

# Philosophy of Meaning, Interpretation, and Application

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## I. The Hermeneutical Foundation

The primary foundation for believe in a high view of Scripture is an acceptance of a consistent, literal-grammatical-historical interpretation of the biblical text. Before proceeding to the matters of the nature and practice of a consistent literal hermeneutic, let me address the nature of meaning, application, significance, and interpretation of the text. Then we will explore the need to follow a consistent literal hermeneutic, the meaning of literal versus allegorical or spiritualized interpretative, the progression of revelation, and the relationship between the Old and New Testament.

### A. The Nature of Meaning, Application, Significance, and Interpretation

#### 1. What is Meant by “Meaning” of a Text?

The meaning of a text is what the author of the text intends to convey to an anticipated reader through the words that he or she uses in constructing the text. In order to convey this meaning, the author joins together similar ideas (a type) within a broader context of words that comport with this type meaning and is shareable with potential readers. A meaning, then, is a reality expressed by various constituent parts (traits) which may, or may not all be, expressed in a given statement, but are never contrary to the meaning and its parts. The meaning may have more than one idea included within it, and not expressed by the author, but these are never contradictory ideas to the type meaning. Moreover, in seeking to determine if the meaning in one passage of Scripture is the same as the meaning in another passage, the dissimilarities between the passage must be given special attention, not the similarities.

The general acceptance of the idea that the meaning of a given text’s meaning is determined by the author began to be challenged several decades ago through the influence of a post-modern literary movement called The New Criticism in middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> This new approach to determine meaning gradually moved into the area of biblical literature. According to this view, words do not have fixed meaning but may mean whatever a person wants them to mean, not only by the author but by the reader.

Before post-modernism, the concern of interpretation was to determine what the author of

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<sup>1</sup> Representatives of this perspective are Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Continuum, 2004, rep., London: Continuum, 2006); Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1988); Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the biblical text sought to convey through his words, but then The New Criticism's concern was to understand how the reader would determine the meaning and significance of the words. Under this new philosophy, the meaning allegedly is found in the text independent of the author and may just as easily be determined by the reader of the text than the one who authored it.

This view was vigorously challenged by E.D. Hirsch, now professor emeritus at the University of Virginia, in his book *Validity in Interpretation*.<sup>2</sup> Hirsch argued that the attempt to banish the author from the meaning was contrary to common sense. Hirsch says that someone must be the final arbiter of a text's meaning and the author is the most reasonable candidate for this. Meaning does change over time. It is ingrained in the words of the author. What might change is how a reader (even the author) might relate to her meaning. Hirsch calls this significance. The author can't change the meaning but she can come to disagree with her own viewpoint. The critique is devastating because, if this is not true, then no text means anything in particular and may change by the whim of whoever is the reader.

Another question arises. What about the situation in which an author may intend or mean more than she is conscious of meaning? Hirsch would reply that even if this is so, an unconscious intention is nonetheless intention; it is what the author means. Words do not have meaning apart from the intention of the author of the words.

### 2. *The Difference between the Meaning of a Text and the Interpretation of a Text.*

The meaning of a piece of literature, including the Bible, is not obvious on its face, but must be interpreted by someone who will give due consideration to the kind of meaning that an author intends.<sup>3</sup> The meaning of a biblical text is not found apart from the interpretation of the text, determined by paying attention to an author's signposts that define her type-meaning. The interpreter's task is to discern the various "traits" or elements of the type meaning that the author intends. Only when the interpreter looks at these parts of the author's statements does the meaning become knowable.

### 3. *Type Meaning and Implications/Traits*

The type-meaning is the essence of the author's words determined by the elements of the whole meaning in the author's conscious thought. For example, when one looks at a physical, or even mental, object to determine its essence—"what it is"—the components of the object define the meaning of the object. Its ontology, or essence, is defined by the traits or attributes that make the object what it is, *but also what it is not*. Humans and apes share many of the same traits—such as legs, heads, eyes, and the like—but ultimately it is not only what is in common, but *what is uncommon*, that helps one to distinguish the nature of the thing spoken about.

