

UNIT III

HOW TO INTERPRET AND STUDY THE BIBLE

Every preacher and biblical teacher employs certain methods, oftentimes unconsciously, in the interpretation of the Bible. The Scriptures which were addressed to specific needs must be interpreted and applied to the needs of contemporary situations. The task of interpretation is to take the essence of God's revelation and give to it a new expression or a new form which is relevant to modern man.

History is a valuable teacher. Important lessons are to be learnt by studying the methods of interpretation used by Jesus and the apostles. The Early Church Fathers in Alexandria were especially influenced by Philo's allegorical method of interpreting Scripture. The extreme use of this method led to fantastic results. History can teach us what to avoid as well as what to accept. Lesson 9 deals with the methods of interpreting Scripture used by the Early Church.

In recent years there has been a new interest in determining the proper method of interpretation. The new emphases on biblical theology and on the theological interpretation of the Bible have led to a renewed study of Luther and Calvin of the Reformation period. Luther and Calvin set forth principles of interpretation which seem valid today. Lesson 10 surveys the principles of interpretation during the Reformation and the modern periods.

The principles of interpretation applied to a particular Scripture will be affected by the type of literature contained in the Scripture. Some biblical teachers and preachers err in not recognizing the difference between apocalyptic and historical literature. Poetical literature is not to be interpreted in the same way as prosaic literature. Although the Early Church adopted the Old Testament as Scripture because it spoke of Christ, they found very few Scriptures which spoke directly of Christ. Many of the Messianic references were interpreted typologically (using Old Testament persons or events as examples). Lesson 11 gives attention to the interpretation of different types of literature.

The Bible is often neglected or abused. Since its content is difficult to master, many students are at a loss to know how to study it. Some learn only to quote Scriptures but never succeed in understanding the personal application. Others misapply Scripture by using it to support various opinions and arguments. Lesson 12 is concerned with the study and application of the Bible.

LESSON 9

INTERPRETATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

Jesus was a master interpreter. He was frequently called a teacher because of His interpretation and application of the Old Testament Scriptures. The error of the Jews was their misinterpretation of the kind of Messiah to expect and of their own missionary commission. The difference between the apostles and the Pharisees was basically their interpretation of Scripture. God's rejection of Israel as a nation was the result of her misinterpretation of the Old Testament.

The crucifixion of Jesus had to be interpreted. To the Romans, the event was nothing more than the punishment of another criminal. The sermons and letters of the apostles gave a different interpretation to that great event: the crucifixion of Jesus was a sacrificial act of redemption.

God has spoken in the Holy Scripture, but what has He said? The primary task of the preacher and teacher today is to interpret the meaning of the ministry, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus. The average Christian needs to know what the Bible says and how it is to be applied in his daily life. Many biblical concepts are strange and foreign to him. If someone does not tell him what they mean, he will never know. If the preacher or teacher misinterprets the Scripture, he fails in his divine calling.

The Scripture has been used to support unchristian activities and attitudes. For example, wrong principles of interpretation are followed when the Bible is used to justify polygamy because the Patriarchs practised it. The Bible has been used to justify slavery, the death of witches, the pronouncing of plagues upon enemies, and the superiority of one race of people to another. Correct principles of interpretation will prevent the wrong application of the Old Testament to Christian morality.

The word interpretation comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein* (to explain). Hermeneutics is defined as the science which deals with the history, principles, laws, and methods of interpretation.¹ Robert M. Grant has defined the task of interpretation of any written record of human thought as the exposition of its author's meaning in terms of our own thought forms.²

Interpretation is related to exegesis (bringing out the meaning of Scriptures). Principles of interpretation guide the work of exegesis. The work of exegesis applies hermeneutics or the rules of interpretation.

Jewish Interpretation

Two extremes are to be avoided in understanding the relation of Jesus to His Jewish environment: (1) Jesus was not affected

¹ H. E. Dana and R. E. Glaze, *Interpreting the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), p. 1.

² *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (rev. ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 11.

The Jewish nation was rejected because of her misinterpretation of the _____.

(Old Testament)

The role of a preacher or Bible teacher is to interpret the _____, _____, and _____ of Jesus.

