We tend to use hyperbole to emphasize what is important. We do not exaggerate trivial truths. We use hyperbole when we seek to convey something that we think is important. As a result, we need to pay special attention when we find this literary form in the Bible. Thus the meaning of such a statement should be especially significant to the reader.

Chapter 10 – The Game of Comparison – Parables

The best known most famous literary form in the Bible is the parable. Defining exactly what a parable is in the Old Testament or New Testament is difficult. These terms can refer to a proverb satire or taunt; riddle figurative saying; extended simile or similitude; story parable; example parable; and even an allegory. The two biblical terms carry a broad range of meanings, but basic to each is the idea of a comparison between two different things. Something is likened to something it is not.

The parable is a fictional literary form. Consists of two parts; a picture, or the story proper, and a reality part, the comparison to which it is likened. We should not confuse it with biblical narrative, for in a biblical narrative the picture describes a historical event that really happened.

Because of the fictional nature of parables, it is not surprising that at times we find unreal elements in them, unusual exaggeration, the unforgiving servant forgiven ten thousand talents. We also find at times unusual circumstances; all ten maidens fall asleep. All the invited guests decline the final invitation to come to the banquet.

Basic Principles for Interpreting Parables

Throughout the history of the church parables have been interpreted allegorically. The details in the picture part of a parable all have a corresponding point of comparison in the reality part. Most famous example is Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan as follows:

The man going down to Jericho = Adam

Jerusalem from which he was		
Going	=	City of Heavenly Peace
Jericho	=	The moon, which signifies our morality
Robbers	=	Devil and his angel
Stripping him	=	Taking away his immortality
Beating him	=	Persuading him to sin
Leaving him half dead	=	Due to sin, he was dead spiritually, but half-alive, Due to his knowledge of God
Priest	=	Priesthood of the Old Testament, i.e., the Law
Levite	=	Ministry of the Old Testament, i.e., the Prophets
Good Samaritan	=	Christ
Binding of the wounds	=	Restraint placed up sin
Oil	=	Comfort of good hope
Wine	=	Exhortation of spirited work
Beast	=	Body of Christ
Inn	=	Church
Two denarii	=	Two commandments of love
Innkeeper	=	Apostle Paul
Return of the Good Samaritan	=	Resurrection of Christ

A Parable Teaches a Basic Point

Details do not make a parable into an allegory. They help illustrate an aspect of the point of the parable. But they do not possess any specific meaning in themselves.

Ultimately any comparison will break down when pressed. The only comparison that will not break down is something like “God is like God.” Every comparison of two unlike things must sooner or later break down. The purpose of an analogy is to convey a basic point of comparison between the picture and the reality to which it corresponds. If we do not press the details of the parable but are content with its one basic point of comparison, the parable does not cause confusion.

In the study of parables we should seek the main point of the parable and not press its details. (This does not exclude the possibility that at times details in the picture part of a parable may refer to a corresponding reality. The greater danger is to see too much meaning in specific details rather than too little!)

A parable consists of commissive language, whereas a statement of its meaning consists of referential language.

Jesus purposely shaped his parable knowing that it clashed with the established values of his audience. His parable is not a tale with expected results.

Second basic rule for interpreting parables seeks the meaning of its original author. The interpretation of any of Jesus' parables should, of course, be undertaken in the context of his entire teaching.

The Gospel writers were not simply recorders of the Jesus traditions but interpreters of them. They believed they were called of God not only to share the teachings and acts of the Son of God but to interpret them for their readers. Not surprising therefore, we have four Gospels that are both similar and different. Each Evangelist felt free to explain, clarify, apply, abbreviate, or reorder these materials as the Spirit of God led them.

On several occasions the Gospel writers took parables of Jesus aimed at one audience and applied the same pattern of meaning in the parable to a new situation. In the parable of the four soils, Luke applies this parable to the needs of his particular audience. These Lukan emphases can be seen most clearly by comparing them to the form of the parable found in Mark 4:3-20.

The Evangelists have interpreted the parables. This means that they are now also authors of the parable. Thus, even as we have sought the meaning of the parable that Jesus intended we should also seek the meaning of the parable that the Evangelists intended.