In the same way, in a written document, ideas are created by the use of words that are constructed lexically and grammatically, but also they must be shareable with others' reading the documents. Only then may the author's meaning be known. The type meaning of a statement, then, is formed by the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical expression of the words. Some of the same words may be used in two different, or even similar, contexts, but the

<sup>2</sup> Hirsch has altered his perspective in certain respects since the initial writing of his important book, but he maintains the core of what he originally wrote.

<sup>3</sup> For clarification, "intention" does not speak to *why* an author says what she says, or her purpose, but rather *what* she is attempting to say.

type meaning of these passages may not be the same. This causes interpreters trouble, on occasion, because the same, or different, authors may use even the same words, but mean something quite different. For example, James uses the word faith, as does the apostle Paul, but they may mean something different by the same word in different contexts.

#### 4. *How Dissimilarities among Types helps Determine Meaning*

Some biblical passages may seem to be discussing the same idea, but in reality, they are only speaking of similar ideas, or *meanings*. Different passages may have similar wording that can lead an interpreter to believe (wrongly) that there is the same type-meaning. For example, in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 and Mark 13) and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, there are a number of similarities between these biblical passages, but also considerable differences.<sup>4</sup> Though both passages mention the coming of Christ, that He comes in the clouds, that He has angels (or angel) accompanying Him, and that people are gathered (which causes interpreters to view them as the same event), yet, there are some important distinctions between the passages. Different questions are being addressed in the respective contexts, and different answers are given. The Olivet Discourse responds to the disciples' questioning about Christ's words of the destruction of the temple and His coming at the end of the age, whereas Paul is addressing concerns by Thessalonian believers regarding the death of saints in light of the coming of Christ for His church. Matthew's mention of watchfulness does not equate to Paul's sense of urgency. Matthew focuses on Messiah's judgment and gathering of persons from the diaspora (most likely), while 1 Thessalonians refers to a gathering in the air at the time of a resurrection of saints. Jesus' focus is judgment, whereas Paul's emphasis is on salvation and comfort. The Son of Man theme of the Gospels is absent in Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4. There are other similarities and distinctions between the texts, but it is fairly certain from what we have said, that they are not addressing the same issues or speaking of the same event.

### **B. The Nature and Practice of a Consistent Literal Hermeneutic**

#### 1. *The Importance of a Consistent Literal Hermeneutic*

As we have observed, it is common for persons to affirm a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic, but when it comes to the interpretation of prophecy there is a shift to set aside this method and move toward allegory or spiritualization of the meaning of the texts, unfortunately the practice of some early Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin. Commonly, in following this inconsistent approach, appeal is made to the apostles as examples of not taking the Old Testament prophetic texts in a literal fashion. I will address the matter of the apostolic method of interpretation below, but now let me deal with the problem of abandoning a consistent use of the literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

Oswald Allis, in his *Prophecy and the Church*, says that talk of literal interpretation is not simple, and that a thoroughgoing literal interpretation is not possible. He then gives three reasons why this is so. First, the Bible uses figurative language. Second, God is a spirit and so the teachings of the Bible are spiritual, referring to a spiritual realm, and not merely earthly. Third, the Old Testament is preparatory to the New Testament, and typically prefigure the New Testament. The Old Testament, in light of New Testament fulfillment, contains words that

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<sup>4</sup> H. Wayne House, "Differences between 1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 24," <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/House-Differencesbetween1T.pdf> (last visited July 1, 2017).

are “deeper” in meaning than they appear in their context.<sup>5</sup> Let me respond to the thinking of Allis as representative of those who fault the emphasis of dispensationalist on consistent literal interpretation.

a. What is meant by the literal meaning of a text?

In contrast to Allis, when a conservative interpreter says that he interprets Scripture in a literal manner, it is a mistake to understand this as meaning that he believes there are no figurative terms used in a text. Literal is the opposite of allegorical, not figures of speech. All human communication includes figurative and non-figurative expressions (both conveying a literal sense, sometimes called plain-literal and figurative-literal). This is the normal or customary manner to communicate. For example, if a person were to speak of a person “kicking the bucket,” or simply say that a person died, both speak of an actual, or literal, physical death of the person being spoken about. The actual death is the literal meaning, regardless of whether one uses a figurative expression or not.

For example, surely Allis would know that literal interpreters recognize the difference between metaphorical and normal language. We use the term denotative language when the literal meaning is the *explicit assertion* of the words, whereas connotative language is used when the literal meaning is the *specific intention of the figure of speech*.