(ministry, cross, resurrection)

The Bible is being misinterpreted when it is used to justify un-Christian _____ and _____. List some practices which people sometimes justify by misinterpreting the Bible. _____

(activities, attitudes, polygamy, slavery, death of witches, pronouncement of plagues, superiority of one race to another)

Hermeneutics is the science of dealing with the _____, _____, _____, and _____ of interpretation.

(history, principles, laws, methods)

Exegesis means to bring out the _____ of _____.

(meaning, Scriptures)

by Jewish methods of interpretation; (2) Jesus' methods of interpreting the Old Testament were no different from the Rabbis'. Grant concludes that Jesus was influenced by His Jewish environment since the form and sometimes the content of His sayings were similar to those of contemporary Rabbis.³ On the other hand, Jesus was not restricted by Jewish rules and customs in interpreting the Old Testament. The followers of Jesus were amazed that He did not interpret the Old Testament like the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees questioned the right of Jesus and His apostles to interpret the Old Testament since they did not have proper training. Judaism was built on a particular method of interpretation.

The Origin of Jewish Interpretation

The development of a system of interpretation of the Old Testament began with Ezra, about 450 B.C. When Ezra returned from Babylon, he determined to teach statutes and judgments in Israel (Ezra 7:7). For long hours, he read the Law of Moses to the men and women (Neh. 8:3, 18). This emphasis elevated the Law above other sections of the Old Testament. He and other leaders of the people made an oath to walk in God's law, "to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, . . . and his judgments and his statutes" (Neh. 10:29). With the establishment of the Covenant between God and Ezra and the leaders who represented the people, it became necessary to have teachers and interpreters of the Law who would determine its application to the new and varied situations which would arise.

One of the first applications is recorded in Nehemiah 13. Because Moses had written that the Ammonites and the Moabites should not come into the congregation of God forever, Ezra concluded that Jews should not mix with foreigners. A further application of the Law required Jewish men to put away their foreign wives. Also, an emphasis was placed on keeping the Sabbath day holy. During the following generations, rules were multiplied for enforcing the observance of the Sabbath commandment and for restricting foreign relations.

The work of Ezra resulted in three emphases:

1. A new emphasis on the observance of the Law.—The authority and importance of the Law were exalted above the other sections of the Scripture. To insure that the people would correctly observe the Law, the Rabbis constructed a "fence for the Torah." The fence was to prevent the transgression of the Law. It meant that scribes needed to define its limits and magnify its authority in such a way that men knew precisely what their obligations were. Then they could avoid transgression.

2. The recognition of the scribes who would officially interpret the Law.—To meticulously keep the Law required that a body of authoritative interpreters determine how it should be applied to new circumstances. The scribal period extended to the beginning of the second century B.C.

3. The establishment of synagogues.—The captivity prevented the participation of the people in temple services. The teaching of the Law and prayers in synagogue services partially compensated for the temple ceremonial worship.

The form and sometimes the content of _____ sayings were similar to the Rabbis', but He was not restricted by Jewish _____ and _____ of _____ interpretation.

(Jesus', rules, customs, Old Testament)

With a new emphasis on the Law, _____ were needed as authoritative _____ to determine how the Law should be _____.

(scribes, interpreters, applied)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25

The period of the "pairs"

Beginning about 200 B.C., pairs of teachers carried on the traditional methods of interpreting the Old Testament. The definition and limits of the Law were transmitted in the form of oral tradition. Hillel and Shammai were the great teachers in the day of Jesus. Hillel was one of the greatest Jewish interpreters. He is remembered for his classification of the oral tradition and for the seven rules of interpretation. "The tradition of the fathers" had been transmitted orally, according to the Rabbis, since the time of Moses. Hillel reduced to Six Orders the chaotic mass of rules which had accumulated around the 613 Mosaic precepts. When the oral laws were recorded, these Orders became the framework for the Mishnah (the written "traditions of the fathers").

Hillel defined seven rules of interpretation. They became the customary method of all later developments of the oral law. Some of these rules are:

1. Inference by analogy—words having identical or similar connotations could be treated alike even though they might be bound up in statements that were very different.
2. Deduction from the special to the general—general implications deduced from one passage.
3. Deduction from several passages—laws deduced by implication from more than one passage.
4. Deduction from the particular to the general and vice versa.
5. Deduction from the context.