Guidelines for Arriving at the Main Point

To arrive at the main point several questions prove useful.

Who Are the Main Characters?

Helpful in drawing our attention to the particular characters Jesus and the Evangelist wanted to emphasize.

What Occurs at the End?

"The rule of end-stress" good storytelling builds up and focuses interest on the conclusion of the story.

What Occurs in Direct Discourse?

If a parable contains a conversation, this requires the readers to focus their attention on what is being said.

Who Gets the Most Space?

Usually we spend the most time describing the important characters.

The key to interpreting the parables is to remember that they are not extended allegories but that they tend to teach a single basic point. Therefore focus attention on the basic analogy in the picture part and its corresponding point in the reality part.

At times in the search for the basic point of the parable, the following questions prove helpful: Who are the two main characters? What comes at the end: Who is involved in a dialogue: To whom or what is the most space devoted? After having correctly understood the meaning of Jesus and/or the Evangelist, however, our task is not over. The most important aspect of interpretation, seek those implications that are most relevant for us and act on them. What does it profit us, if we have learned the meaning of a parable without allowing the meaning and its implications to affect our lives.

Chapter 11 – The Game of Stories – Biblical Narrative

The literary form found most frequently in the Bible is narrative. This genre possesses unique importance. Many people first encounter the Bible by means of its stories. Stories, involve biblical narrative. Vast sections of the Bible use this form. Over 40 percent of the Old Testament and nearly 60 percent of the New Testament consist of narrative.

During the first three millennia in which biblical narratives existed, interpreters all thought that they were historical accounts. Even those who applied an allegorical interpretation to these accounts acknowledged that the events were also literally true. The closest analogy to this material would be reports of other historical events.

With the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries skepticism arose with regard to the supernatural. It was not long before it was applied to the Bible. It was not long until the historicity of all the miracles of the Bible began to be questioned.

Previously to the Enlightenment the meaning of a text was sought by investigating the willed meaning of the author. With respect to biblical narrative a literal, grammatical exegesis provided the meaning of the text.

In order to preserve the “meaningfulness” of the biblical narratives, meaning had to be redefined and sought elsewhere than in the willed intention of the author.

Three alternatives presented themselves. Seek the meaning in the event portrayed in the text. This was rationalism. The literal description, which was miraculous, was not what actually took place. The narrative is a fictional portrayal of the event. A real, nonsupernatural event lay behind this account, and discovering this was the goal of rationalism. One should therefore seek to reconstruct the event in order to find what really happened. Most rationalistic reconstructions left the interpreter with little or nothing to preach or teach. Where is there any meaningfulness in Jesus walking along the shore and being mistaken as walking on the sea?

What the author willed to teach by the event was lost sight of, and the event came to contain meaning in and of itself. The biblical stories as a result were treated independently of the literary context their authors gave them.

Second, the theory of accommodation. According to this view, the authors of the biblical narratives knew that the events they were telling did not occur in the manner reported. They knew that no such miracles had occurred. But the authors realized that they were living among and seeking to minister to readers who believed in miracles. Thus, they shaped the principles in the form of miracle stories. The meaning was to be found in the willed meaning of authors who consciously presented myths that their readers would think were true.

Comparing rationalists and accommodationists we find an interesting paradox. Rationalists though little of the intellectual ability of the biblical narrators, who badly misinterpreted what actually took place. Accommodationists, however, preserved the intellectual ability of the writers, for the writers were intelligent enough to know that these events were not true. Rationalists protected the integrity of the biblical writers. They might not have been very smart, but they were honest! Accommodationists while protecting the authors' intelligence, sacrificed their integrity. Biblical writers purposely misled their readers.

The third attempt to find meaning in biblical narratives that were miraculous was the mythical approach. The biblical myths were essentially religious ideas dressed in historical clothing. The goal of interpretation was to discover the meaning of these myths seen as the truth that was working in the sub consciousness of the authors. In the nineteenth century these subconscious meanings that were at work in the author tended to be good nineteenth-century liberal truths and values. In the first part of the twentieth century they tended to be existentialistic calls for decision.