What literal interpreter would believe that when Jesus is referred to as the lion of Judah this refers to Him being an actual lion (*Panthera leo*). We know that the figure of a lion represents someone of great strength or magnificence, One may use figurative or connotative language to speak literal meaning, moreover, when Moses declares in Exodus 15:8 that the waters were gathered together with the blast of Yahweh’s nostrils. Literal interpreters understand that the text includes metaphor, but only a small portion of it. Anytime figures of speech are used in a text, they make up but a small portion of the text; most is denotative, or it would be impossible to provide shareable meaning. The words “Yahweh” and the waters “gathering together” are all literal truths, but the blast of Yahweh’s nostrils expresses the act of God metaphorically, when He caused a strong east wind.

Let us look at two examples regarding Jesus that distinguish these. When the text tells us that the Messiah will actually descend to the Mount of Olives and that it will split north and south, is this speaking of a higher principle, or even type, of the Messiah's majesty or will the physical mountain east of Jerusalem actually move apart? I would take the words non-figuratively. Zechariah 14:4 reads, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.” There is nothing in this text that should be seen as metaphorical. It is a straightforward statement of a future act by Messiah.

On the other hand, in John 7:37 we have an example of a literal meaning of Messiah’s works, but using metaphors to express the literal truth of His ministry: “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” This

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<sup>5</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1969, P & R. Publishing), p. 17-18.

teaching of Jesus states literal, spiritual truth, but is not an allegory. It speaks clearly of the works of Messiah, and not of some other “so-called” deeper truth other than stated by Jesus *and interpreted by the apostle John*. Water in the text stands for the Spirit that comes from the believer in Jesus. The thirst of water speaks of the desire for salvation, or the coming of the Spirit. The text makes the figures of speech clear.

One may decide what is figurative versus non-figurative by following some basic guidelines. If an interpretation causes an inherent contradiction with other Scripture, with a moral or physical impossibility, or a meaning is contradicted by the context, it is clear that figurative language is involved. So, when the Scripture requests “Prayer for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psa 122:6), this refers to the actual and literal earthly city of Jerusalem, not a type of the Church for which we are to pray. On the other hand, often figures of speech are easy to recognize, as in Galatians 2:9, where James and Cephas are declared “pillars,” who support the Church, and not buttresses in a building.

b. There is no “spiritual” language, though there are truths revealed by the Spirit

The use of literal language is contrasted with allegorical language. In allegory, non-figurative and figurative language is also used, or no meaning could be discerned by the reader. The difference is that behind the verbal expressions of the author the texts purposely mean something other than the obvious meaning. What is sometimes called spiritualized interpretation falls into this category, and is the same as allegory, in that what the author means, or the reader reads is “beneath” the text, or different from what one would normally understand by the words being read. Unless the author provides the “key” to understanding the meaning, the author and reader would not have shareable words, and thus the text would be incomprehensible to the reader. God has spoken His revelation through human words to be understood and not mystical words that are unknowable to us.

What disturbs me most about the type of interpretation that Allis supports is the desire to set aside meaning that is rooted in historical and textual reality (for example, Canaan means Canaan, not heaven, unless the figure is clearly evident), in favor of a “spiritual” meaning, because God is a spirit. This sounds somewhat gnostic when he says that “spiritual things are more real and more precious than visible, tangible, ephemeral things.”<sup>6</sup> He forgets that God created and operates within a physical and earthly reality to give His revelation to us. He follows this with the conclusion that instead of Israel referring to the people Israel, we should understand it to typify the Church.<sup>7</sup> He then mischaracterizes the dispensationalist as believing that everything about Israel is earthly and everything about the Church is heavenly. This is far from true. Dispensationalists believe that certain things about Israel are in fact earthly, as they relate to their function in God’s kingdom, based on the plain reading of the covenants, but this does not exclude the church, as he avers, from the earth. In fact, both are involved in the millennial reign of Christ in different capacities, and both shall subsequently dwell in the New Heavens, and the New Earth.