Hillel showed greater liberality and breadth of use than Shammai. Shammai was an extreme formalist. He was enslaved to the letter of the Law and refused to consider human welfare. His daughter-in-law once bore a child during the Feast of Tabernacles. To enforce the strict keeping of the law of the feast, he broke away some of the roof-plaster and made a booth of branches over the head of the child (*Sukkah* 2:8).

The period of the Tannaim or Teachers (A.D. 10-200)

Gamaliel I, Paul's teacher, followed his grandfather Hillel in being broadminded and considerate in his interpretation of the Law. He studied and taught Greek literature and stood for the inherent rights and privileges of the Gentiles. The Book of Acts reveals his lack of dogmatism.

Johanan ben Zakkai (about 87-100) established the school at Jamnia after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He was leader of the Jews who recognized the books of the Old Testament as canonical. He led in the reorganization of Judaism after the fall of the Temple.

Rabbi Judah (about 220) is famous for compiling, standardizing, and reducing to writing the oral tradition. The written form was given the name Mishnah (to teach). The Mishnah and the later interpretations and comments concerning its laws were combined into the Talmud (learning).

Principles of Jewish interpretation

Palestinian Jews regarded the Bible as the infallible Word of God. They considered that every word of Scripture had been spoken by God. The concern of the Pharisees and scribes was to use all exegetical means to discover hidden meanings in the application of Scripture. Their principles of interpretation included the literal meaning of words and sentences and the discovery of hidden meanings. The exposition of hidden meanings often resulted in arbitrariness. Rabbi Judah stated, "He that renders a verse of Scripture as it appears (that is, literally) says

The definition and limits of the Law were transmitted in the form of _____

Hillel was a Jewish _____ who is remembered for his _____ of the _____ tradition and his seven rules of _____.

(oral tradition, interpreter, classification, oral, interpretation)

The Mishnah is the written " _____ of the _____."

(traditions, fathers)

Hillel was more _____ than S _____, especially towards the Gentiles. Shammai was a _____.

(liberal, Shammai, formalist)

Write the letter of the teacher by the description which applies to him.

- a. Gamaliel I b. Johanan ben Zakkai
c. Rabbi Judah

_____ led in the reorganization of Judaism after the fall of the Temple.

_____ compiled, standardized, and reduced to writing the oral tradition.

_____ teacher of Paul who stood for the inherent rights of the Gentiles.

(b, c, a)

The Jewish principles of interpretation included the _____ meaning of words and sentences and the discovery of _____.

(literal, hidden meanings)

what is not true. He who adds to it is a blasphemer."⁴ They used the rules of Hillel to justify their interpretations of hidden meanings.

Oral law was first exalted as a supplement to the written Law. In the day of Jesus, oral law or tradition had replaced the written Law (cf. Mark 7:11ff.). One of the Jewish traditions for applying the fifth commandment in a situation actually led to the transgression of it. Jesus opposed the Jewish oral tradition which set aside the Law of Moses and substituted legalistic rules for genuine spirituality and loving consideration of others. According to Matthew 23, Jesus strongly censured the Pharisees for having misinterpreted the Old Testament teachings through their legalistic rules. Their rules regulating work on the Sabbath would not permit the sick to be healed nor the hungry to be fed. Jesus considered these rules to be misinterpretations of the Old Testament.

Jesus' Interpretation of the Old Testament

Jesus agreed with His contemporaries, the Pharisees and scribes, that the Scriptures were authoritative and inspired. He did not, however, hold to the "wooden view" of literally interpreting every word and applying the resulting precepts to situations without regard to circumstances. He did not consider loyalty to the Law to supersede human welfare.

Jesus joined His contemporaries in quoting Scripture and saying, "It is written . . ." (Matt. 4:4; Mark 11:17; Luke 4:4; etc.). Jesus revealed that He regarded Scripture as inspired by saying, "David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared . . ." (Mark 12:36—RSV). Jesus did not hold to a mechanical dictation view of Scripture since He recognized that it was David who spoke. Yet, He could say, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). Other Scriptures reveal, however, that He did not hold all of the Law to be on the same level. He considered the permanency of marriage set forth in Genesis 2:24 to supersede the law permitting divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (cf. Matt. 19).