The main problem with mythical approach is it confuses historical issues and literary genre. The biblical narratives do not possess a mythical literary form. The stories are described as "realistic narrative". They are straightforward and use the language of ordinary events. Mythical monsters and places are not found. Real events are described involving real persons, in real places at real times. To assess a biblical narrative as "mythical," is a judgment of the facticity of the narrative, and this affects "significance" not "meaning."

The meaning of a biblical narrative is to be found in what the author wished to teach his reader by recalling this incident.

Principles for Interpreting Biblical Narrative

The purpose of biblical narrative is not merely to tell what took place. Rather, it is to relate these past events to biblical faith. The meaning of a narrative is taught implicitly rather than explicitly. The writers of the biblical narratives seldom say, "Now the point I am trying to make by this story is..." Thus, the meaning of a narrative is more elusive for the reader. The following are especially useful.

Context

A biblical narrative is always part of a larger narrative. Readers will seek to discover the meaning of a particular narrative in light of the overall meaning of the book known as the "hermeneutical circle." In seeking to understand the part does so in light of an understanding of the whole. In turn, this understanding of the part makes clearer the understanding of the whole. This whole process is both helpful and frustrating. Frustrating that it requires the reader possess an understanding of the entire work to interpret correctly the particular narrative. It is helpful, however, because the author provides by his entire work a useful context for the reader to interpret each narrative.

Sometimes the immediate context provides a clue.

Another way in which an author gives clues as to how he wants his readers to interpret a narrative can be through his introductions and conclusions of the narrative.

The introduction to the Book of Joshua gives readers the theme of this book in the opening verses. Clearly we are to interpret this book recognizing that it is about the divinely ordained successor to Moses who God would use to lead the children of Israel into the promised land.

In Judges the author also introduces us to the theme of his work in the opening verses. The author reveals to us that this book is about a period in which there was a leadership crisis in Israel. The author drives this point home in the concluding verse of the work when he points out that "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (21:25).

The gospel writers also assist their readers in reading their individual narratives in light of contextual clues given in their introductions and conclusions.

Each Gospel writer seeks through his various narratives to tell his readers about Jesus.

Yet there is also a larger context within which the biblical narratives are written. The writers of the historical narratives in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles build upon the content of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. In a similar way the New Testament writers build on the teachings of the Old Testament.

Authorial Comments

On numerous occasions the authors of the biblical narratives intrude and give interpretative clues to their readers as to how they should interpret these narratives.

Throughout the biblical narratives we find various insertions by the authors that are intended to help the reader.

Another way in which a narrator provides clues involves the use of summary statements he inserts within the text.

Repetition

Another way the author shares his meaning with the reader is by the repetition of key themes.

Luke continually emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke wants his readers to understand the importance of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus, and this prepares for the importance of the Spirit for the life and ministry of the church in his second work, Acts.

Authoritative Speakers

An author helps readers understand the meaning of his narrative by placing key dialogues in the mouths of various speakers. The reader knows, because of who is speaking, whether what is being said represents the mind of the narrator. For example, Luke goes out of his way to describe Joseph of Arimathea as “a good and upright man.” Thus, we can accept his action in burying Jesus as being good and noble.

The narrators help the reader understand how to interpret their words, often done through the use of positive characters. It is also done through evil characters. We are able to judge whether he approves or disapproves of them according to whether they exemplify the character and plan of God revealed in the rest of the Bible.

Dialogue or Direct Discourse

One way a narrative focuses the attention of his readers is by the use of dialogue. Direct discourse (conversation denoted by quotation marks) is a clue that careful attention should be paid to what is being said.

In the divine theophany in Exodus 3, in which God directly speaks to Moses, the author provides the clue for understanding both this narrative and the entire book. Within this narrative the direct discourse tells us that Moses would be used of God to lead the people of Israel out of their bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt and ultimately into the land of Canaan.