Needing something more spiritual than the words of Scripture interpreted in a normal manner has plagued biblical interpretation since the early centuries of the Church. The allegorical approach of Philo of Alexandria was practiced by the church theologian Origen in

<sup>6</sup> Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 19-21.

the late second and early third centuries. For Origen, every word of Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that every word has a *spiritual* meaning that lies behind, or transcends, the literal meaning of a word. Non-literal (*allegorical*) interpretations, were justified by Origen on the basis that since Scripture is itself spiritual, then it must have a spiritual meaning worthy of God and be inerrant despite its apparent difficulties.<sup>8</sup> It is not a stretch that allegorism gave rise to the amillennialism that began in Alexandria, in contrast to the premillennialism believed in Asia Minor and Syria where the literal method was practiced by the theological progeny of St. John.<sup>9</sup>

c. All biblical prophecy has always been fulfilled in a literal manner

All biblical prophecies (predictions) have been fulfilled in a literal manner. For example, when the Scripture speaks of the wolf lying down with the lamb, is it *only* speaking of some deeper meaning or higher truth like peace in the world, or does it mean in fact that the wolves and lambs will exist without hostility, certainly a clear sign of a time of peace in nature? When Zechariah the prophet spoke of a river flowing at the temple which goes into both the Mediterranean and Dead Seas, complete with descriptions and boundaries, does this refer merely to some spiritual truth, or that the event will actually occur? Is Ezekiel's temple only a weak description of Jesus as the temple of God, or an actual millennial temple? How we approach ideas such as these will reveal our commitment to the literal interpretation of a text. Although the Old Testament does have types, as Allis indicated, of New Testament truths and events (the anti-types), this in no way denies the historical reality of the type.

We have an example of literal meaning having the mixture of connotative and denotative language used in reference to a historical happening in the Old Testament, namely the prophecy of Isaiah about the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus the Great. Speaking about the fact that Yahweh knows everything and determines the movement in human history, Isaiah uses Yahweh's words speaking of Cyrus, and him being a "bird of prey" from the east. Yahweh bases it on the fact that He declares "the end from the beginning," that "I have planned *it, surely* I will do it," and "he will perform all My Desire." (Isa 46:10-11; 44:28)

How should we understand this prophecy? Does it matter that specifics are given such as the direction of Cyrus' coming, or his name? Symbols are used, such as Cyrus being called a bird of prey, but the meaning of the text is literal, even if some figurative language is used. Yahweh would bring someone (Cyrus) against Babylon from the east (Persia), and this "bird of prey" will rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Rather than ignoring the historical context of an Old Testament passage, literal interpreters endeavor to be consistent in reading the Old and New Testaments. They desire to interpret all biblical texts within the historical and literary context of a passage, rather than imposing a non-literal interpretation due to matters outside the original setting (prophetic utterances are often found within historical settings, negating neither). Some scholars sometimes follow what is known as intertextual interpretation, in which Old Testament texts

<sup>8</sup> See H. Wayne House and Gordon Carle, *Doctrine Twisting: How Core Biblical Truths Are Distorted* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 84, for additional information on thinking of Origen in relation to spiritual truth versus literal truth in the text of Scripture.

<sup>9</sup> See H. Wayne House, "Premillennialism in the Ante-Nicene Church: Why the Divide in the Early Church on Chiliasm?" <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/premillennialism-in-the-ante-nicene-church-why-the-divide-in-the-early-church-on-chiliasm> (last visited July 5, 2017).

are reinterpreted through New Testament texts. Supposedly, the New Testament authors molded the Old Testament writings to convey meanings not found within the original author's texts. It is argued that New Testament authors did this to convey ideas that the Old Testament authors did not envision but served the purposes of the New Testament authors. In practice, this appears to be nothing other than eisegesis. It is granted that the New Testament authors, at times, view the Old Testament as other than fulfillment of a prediction, or that they apply passages that speak to Israel as lessons for the church, but these are no denials of the original meaning of the Old Testament passages.

In fact, Roy Zuck provides a number of ways that the New Testament understanding of the Old Testament does not require a reinterpretation of the Old Testament that changes the historical meaning or the Old Testament text.<sup>10</sup> Literal interpreters would agree that the New Testament authors do not necessarily seek to attest predictions being fulfilled<sup>11</sup> each time that they quote or refer to an Old Testament text, but that they use them as types, moral lessons, applications of various sorts, but they insist that once one is able to determine the author's meaning in the biblical text, Old or New, the meaning itself never changes. This approach is not recent but is represented even in the rabbinic and apostolic understanding of the Old Testament, to be discussed below.