Jesus did not exalt the Law above the Prophets or the Writings, but He did exalt the vitally religious portions of the Old Testament above the less valuable cultic prescriptions. Performing no work on the Sabbath was not to be legally interpreted if it denied helping a person in need. Jesus stated that He preferred mercy to sacrifice (Matt. 9:13). External cultic observances were not to be substituted for genuine worship and service, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do" (Mark 7:6ff.). Jesus summed up or interpreted the entire 613 commandments in the Law with two statements, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:30f.).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated that His laws went beyond the laws of the Old Testament. Whereas the Pharisees and scribes interpreted Old Testament laws as prohibiting external actions, the interpretations of Jesus included deeper meanings which dealt with the attitudes of the heart. It was not sufficient to refrain from adultery or murder; man must refrain from lust and anger.

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (a reprint of the Bampton Lectures 1885, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 85.

Jesus regarded the Old Testament as

_____ and _____, but
*He did not consider loyalty to the Law to
 supersede _____.*

(authoritative, inspired, human welfare)

*Jesus exalted the vitally _____
 portions of the Old Testament above those of
 _____ value.*

(religious, lesser)

*The interpretations of the Pharisees and
 scribes prohibited _____,
 but Jesus included _____ of
 the _____.*

(external actions, attitudes, heart)

The attitude with which Jesus approached the Old Testament made a tremendous difference in the results of His interpretation. The Pharisees were self-seeking and proud; therefore, they used the Old Testament to justify their self-exaltation. Jesus was dominated by love and humility. He saw in the Old Testament no promise of honour and exaltation until after suffering and sacrifice. Jesus emphasized the Suffering Servant sections of Isaiah; the Pharisees and scribes emphasized the promises concerning the glory of the nation.

Jesus used some of the forms of expression of the Rabbis, but the content of His teachings was different. He magnified the presence of the Kingdom of God instead of the Law. He identified Himself as the fulfilment of prophecy rather than pointing towards a coming Messiah. He interpreted the Old Testament in the light of the dawning New Age instead of emphasizing the literal interpretation of sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words without consideration of context or the historical occasion.

Although Jesus used rabbinic forms of expression and held a high regard for the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament, He differed greatly from the Rabbis. The content of His message was different. His attitude in the interpretation of the Old Testament was different. He saw the meaning of the Old Testament teachings in relation to His own day.

Paul's Interpretation of the Old Testament

Factors influencing Paul's hermeneutics

His education in Tarsus of Cilicia.—Paul's early education was in a city which had strong Greek influence. He probably was exposed to the Greek educational system which emphasized rhetoric (principles and rules for writing and speaking effectively).

His rabbinical education under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).—Paul's rabbinical training and attitude towards the Law are revealed by his persecution of Stephen and other early Christians. He believed that devotion to God was expressed by performing external rituals and rules. He received a typical rabbinic education; however, his teacher Gamaliel was more liberal and open towards Gentiles than many other Rabbis. Paul was well acquainted with Hillel's rules of interpretation.

His conversion experience.—Paul's rabbinic approach to interpreting the Old Testament may have been shaken by the sermon and death of Stephen. His experience with the living Lord on the road to Damascus laid the foundation for a new understanding of the Old Testament. Previous to his conversion, he had understood the Old Testament to speak of a triumphant Messiah who would lead Israel to glorious victories over her enemies. After his conversion, his interpretation emphasized Scriptures which spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

His divine call.—Before Paul's conversion, he conceived of his divine responsibility being limited to the Jews. After his conversion, he became the apostle to the Gentiles. His search and interpretation of the Old Testament focused on Scriptures which spoke of Israel's mission to other nations.

His emphasis on the Spirit.—Paul believed that the Old Testament was the inspired Word of God and the Holy Spirit who guided the writers also guided the interpreters to understand it. He spoke of God's plan being hidden for ages, but it was revealed in his day. The Spirit enabled Paul to understand God's mystery which was not understood by his Jewish contemporaries.