Interpretation of biblical narrative presents some unique problems. The account means what the author willed to say by the account, whether the event described in it is true or untrue. Evangelical Christianity stands or falls on the facticity of the biblical narratives. The meaning of a biblical narrative is what the author meant to teach by the event recorded in it. If we do not believe these events occurred, the meaning must be rejected. It cannot, however, be changed into something else.

This context involves not just the verses that precede and follow the passage but the entire work within which the author has placed it. We must interpret a particular narrative in light of the theme and purpose of the entire book in which it is found. This requires study. At times the author assists his readers in the interpretation of his narrative by inserting various comments into the account. At times an author may provide a summary of some sort. Through repetition an author also helps. Another way is by the use of authoritative speakers. Likewise use of dialogue helps his readers focus in on the importance of what is being said. We can understand the meaning of a biblical narrative as long as we do not confuse this meaning with its subject matter.

Chapter 12 – The Game of Correspondence – Epistles

In the New Testament the dominant literary form is the epistle or letter. A “letter” tends to address a specific situation or problem and builds on an established relationship. An “epistle” is more artistic intended as a self-explanatory treatise to a wider public. Paul’s writing seem to lie somewhere in between, with Philemon resembling a letter and Romans an epistle.

Within ancient letters we usually find the following:

Salutation – a reference to the sender and the recipient of the letter along with a greeting. On several occasions Paul uses his salutation to explain why he has written the letter and to prepare his readers for his argument in the body of the letter.

Thanksgiving and/or Prayer – found in all Paul’s letters except Galatians, where its omission is significant.

Body – is frequently the largest part of a Pauline letter.

Exhortation and Instruction.

Conclusion – can include such things as a wish for peace, greeting, kiss, a concluding autograph and benediction.

An author was not enslaved to this form, but it is important to note instances when the author chose to deviate from it. In Galatians Paul omits a word of thanksgiving and/or prayer (b.) and thus reveals his anger and frustration over what was happening in the church. The unusual addition of material such as Galatians 1:1b-d and Romans 1:1b-6 to the salutation likewise reveals a great deal about the purpose of Paul in writing these letters.

Paul at times uses his conclusion as an opportunity to recapitulate the material in the body.

In seeking to understand how an author like Paul used a particular word, we can assume, unless stated otherwise, that the meaning he intended lies within the language norms of his audience. This range of possibilities is available to us today in a Bible dictionary or, a Hebrew or Greek lexicon. The issue for the interpreter is how to narrow down these possibilities to the particular meaning of the word that the author intends. A double meaning as in pun, are quite unusual.

At times an author helps his readers by carefully defining what he means by a particular term. This can be done in several ways. Most common is the use of an explanatory clause. Another way is by using an appositive. Still another way is by means of synonymous parallelism. In most instances, however, the specific meaning of a term must be ascertained in other ways.

Etymology

When we speak or write, we are almost always concerned with only the present meaning of the words we are using. We are not interested in what these words meant when they came into existence.

The etymology of a word is of little value in biblical interpretation. It is only useful in two instances. One, when we have no, or little, idea of what a biblical word means because it is found very seldom and the second instance in which etymology appears to be useful is in the use of names. The name

given to Mary's son is carefully chosen based on the etymology of the name. "Jesus," which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Joshua," has as its root meaning "Yahweh is salvation." Two verses in Matthew, Mary's son is called "Immanuel," which has as its root "God is with us."

Old Testament people are carefully named due to the etymology of the name because of the common idea that people were/would be as they were named.

If the key resource for obtaining the possible meanings of a particular word is a dictionary or lexicon, the key resource for understanding its specific meaning is a concordance. Seeing how this word is used elsewhere, we can understand how the author is using it in the particular instance we are studying.

Even more helpful would be to understand how contemporaries wrote. More helpful still would be to find how the same author uses this term elsewhere in his letters.

There are times when we can ascertain the particular meaning of a word by comparing how the author uses the term within the same book.

There are times that the meaning of a word becomes clear through the very paragraph in which it is found.