In line with this consistent practice of literal prophecy, every prophecy regarding the Messiah in his first coming to Israel was fulfilled in a literal manner. To only mention a few: Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:18); Messiah would be from Abraham's seed (Gen 22:18 and Luke 3:23, 34); Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; Mic 5:2 and Matt 2:1); Messiah would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12 and Matt 26:15); Messiah would be pierced in His side (Psa 22:14 and John 19:33); Messiah would be raised from the dead (Psa 16:10 and Acts 2:31); Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matt 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 19:43-44; 21:20-24). Since all of these Old Testament prophetic predictions were fulfilled literally by Jesus, why should we expect those regarding His second coming be fulfilled in a non-literal way?

When teaching the first and second comings of Jesus to earth, evangelicals have always recognized that these were to be fulfilled literally and not in some "spiritual" way, though the literal language may convey "spiritual or theological truth" (energized by the Spirit). Dispensationalists have affirmed, along with covenant theologians, belief in a bodily, visible *return* of Christ. It is no large step, then, to believe also in a bodily and visible *reign* of Christ upon the earth. There is no need reinterpret the words "heaven" and "Jerusalem" as a reference to heaven, or even to see these as types and anti-types. Dispensationalists see no need to depart from the literal hermeneutic; the problem with non-dispensationalists is when they frequently change the plain meaning of the author's meaning in the Old Testament text. We believe that one should not ignore the plain reading of the Old Testament text within its own historical context, giving due regard to occasional metaphors. We do not believe that the New Testament authors appropriated for the Church the role of Israel initiated in the Abrahamic Covenant (and those that flow from this covenant). Even though the New

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 260-267.

<sup>11</sup> See my fuller interaction with the various meaning for "fulfill" and interaction with four ways that Darrell Bock provides as to how evangelicals have followed in harmonizing the Old and New Testaments. H. Wayne House, "Traditional Dispensationalism and the Millennium," *CTR*, 11/1 (Fall 2013), 8-10.

Testament authors developed lessons and theology from the Old Testament, they did not abandon or contradict the Old Testament texts to create a New Testament theology contrary to the original meanings found in the Old Testament.

### 3. *How Literal Interpreters Understand the Term Literal*

#### a. Plain-Literal language versus Figurative-Literal language (denotative and connotative meaning)

What about the use of numbers and symbols in the book of Revelation, or possibly the Olivet Discourse? How does one know what is figurative and what is not? For example, was Jesus truly in the tomb three days; did it really rain 40 days and 40 nights for Noah; were there really seven churches that received the letters from John; were 70 years really appointed for the people of Israel in Babylonian captivity, as Daniel and Jeremiah had said? Sometimes numbers are very literal but also may have a typological value. The twelve were actually 12 disciples, but they stood typologically for the twelve tribes of Israel. The issue of numbers is not without difficulties, but it does not need to be a non-starter in interpretation of a biblical text. There is no one rule that determines whether a particular number is literal or figurative, but the maxim to consider something literal, unless it is absurd, is a reasonable approach. Thus, even if the number “seven” carries the sense of completeness, or the like, this in no way negates it being also used for the literal numeral seven. Clearly portions of these accounts are given in visionary form, but even so, there is also a clear connection to real history in the mention of historical churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea), the province of Asia, the seven Spirits probably referring to the seven-fold work of the Spirit found Isaiah 11:2-3, and mentioned four times in the book (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), association with the temple imagery of lampstands, seals, stars, lamps, eyes, horns, trumpets, plagues, peals of thunder, bowls, heads, horns, kings, and angels. In addition, there is no reason to consider the use of the number 1,000 in Revelation 20:1-10, as figurative or symbolic. The word occurs six times in the passage and that it referred to a real thousand years was universally held in the early fathers of the church who wrote on the passage. This thinking changed with the wildly allegorical teaching of Origen, and finally St. Augustine.