His daily experiences.—Paul's understanding of the Old

Read all of the section Factors influencing Paul's hermeneutics (continued on p. 115), then list those factors.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

1. *His education in Tarsus of Cilicia.*
2. *His rabbinical education under Gamaliel.*
3. *His conversion experience.*
4. *His divine call.*
5. *His emphasis on the Spirit.*
6. *His daily experiences.*
7. *His emphasis on the return of Christ.*
8. *The influence of Jesus' teachings.*

Testament and the emphasis of his interpretation were affected by his controversy with the Jews. In the midst of his experiences, he was able to see the meaning of the Scriptures which referred to the stubborn and stiff-necked people.

His emphasis on the return of Christ.—Although Paul said little about the Kingdom of God, he believed that he walked in the power of the Kingdom because of the indwelling Spirit. He expected an imminent return of Christ to bring the Kingdom to its fullness.

The influence of Jesus' teachings.—Paul followed Jesus in rejecting the legalistic interpretation and application of the Law. Jesus had summed up the Law in the words "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Paul adopted the same summation of the Law (cf. Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:9).

Characteristics of Paul's hermeneutics

Paul was a theologian who used his rabbinic training to find Old Testament support for his understanding of Christ. After his conversion, his emphasis was on the blind deceitfulness of man and the redemptive hope of Christ's death and resurrection. Paul set forth in his epistles, especially in Romans, a systematic expression of the doctrine of Christ.

Paul used typology to apply the Old Testament Scriptures to Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 1:7; 2 Thess. 3:9). Type usually means "example." The experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness were an example to Christians (1 Cor. 10:6ff.). Adam was called a "type of one to come" (Rom. 5:14).

Traces of rabbinic literalism appear in Galatians 3:16b, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Although "seed" in Genesis 13:15f. refers to all of Abraham's descendants, Paul interpreted the word to mean Christ since it is singular in number. Christ was the heir of Abraham, and to reject Christ was to reject the essence of the Abrahamic Promise. He arrived at his conclusions by using methods of interpretation of his own day rather than using our contemporary methods of historical exegesis.

Both Greeks and Jews used allegory (to speak figuratively). The Greeks, especially the Stoics, used allegory to explain away the myths concerning the gods. The Rabbis understood Scripture to have hidden meanings; therefore, they used the allegorical method to bring out the hidden meanings. Paul used the allegorical interpretation of an Old Testament Scripture to illustrate the difference in bondage under the Law and freedom under grace:

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.⁵

Paul went far beyond the literal or historical understanding of the story of Hagar and Sarah when he applied it to enslaved Israel and the free. His interpretation differs, however, from true

⁵ Galatians 4:22-26.

<p>Paul used _____ to apply the _____ _____ Scriptures to _____.</p> <p>(typology, Old Testament, Christ)</p>
<p>Allegory means to _____.</p> <p>(speak figuratively)</p>

allegory since he did not deny the reality of the Old Testament history. The story is a figure of a spiritual truth. Paul's use of allegory indicates that the method is not ethically wrong, but it is an inferior way of discerning the real meaning of the Scriptures. His use of Abraham's two sons as examples of the enslaved and the free is not entirely forced.

Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament is Christocentric; the redeeming Christ is the point towards which Old Testament history was moving. Passages refer to Him since He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Sometimes the application to Christ has to be made by using typology. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 predicted the suffering of Jesus Christ. The promises of God to Abraham and his descendants became the promises of God to believers in Christ, the new Israel.

Paul understood Christ to be the one through whom the world was made and sustained. God's miracle of providing food and water in the wilderness was in reality the pre-incarnate Christ providing for His people. The miraculous gift of water was given from rocks at three different places. In all three cases, it was the divine Christ who provided for His people. To Paul, Christ was the Rock who provided for the physical needs of the people and followed them from place to place (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1ff.). Paul's contemporary application of the story emphasized the spiritual Christ who as a "spiritual rock" could provide for the needs of his people. Paul's language may not appear logical if we do not look beneath the physical surface to see the divine provision brought about through physical resources.

Paul emphasized that the Scriptures remained hidden until the veil was removed by Christ. The Jews could not understand the Law of Moses because the veil lay over their hearts, and it would only be removed and the Scripture understood through the work of the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14f.). The Spirit does not lead to enslavement under the Law, but He gives life by enabling the Christian to understand the Old Testament as a spiritual book. Without the Spirit, the reader cannot understand the Old Testament because he is blinded by Satan (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3f.).