Words in isolation cannot possess specific meaning. It is only within sentences that they possess specific meanings. Next observe how these words function within the sentence we cannot understand the specific meaning of a word without simultaneously understanding the meaning of the sentence. This is another example of the hermeneutical circle.

To decipher what the author meant by the sentence we must know how the words within them relate to each other. In English, word order is most important. In Greek, however, word order plays a lesser role because the endings on the word determine which is the subject and which is the object.

In the interpretation of the Bible readers often pay insufficient attention to how parts of sentences and clauses relate to one another. Following is a description of some of the ways in which parts of sentences can relate to each other.

1. Cause – In this relationship (A) is because of (B), that is, (B) is the cause of (A): Some of the terms used to describe this kind of a relationship are "because," "for," "since," "on account of," and "as a result."

2. Result – In this relationship (B) is the result of (A): Some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are "so that," "that," "as a result," "therefore," and "so as to."

3. Purpose – In this relationship (B) is the purpose of (A): Purpose and result are quite similar, for if we are successful in what we have purposed, what results is the purpose. Purpose, however, refers to the intention of the action. Some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are “in order that,” “so that,” “that,” “to” plus an infinitive, “lest,” and “rather.”

4. Condition – (A is the condition of (B).: Some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are “if,” “if . . . then,” “except,” and “unless.”

5. Concession – despite (A), (B) took place: some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are “despite,” “even though,” “although,” “though,” “yet,” “apart,” and “even if.”

6. Means – (A) is the means by which (B) is accomplished: some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are “by,” “with,” “by means of,” “through,” and “in.”

It is easy to confuse “means” and “cause.” In Ephesians 2:8-9 the believer is not saved *because* of faith. Faith is not the “cause” but the “means” of salvation. All the faith in the world could not save a person if Jesus had not died for the sins of the world.

7. Manner – (A) is done in the manner of (B): some of the terms used to describe this kind of relationship are “by,” “with,” “by means of,” and “from.”

There are other kinds of relationships that clauses and phrases can have, but these seem to be most important. The same word can introduce a number of different relationships. The specific relationship is decided by the meaning the author has willed through the surrounding context. From the context possibilities narrowed to the one specific meaning intended by the author. To understand the reasoning of the biblical authors, we must pay careful attention to how they related the clauses and phrases they have written. It is especially important, with respect to the Epistles because it is within this literary form that we encounter the most carefully reasoned arguments found in the Bible.

To study the Bible in its original languages possesses two distinct advantages. One, there are certain grammatical insights that can be gleaned from the author’s writings not available in translation.

The second advantage involves a difference in the goal of interpretation. The interpreter of Greek can seek as his or her goal the discovery of meaning, the reader of a translation cannot. The goal of reading a translation of the Bible is to understand the meaning of the translators. A reader of the Bible in translation is a step removed from the meaning of the biblical writer. Those who have facility in the original languages have direct access to the test of the author.

Chapter 13 – the Games of Treaties, Laws, and Songs

In this final chapter we shall look at three additional literary forms. Forms as similes and metaphors are not discussed because the principles described in the chapter on parables are applicable to them. We shall not discuss such forms as riddles, satire, visions, midrash, household codes, genealogies, the supposed “we” travel narrative form (which we now know never existed), or theophanies because of the limitations of space.

Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant is the most important referred to time and time again in the Old Testament. A new covenant is referred to in Jeremiah 31:31-34, which finds its fulfillment in Jesus. And it is the new covenant, initiated with Abraham, which is the hope of the believer.

There were two main kinds of covenants. The difference between them depends on the relationship of the people involved. If the relationship involves equals a “parity” covenant. Both parties mutually agree as equals to obey identical stipulations. The other form is called a “suzerainty” covenant. In a suzerainty covenant the lord unilaterally established the terms and conditions for his subjects. The subjects in turn could only accept or reject the covenant and its terms. It contained such things as:

- Preamble – In the preamble the author of the covenant identifies himself.
- Historical Prologue – This describes the previous relationship of the two parties and emphasizes the gracious character of the suzerain in his past dealings with the lesser party. It provides justification for the following stipulations.
- Stipulations – This describes the obligations and responsibilities of the lesser party and involves such things as prohibition of establishing relationships and treaties with other nations (cf. “You shall have no other gods before me,” Exod. 20:3); support for the suzerain; obligation to hate the enemies of the suzerain; various prohibitions and commands; and the like. These stipulations are not conditions for entering the covenant but for remaining true to it. The prime stipulation involves loyalty to the suzerain.
- Provision for Continual Reading – this was meant to insure familiarity with the covenant by the people and their descendants.
- List of Witnesses – Frequently the suzerain would appeal to the gods (cf. in the Old Testament “heaven and earth”) to bear witness to the establishment of the covenant.
- Blessings and Cursings – These are contingent on the obedience or disobedience of the subjects.
- Oath – The subjects here pledge obedience to the covenant and to its stipulations.

All of these elements are not always present, most important the preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, and blessings and cursings.

Within the Old Testament no divine covenant follows the order listed above exactly or contains all these elements, but it is evident that “Old Testament covenants are patterned along similar lines.”

The covenant established with the people of Israel, is not earned or merited but due entirely to the mercy and kindness of God. Even the blessings are not earned or merited, for they are offered as rewards for obedience, not as pay earned! Compare Old Testament covenants with suzerainty covenant. Some remarkable parallels:

Genesis 12:1-3

- Preamble
- Stipulations
- Blessings

Genesis 17:1-14

- Preamble
- Stipulations
- Blessings

Exodus 19-24

- Preamble
- Historical Prologue
- Stipulations
- Provision for Continual Reading
- List of Witnesses
- Oath

Deuteronomy

- Preamble
- Historical Prologue
- Stipulations
- Cursings and Blessings
- List of Witnesses
- Provision for Continual Reading

Joshua 24:1-33

- Preamble
- Historical Prologue
- Stipulations
- List of witnesses
- Provision for Continual Reading
- Oath

The writers of Scripture as they recorded these covenants expected their readers to recognize them as “suzerain” and to understand their various elements. Two principals involved in the interpretations of such treaty forms.

One, the unilateral and gracious nature of the biblical covenants must be kept in mind. These covenants are not treaties among equals. The sovereign Lord may willingly obligate himself to us, but this has nothing to do with our worthiness or merit. The covenant originated in grace and is based on grace alone.

Second, the stipulations in a covenant are not to be understood as requirement in order to initiate a positive relationship with God. The ten commandments of Exodus 20:2-17 are not directed to people outside a covenantal relationship, revealing how they may enter into such a relationship. They are given to God’s people who have already been “redeemed” from bondage and describe how that relationship can be maintained and how continued divine blessing may be experienced.

In the Bible Genesis through Deuteronomy, is called the “Law.” The “Law” can also refer to the entire Old Testament. Usually, however, the Law is associated with Exodus 20-Deuteronomy 33. There are over six hundred commandments or laws found in Genesis-Deuteronomy. Genesis does not contain any of this legal material but is part of the Law, because it serves as the introduction to Exodus-Deuteronomy and because it was assumed that Moses wrote all these books. However, most of these five books, called the “Pentateuch,” consists of narrative.

When we compare the laws found in this section of the Old Testament with ancient near Eastern laws, we can observe at times a striking similarity.

The laws of the Bible have been classified according to their form. Two types: casuistic law and apodictic law. Casuistic law usually involves secular or civil matters. Apodictic law, however, is declarative and categorical. It tends to consist of prohibitions, commands, and instructions. These laws tend to be more “religious” in nature. Most laws in the ancient Near East end to be casuistic. Also true with Old Testament.

The laws of the Bible are not exhaustive in nature. They serve as patterns that govern behavior by means of the implications contained within those patterns of meaning. Thus the command “You shall not commit adultery” has numerous implications concerning lust & pornography. The laws involved patterns of meaning that went beyond the specific meaning found in the law itself.

Another distinction between various laws involves their content. Frequently divided into three classifications: ethical laws such as the Ten Commandments; cultic laws such as ritual laws; and civil laws, penalties for crimes, inheritance regulations, etc. At times these classifications appear to overlap.