#### 3. *Distinguishing literal meaning from spiritualized or allegorical interpretation.*

As we've already indicated, any time we read a document it is imperative that we seek to interpret it according to the plain meaning of words as they would normally be understood, whether the terms are literal or metaphorical. The introduction of allegorical meaning in the ancient Greek world preceding the New Testament, in which authors sought to make sense of the various mythologies about the gods and their miraculous acts, gave rise to allegorical explanations since authors no longer accepted that the gods and those events surrounding them actually occurred. This is also true of Philo, who attempted to make palatable the miraculous events in the Old Testament to a Greek world that might have difficulty with the creation accounts, the story of Adam and Eve, the various acts of Yahweh among the people of Israel. The tendency of Origen, and later Augustine, et al, to attempt to find something more than was viewed as mundane, and make it relate to the spiritual world, created allegorical stories that do not comport with the actual happenings that one observes in the biblical text. Allegory, or what might also be called spiritualization, however, is contrary to the normal sense of words and the meanings that reside really only in the interpreter mind and not in the

text itself. Even though an interpreter might have lofty reasons for attempting to find something more spectacular or spiritual within a given passage, it is actually a betrayal of the intent of the author who wrote the passage, as well as the God who inspired it. Any interpretation that does not give proper recognition to the plain reading of the text is an abuse of the text.

I certainly agree with those who argue that God is pure spirit and that there are intentions and plans of God that are beyond our understanding, but we recognize that God chose to create a physical world and to work within this physical world, in time-space history. God's desire to interact with human beings on the historical plane is not a denigration of God. His intention to create not only human beings initially, but to form a people called Israel, is not somehow less spiritual than his works in the Church after the time of Christ. It is true that Jesus the Savior, in fulfillment of God's desire to rescue humanity spiritually, is the pinnacle of his salvation plan, but it is also true that God's work through Jesus the Messiah to create a kingdom on the earth through the people Israel is no less a spiritual work of God. We may find that the plan of God for Israel and the Church are not in conflict, but complementary.

#### 4. *Following the Interpretive Methods of Jesus and the Apostles*

It is common to believe, and this is a mainstay of those who spiritualize the Old Testament, that the apostles, when they interpreted the Old Testament, found the "deeper truths" that were often diametrically different from what was understood by the authors of those Old Testament texts. Feeling the freedom given to them by the manner in which the apostles *supposedly* interpreted the Old Testament, some interpreters follow suit when they interpret the Old Testament. But on the contrary, the apostles understood the Old Testament quite literally, even though not every passage that they interpreted was a prediction to be fulfilled in light of the coming of the Messiah.

Emil Schürer, in *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, contrasts the interpretive practices of the apostles with Judaism. Though the apostles used the basic rabbinic forms, they did not expand them to the extravagances of Jewish exegesis.<sup>12</sup> What should be understood from this study of Schürer is that the New Testament authors did not ride in a vacuum but followed in many respects the rabbinic exegetical approach, but not the allegorism seen in Jewish interpretation. Fortunately for us, the New Testament authors refrained from such excesses and sought to understand the Old Testament passages in a straightforward manner uniformly interpreting them literally rather than some deeper meaning that went *beyond* the original authors' meaning.

David L Cooper, in his work *Messiah: His Historical Appearance*,<sup>13</sup> shows his familiarity with Jewish writings and about the way in which the rabbis interpreted Scripture in a fourfold manner. Recognizing the conservative approach of the apostles he creates new names for the four categories mentioned by Schürer. Let us look at these four categories and then examine the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew to see the way in which the apostle Matthew follows

<sup>12</sup> Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, trans. Sophia Taylor and the Rev. Peter Christie, Division 2, Vol 1 (Hendrickson reprint, 2003, originally published by T&T Clark Edinburgh in 1890), 348-349.

<sup>13</sup> David L Cooper, *Messiah: His Historical Appearance* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1958), 174-177.

these rabbinic methods.<sup>14</sup>

The first category given by Cooper is called *pshat*. Cooper referred to this as *literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment*. An example of this is found in Matthew 2:5-6. “so they said to him, ‘in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Matthew connects this event, relating to the Messiah, to a biblical passage from Micah 5:2, “but you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are of old, From everlasting.” (Micah 5:2).

In the original context of Micah 5:2, the prophet Micah speaks prophetically that whenever the Messiah is born, He will be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Consequently, the literal meaning of the prophet Micah is that the Messiah would be born in the Bethlehem located in Judah. The predictive prophecy and its fulfillment is very specific.