Grant gives the following summary of Paul's principles of interpretation:

1. Everything is finally determined by its reference to Christ.
2. The outward form of the interpretation of the Old Testament is similar to that of the Rabbis, but the content is different:
 - (1) Paul took great liberty with the original meaning of passages he quoted.
 - (2) He placed much emphasis on individual words at the expense of context.⁶

Paul's hermeneutics was similar to the Rabbis' in form, but he differed in outlook and content.

The Hermeneutics of the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Although the writer of Hebrews did not have Paul's deep understanding of the Old Testament, he more thoroughly worked out the implications of the texts he used. He compared Christ to Moses and argued for Christ's superiority because He is the Son rather than a servant. He used Melchizedek as a type of Christ. Melchizedek was a mysterious person whose genealogy is not

⁶ A Short History of Interpretation, p. 37ff.

Paul's use of allegory differs from true allegory in that he did not _____ the reality of Old Testament _____ in using it allegorically.

(deny, history)

The statement, "Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament is Christocentric," means the redeeming _____ is the point towards which Old Testament _____ was moving.

(Christ, history)

Paul emphasized the meaning of the Scriptures was hidden and could not be understood except through _____ or the work of the H _____ S _____.

(Christ, Holy Spirit)

Paul's hermeneutics differed from the Rabbis' in _____ and _____.

(outlook, content)

given. Since his parents are not named, he typifies the eternal nature of Jesus.

The author of Hebrews also gave a Christological interpretation to the Old Testament. The Temple and priesthoods are shadows of Christ. The Old Testament looks forward to its fulfilment in Christ. The typological message of Hebrews is more thorough than that of any other New Testament book.

Biblical Interpretation at Alexandria

Greek philosophy and Hebrew religion met in Alexandria. The city was an important seat of learning. Philo, an Alexandrian Jew who was a contemporary of Jesus, perpetuated the argument of his predecessors that Greek philosophy came from the Pentateuch. Aristobulus (about 160 B.C.) contended that Scripture was not to be understood literally. The speech of God implies only an influence on the soul of man.⁷

Allegory was used by the Hellenistic Jews to develop a philosophy based on Moses' writings which had a semblance to the Greek philosophers. Philo was convinced of the spiritual superiority of Moses and the prophets over Plato and the philosophers. He compared divine wisdom to Sarah, the princess, and human wisdom to Hagar, the concubine. Farrar states that Philo considered the Mosaic Law to be sacred and eternal, and he found Greek philosophy to be inspiring, noble, and irresistible.⁸ He desired to harmonize the dogmas of divine revelation with the discoveries of speculative thought. Philo changed the story of Abram, the father of the faithful, into that of "a typical Stoic who departs from the Chaldaea of the sensual understanding to Haran, which means 'holes,' i.e., the five senses which teach him that they are nothing without the soul!"⁹ Abraham attained a knowledge of God and married Sarah or abstract wisdom. The statement of Jacob, "with my staff I pass over this Jordan," is interpreted to mean that Jordan is baseness, the staff is discipline, and Jacob intends to say that by discipline he had risen above baseness.¹⁰ The extreme allegorical interpretation of Philo has caused Christians to recoil from using allegory and to deny that Paul employed a different and moderate form of allegory.

Philo developed a set of rules for interpreting Scripture. Scripture can be interpreted either literally or allegorically. The literal sense is excluded when:

1. The statement is unworthy of God—"Adam hid himself from God" is a statement which dishonours God who sees all things.
2. There is any contradiction—Abraham is called the father instead of grandfather of Jacob.
3. Allegory is obvious.

A passage contains both allegorical and literal sense when:

1. A word is repeated—"Abraham, Abraham" expresses first affection, then warning.
2. If a word is superfluous—"eating thou shall eat" implies eating at a proper speed and in a conscious knowledge.

If synonyms are used, an allegorical meaning is intended: God made man (Gen. 1:27) and God moulded man (Gen. 2:8) teach

⁷ Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 130.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 133.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

The writer of Hebrews used a _____ interpretation of the Old Testament as well as _____.