Jesus saw a distinction between the cultic and ethical dimensions of the law when he said, “Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him.”

When the New Testament refers to the laws of the Old Testament, it understands the cultic and civil laws as being no longer binding. The Old Testament foresaw that a time would come when a new covenant would be established. In the new covenant all foods are cleansed, the sacrificial system and its priesthood have been made superfluous through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus and his eternal priesthood on our behalf and circumcision is no longer required. The civil laws of the Old Testament are also no longer binding since biblical Israel no longer exists. The principles of such laws still reflect divine guidelines for society to follow.

As to the ethical dimension of the Old Testament laws, there is no reason to think that they would change drastically, for they reflect the character of God. The New Testament writers understand them as still binding. Jesus demands not merely an external keeping of the specific commands of the law. The Pharisees and teachers of the law did that. The higher righteousness Jesus demanded involves keeping the entire pattern of meaning found in these commands and their various implications.

In interpreting the laws of the Bible it is important to remember several things. First we must remember that they are associated with a covenant of grace. Due to our fallen nature and sin, we do not and cannot keep the commandments. Furthermore, the attempt to keep the commandments cannot save. We must never forget how covenant and law are related. It is after God establishes a covenant of grace with his people that the stipulations of the law are given. The order cannot be reversed! Salvation precedes obedience.

The recent debate on lordship-salvation or “Once saved—always saved” has all too often lost sight of the fact that salvation takes place within a covenant relationship. That covenant brings with it numerous benefits. One of them is regeneration. The regenerated heart and will seek to serve God. What serving God involves is described in the laws of stipulations he has given in his covenant. How that service is then rendered is by obedience to those laws. It would be a strange “faith” indeed that

did not result in a regenerated heart and life and that was unconcerned or antagonistic toward God's laws. However else the Bible might describe such a "faith," it would not describe it as "saving faith." It is more like the faith James describes as possessed by demons (James 2:19).

Another principle, their specific meaning does not exhaust all their meaning. The laws of the Bible are patterns of meaning that contain numerous implications. Thus, even laws that seem out-of-date and no longer applicable may carry useful and appropriate implications for today. If a command such as "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" does not seem to be applicable today, its principle, that punishment should fit the crime, will always be relevant.

Similarly, the casuistic law found in Exodus 21:28-29 has important implications for today.

One additional principle for interpreting the laws of the Bible, the law has as one of its purposes the revelation of our sine and depravity. We must recognize that we need forgiveness and grace. The law seeks to show us our need of God's grace. It drives us to repent and seek God's saving grace. It shows us that time and time again we fail to keep the divine stipulations of the covenant and that we must confess our sins. We enter into a covenantal relationship with God on the basis of grace alone, and that relationship is maintained on the basis of grace as well.

Psalms is by far the largest book in the Bible. It consists of 150 individual psalms arranged in five "Books." Each Book (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150) ends with a doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; and 150, which serves as a doxology for the last book and the Psalms as a whole). The Psalms and its present arrangement were compiled over a period of time. This is clear from the editorial comment found in 72:20. The largest numbers of psalms are attributed to David (73), others Asaph (12), Sons of Korah (11), Solomon (2), and Moses (1). Some psalms are even repeated in part or as a whole (14 = 53; 40:13-17 = 70; 57:7-11 = 108:1-5; 60:5-12 = 1-8:6-13).

We dealt with the rhythmic nature of the psalms in the chapter on poetry. Here we shall deal with the forms of the psalms rather than the kinds of poetry found within them. Forms are not rigid and some of the classifications are somewhat arbitrary.

Psalms of Lament

These make up the largest number of psalms. Both individual lament and national lament psalms. Although not all the following elements are contained in each, we frequently find:

- Address to God – "O LORD."
- Lament of Description of Need – "Will you forget me forever?" At times within the lament there is found a protest or claim of innocence by the Psalmist.

- Petition or Prayer for Help – “Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.” Usually the petition involves help and rescue in the present life.
- Confession of Confidence – “But I trust in your unfailing love.”
- Vow or Confession of Praise – “I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.”

Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving

Opposite of the lament psalms, thanksgiving and praise go together. There is no we have individual group praise and thanksgiving psalm. This form generally contains the following:

- Introductory Praise – Frequently they begin with a call to: “Praise the LORD.” There may even be a call to a particular mode of praise: “Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him. He upholds the cause of the oppressed . . .” “For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation . . .”
- Concluding Word or Call to Praise – Some psalms lack this, “Praise the Lord.”

Several other kinds of psalms, whose classification is due less to form than to content, can also be mentioned:

- Psalms of Zion – do not possess a specific form content frequently centers on Jerusalem and the temple. Examples are 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, also 137.
- Royal Psalms – frequently associated with the messianic hope, (2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 132, 144).
- Hymns to God – is not easy to distinguish from psalms of praise and thanksgiving, but these include 19, 24, 29, 47, 95-100, 104.
- Wisdom Psalms – psalms such as 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127-128, 133.
- Trust Psalms – this theme is found in 11, 16, 23, 62, 91, 121, 125, 131.
- Penitential Psalms – general category of psalms of lament. Lament psalms frequently called “penitential” are 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130.
- Imprecatory Psalms – referred briefly to these (35, 58, 69, 83, 109, 137) in the chapter on idioms.

Knowledge of these forms primary value lies in the area of interpretation, an example, Psalm 13. At the end of this lament psalm the confession of confidence and the vow of praise found in verses 5-6 look entirely out of place. There is no logical connection between these two verses and what has preceded. Yet they are not some later scribal addition to the psalm to make it more devout. On the contrary, they are normal elements in a lament psalm. They are vital parts in this literary form. Rather than appearing out of place, they should be expected by the reader. We must always read such laments in light of the fact that they are not made in despair but in faith.

The faith manifested in a psalm of lament involves the essence of a person's relationship with God.

Psalm of Lament

Address to God

Lament or Description of Need

Petition or Prayer for Help

Confession of Confidence

Vow or Confession of Praise

A thanksgiving or praise psalm reveals that the cause for such praise and thanksgiving always rests on what God has done in the past and the gracious covenant he has established.

Glossary

application – The way meaning applies to the reader, i.e., significance; or implications that stem from the pattern of meaning.

author – The actual writer who penned the work being interpreted.

context – The author's willed meaning of the passages surrounding the text.

conviction – That work of the Holy Spirit that brings assurance of the truthfulness of the meaning of the Bible.

enlightenment – In biblical studies that period in history (primarily the nineteenth century) when the miracles of the Bible began to be doubted and denied.

exegesis – The process of understanding and interpreting a text.

generic expectation – The interpreting of a text, based upon a conclusion as to its literary form, using the rules governing that literary form.

genre – See literary genre.

implications – Those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but which nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern (or type) of meaning he or she willed.

intentional fallacy – An objection to seeking the willed meaning of the author because of the belief that a reader can never relive the experiences of the author when he wrote (i.e., his mental acts) or that the author may not be able to express adequately his intended meaning.

interpretation – The verbal or written expression of one’s understanding of a text’s meaning.

illumination – The special guidance that the Holy Spirit supposedly gives to believers in understanding the meaning of the Bible.

langue – A French word that is a synonym for “norms of language.”

literary genre – The literary form being used by the author and the rules governing that form.

meaning – The pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words (shareable symbols) he or she used.

mental acts – The experiences that the author went through when writing the text.

mental experiences – A synonym for mental acts.

norms of language – The possible range of meanings allowed by the words (verbal symbols) of a text.

norms of utterance – The specific meaning that the author has given to a word, phrase, sentence, etc. in a text.

parole – A French word that is a synonym for “norms of utterance.”

pattern of meaning – The conscious willed meaning of the author and all its implications.

shareability – The common understanding of the language of the text possessed by both the author and his intended readers.

significance – How a reader responds to the meaning of a text.

subject matter – The content or “stuff” talked about in a text.

subtype – A synonym for “implication.”

type – A synonym for “pattern of meaning.”

unconscious meaning – A synonym for “implication.”