It was common for Old Testament prophets to make predictions that are within the broader historical narrative, so that it may appear that the prophecy itself is not predictive but this is the manner in which they made predictions. The historical narrative served as a framework to *look ahead* to future events outside their own time. This probably is true in Psalm 22, describing the death of the Messiah, or Psalm 110:1, where the Messiah is said to sit at the right hand of God, and even the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14.

The second rabbinical category was called *remez*, which Cooper designates as *literal plus typical*. An example is found in Matthew 2:15, in which Matthew discusses Messiah’s sojourn in Egypt, “until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son’ (Matt 2:15). The actual quote from which Matthew speaks is located at Hosea 11:1: ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.’ It is clear in reading Hosea 11:1 that the discussion is *not* a prophecy but the recording of an *historical event*, namely, the Exodus. The background of the passage from Hosea is Exodus: 22–23, referring to Israel as the “national son of God.” In comparing the statement of Matthew with that of Hosea, we observe that the apostle is not viewing his statement as the fulfillment of a prophecy. Matthew does not deny a literal Exodus, and so the accuracy of the Old Testament passage. Rather, the Exodus event becomes a *type* of a New Testament event, in which “an individual Son of God, the Messiah, is also divinely called out of Egypt.” So then, Hosea's reference is *not prediction* but a statement of a historical event, and used by Matthew only as a type.

The third rabbinic category followed by the apostles was called *drash*, which refers to an *expansion* on the meaning of the text, in which the New Testament apostle drew conclusions from the Old Testament and apply them to a new situation, often relating to only *one point of similarity*. Cooper calls this the literal plus application.

One finds an example of this in Matthew 2:17 – 18, where the text says, “then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted,

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<sup>14</sup> I am deeply indebted to the work of Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Ariel Ministries Press, 1989, revised 1994), 843-845 for his study of these interpretative categories in his book on Israelology.

because they are no more.” The actual quote from Matthew is very close to the statement in Jeremiah: “Thus says Yahweh: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’”

In the original context of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the Babylonian Captivity, in which young Jewish men were taken into captivity and passed by the town of Ramah, near the tomb of Rachel was buried, the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As a young man passed by these Jewish mothers of Ramah wait for their sons they would never see again. The Jeremiah event happened in Ramah, north of Jerusalem, whereas the Massey and passage speaks of sons being killed in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. The literal meaning of the passage in Jeremiah was the scene of these mothers representing Rachel, weeping for their children. Similar to the rabbis, the apostles *did not change or reinterpret* what the verse meant in its historical context, but found *one point of similarity* between the two events as an application. Another example of *drash* is when Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32. Actually, nothing that Joel mentions happens on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, and the dominant event of speaking in tongues that actually occurred on Pentecost is not even mentioned by Joel. But there is one point of connection, namely, the coming of the Spirit. This is *not a fulfilled prediction* from Joel (still to occur), but a point of application between the two passages.

The fourth, and last, rabbinic category is *sod*, in which the fulfillment relates not to a specific passage of Scripture or a quotation of any specific Scripture but is a summary of what the Scripture speaks on the subject. Cooper gives Matthew 2:23 as an example of this interpretive method: “. . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.” There does not appear to be any place in the Old Testament in which the biblical writers refer to the Messiah as a Nazarene. Nonetheless, Matthew summarizes what the Old Testament said about Messiah. A clue may be found in verse 23 where Matthew uses the “prophets” rather than prophet. Apparently, he summarizes the teaching of the prophets, in which the Messiah would be a despised and rejected individual (Isa 49:1-13; 52:13—53:12). In the first century in Israel and Nazarene was a despised and rejected individual and was a statement of reproach and shame (John 1:46), so that Matthew connects this attitude for the Nazarenes with the way in which Messiah would be treated is found in Old Testament prophet teaching. This is similar to what happens in developing theology, in which one looks at a variety of passages and summarizes a teaching.

All theological positions regarding eschatology, and the millennium in particular, come with difficulties in attempting to deal with the New Testament use of the Old Testament, since it is unlikely that one could possibly create an encyclopedic classification of these under a single usage. In fact, Bateman is correct that arguments given to address the future millennium in a nuanced fashion depends on “presuppositional preference on one testament over the other” with the presuppositions defining where one begins hermeneutically.<sup>15</sup>