(Christological, typology)

Philo used allegory because he desired to harmonize d _____ r _____ (Old Testament) with s _____ t _____ (Greek philosophy).

(divine revelation, speculative thought)

Philo said Scripture could not be interpreted literally when:

1. The _____ is _____ of _____.
2. There is any _____.
3. _____ is obvious.

(statement, unworthy, God, contradiction, allegory)

that first God made an earthly man and second the heavenly man. Parts of words may be made significant. Unusual expressions imply something mystical.

Origen

Origen was the student and successor of Clement who employed the allegorical method of interpretation. Origen was the father of grammatical interpretation and the systematizer of allegorical exegesis. His allegorical tendencies prevailed over the grammatical. He was aware that many portions of the Old Testament were dull and without evident religious purpose. Others were embarrassing and morally offensive. Marcion had concluded that the God of the Old Testament could not be the Father of Jesus Christ. The Greek philosophers made sport of the God of the Old Testament who sent out the bear to eat children. Origen determined to develop a system of interpretation which would retain the authority of the Bible but would remove the embarrassment of difficult passages.

Origen followed Philo in holding that nothing is to be believed which is unworthy of God, and Scripture does not contradict the goodness of God. He saw three levels of meaning in the Scripture: (1) the literal meaning; (2) the moral meaning; and (3) the spiritual or allegorical meaning. The spiritual meaning was hidden and had to be interpreted from figurative language. Concerning the story of the fall of Jericho, the literal meaning was the actual fall. The moral meaning was that Christ comes to an individual and the walls of his world must crumble at the sound of the trumpet. The spiritual level referred to the fall of idolatry with the coming of Christ. Origen believed that the Jews erred by taking Scriptures too literally; they expected Jesus literally to open prisons. Marcion took the Old Testament literally and concluded that the God who commanded the murder of women and children in battle is evil. Origen attempted to avoid these problems by developing a system of three-level interpretation of Scripture. He believed that passages which are historically true far outnumber those which are historically untrue. He followed the principle of taking the Scriptures as literally as possible. All Scripture has a spiritual meaning but not necessarily a literal meaning. Not all mysteries can be understood because the Bible speaks in symbols.

He was not dogmatic about the interpretation of certain Scriptures. He believed that the exegete must pray for guidance and use intelligence. The interpreter should observe the use of words, compare similar texts when one is literal and the other is spiritual, and be guided by the rule of faith.

Origen attempted to solve the problems which every interpreter faces: What is the possible meaning and good to be received from the account of the drunkenness of Noah, Jacob and his wives and concubines, the incest of Lot, or the story of Judah and Tamar? How should one interpret the command for every man to abide in his place all the Sabbath day, to salute no man by the way, and "if any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn the other cheek"?

The Hermeneutics of Antioch

Origen's influence at Antioch was offset by Jewish teachers who emphasized a literal interpretation of the Bible. Allegory was rejected. The interpreters at Alexandria appealed to Paul's use of the word allegory in Galatians 4, but the interpreters at Antioch claimed that even though he used the word he did not really interpret allegorically. Paul believed in the historical reality of the event and used it as an example. The Alexandrian inter-

Origen determined to develop a system of interpretation which would retain the authority of the _____ but would remove the _____ of _____ passages.

(Bible, embarrassment, difficult)

Give Origen's suggested three levels of meaning in the Scripture.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(literal, moral, spiritual or allegorical)

Origen believed the exegete must pray for _____ and use his _____.

(guidance, intelligence)

The interpreters of Antioch said Paul did not interpret _____ even though he used the word allegory. They said he believed in the _____ of the event and used the event as an _____.

(allegorically, historical reality, example)

preters deprived the Bible of historical reality. According to the Alexandrines, Adam was not really Adam, and Paradise was not really Paradise. Theodore of Antioch asked, "Since there are no real events, since Adam was not really disobedient, how did death enter the world, and what meaning does our salvation have?"¹¹ The Antiochenes insisted on the historical reality of the biblical revelation. They saw a deeper meaning to Scripture than the literal or historical meaning, but they based the deeper meaning on the literal and historical. They rejected hidden meanings which only Gnostics could comprehend.

The Antiochene interpreters believed that the prophet himself foresaw both the immediate event which was to come in the history of ancient Israel and the future coming of Christ. His prediction was both historical and Christocentric.

Theodore of Mopsuestia saw the importance of giving attention to linguistic details. He paid close attention to particles, moods, prepositions, and terminology in general. He endeavoured to study each passage within its context and not to isolate verses. He first considered the sequence of thoughts, then he examined the phraseology and the separate clauses, and finally he gave a scholarly exegesis of the passage.

The Antiochene school held that the Scriptures are the basis of knowledge and not the esoteric Gnosis on which the Alexandrines had placed so much importance. They recognized in the New Testament a superior revelation than was contained in the Old Testament. They admitted degrees of value for different parts of the Old Testament. The Song of Solomon, which does not mention the name of God, is not as valuable as Isaiah.

Unfortunately, Theodore rejected some of the questionable New Testament books which the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 accepted. He was also blamed with the theological error of his student Nestorius. His works were ordered burnt by the Council.

Chrysostom was the prince of preachers. He had a thorough familiarity with all the Scripture and used the Bible in its literal sense as a guide for conduct rather than to support his own arguments or to base his metaphysical speculations. He remained free from dogmatism and allegory. Farrar said that Chrysostom studied every passage as a whole and elicited instead of introduced a meaning.¹²

¹¹ Grant, *A Short History*, p. 91.

¹² *History of Interpretation*, p. 221.

The Antiochene interpreters believed in the literal or _____ reality of the Scripture, but they saw a deeper meaning than the _____ meaning. However, they based the deeper meaning on the _____, thus rejecting a _____ or allegory.

(historical, historical, literal, hidden meaning)

Theodore of Mopsuestia emphasized the importance of _____ details, such as _____, _____, _____, and _____.

(linguistic, particles, moods, prepositions, terminology)

Chrysostom used the Bible in its _____ sense as a guide for _____. He stayed free of _____ and _____.

(literal, conduct, dogmatism, allegory)

Home Study Exercises

Basic assignment (to be answered by Levels 1, 2, and 3)

1. What caused the rejection of the Jews? _____
2. Give examples of what happens when the Bible is interpreted wrongly.

3. What is the meaning of hermeneutics? _____
4. How was Jesus affected by Jewish methods of interpretation? _____

5. Why did an emphasis on the Law give rise to the scribes? _____

6. Name two contributions of Hillel. _____

7. How did Hillel differ from Shammai? _____
8. Give two principles of Jewish interpretation. _____

9. Underline the correct ending for this sentence: Jesus regarded the Old Testament as authoritative and inspired,
thus He interpreted literally every word and applied the results without regard to cir-
cumstances.
but He distinguished between the vitally religious sections and those of lesser value.
thus He gave equal value to each law and teaching.
10. In the Sermon on the Mount, how did Jesus' interpretation of the Law differ from the Pharisees'?

11. Name five factors in Paul's personal life which influenced his hermeneutics. _____

12. How did Paul apply the Old Testament Scriptures to Christ? _____
13. Define allegory and state how Paul's use of it differs from true allegory. _____

14. Give two principles of interpretation used by the writer of Hebrews. _____

15. Why did Philo use allegory? _____
16. Name the three levels of meaning in Scripture according to Origen. _____

17. How did the school of Antioch explain Paul's use of allegory? _____

18. Name three principles of interpretation used by the Antiochene interpreters. _____

Supplementary assignment (for Levels 2 and 3)

1. Contrast the hermeneutics of Jesus and the Rabbis.
2. Do individual experiences influence our interpretation of Scripture? Explain.
3. Give an example of how one's presuppositions affect interpretation.

Advanced assignment (for Level 3)

Read pages 16–56 in *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (rev. ed.; London: Collier-Macmillan or New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), by Robert M. Grant. Give special attention to pages 43–56 and write a brief essay entitled “The Typological Interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures by New Testament Writers.”

Seminar Discussion

1. What principles of interpretation were used by Jesus, Paul, and the author of Hebrews?
2. Evaluate the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture.
3. Compare and contrast the hermeneutics of Alexandria and Antioch.
4. Suggest appropriate principles to guide the modern interpreter.