*Session 5*

*The History of Biblical Interpretation—Up to the Reformation*

Why study history?

* 1. We see how God has worked through people.
  2. We gain wisdom from the past.
  3. We understand why certain methods are used today.
  4. We know the problems of the past in order to avoid them.
  5. Knowing good methods does not mean people practice them.
  6. Methods are often reflections of that time period.

1. **Biblical and Early Jewish Interpretation**
2. **Interpretation within the Old Testament**
   1. OT passages interpret other OT passages
   2. Allusion to past events (the Prophets)
   3. Texts are similar in wording or concepts
   4. Interpretation from oral tradition to written
3. **Two major events** are described in the Old Testament:
4. 621 BC discovery of the Book of the Law
5. 457 BC Ezra’s Reform
6. **Major Jewish Movements in the First Century**
7. **Rabbinic Judaism**
8. Characteristics
   * + 1. Citing earlier interpretations
       2. Literal interpretation
       3. Homiletical comments (“midrash”)
9. Literature
10. **Halakah** (“rule to go by”): legal matters
11. **Haggadah** (“telling”): narrative
12. **Mishnah**: the “Traditions of the Elders”
13. The **Talmud**
14. Palestinian Talmud (AD 400)
15. Babylonian Talmud (AD 600)
16. **Gemorah**: Aramaic commentary on the Mishnah
17. **Midrashim**: homiletical comments or exposition of Scripture.
18. Hillel’s seven rules (*middoth*)
19. *Qal wohmer*: What less important case will certainly apply in a more important case
20. *Gezerah shawah*: Inference by analogy
21. *Binyan ab mikathub ‘ehad*: Application by analogy with a deduction from special to general. The repetition of a phrase means ideas associated with it are applicable in all contexts.
22. *Binyan ab mishene kethubim*: a principle is established by relating two texts together and then applying that principle to other texts.
23. *Kelal upherat*: Deduction from a general to specific case.
24. *Kayoze bo bemaqom ‘aher:* Interpretation from a similar passage; explanation from another passage or difficulty in one passage may be resolved by comparing it with another similar passage.
25. *Dabar halamed me’inyano*: A meaning is established by its context.
26. **Hellenistic Judaism and the Allegorical Method**
27. Centered in Alexandria, based on Greek philosophy
28. Allegory: A deeper meaning lies behind the words of the text
29. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – AD 54); two levels of understanding
30. Outer, literal husk
31. Inner, spiritual kernel.
32. Challenges with the Allegorical Method:
33. Subjective, interpreter is the authority
34. Common among Jews and later Christians
35. Strong reaction against it last century
36. **Qumran** (150 BC – AD 68)
37. From deserts of Judea, wrote the “Dead Sea Scrolls”
38. Essenes who believed God would bring a new day through them
39. Concerned especially with OT prophecy
40. Wrote commentaries on the OT
41. *Pesher* “interpretation” of the OT for their day

**Key Ideas:**

1. It is important for us to study the history of interpretation so that we can learn new methods and avoid the mistakes of others.
2. Jewish interpretation followed many methods, including literal and allegorical.
3. Allegorization is when the details of a passage are given spiritual meaning. This method can be dangerous because the interpreter becomes the authority and may impose a meaning not intended by the author.
4. **Early Church** (AD 30-100)
5. NT use of the OT:
6. Accepted the OT as Scripture.
7. Used Jewish methods of interpretation
8. Read the OT through Christ
9. Importance of oral communication
10. More concerned about OT message than exact quotation
11. Used OT freely
12. Used LXX, Hebrew, and memory
13. **Jesus**
14. Always took historical references as literal
15. Literal application
16. Denounced Pharisees oral interpretations
17. Scribes and Pharisees never questioned Jesus’ interpretation
18. Jesus used the OT text in a way we do not understand
19. Used and knew the OT but recognized it as incomplete
20. Selective use of OT, especially messianic passages
21. Used rabbinic methods but different perspective
22. **Early Christians** used Jewish methods
23. Literalistic
24. *Pesher* – interpretation of OT for contemporary audience
25. *Qal wahomer*: what applies in a less important case will apply in a more important case
26. *Gezerah shawah*: the use of the same word (or phrase) in different contexts means that the same considerations apply to each context
27. *Charaz*: “pearl stringing” – bringing together passages from various parts of the OT to support one point
28. Typology: OT people or events represent or are a pattern for something later
29. Allegory: deeper meaning of what is literal or on the surface
30. **Paul’s use of the OT**
31. Used the OT extensively in his letters
32. Used Jewish methods of his time
33. Had a freedom that comes from knowing Jesus
34. **Hebrews’ use of the OT**
35. Uses OT extensively
36. Uses allegorical, analogical, typological methods
37. **Summary**
38. **Literal-Contextual**
39. **Typological**
40. **Principle/Application**

**Key Ideas:**

1. The early Christians read the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ.
2. They saw Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecy.
3. Early Christians followed the methods of Jews and later included Greco-Roman methods.
4. **Patristic** **Exegesis** (AD 100-590)
5. **Apostolic Period** (AD 100-150)
6. **Major changes** at this time:
7. The church became more Gentile.
8. The NT came to have equivalent authority as the OT
9. The allegorical method was used to save the OT for the church.
10. **Methods** of Interpretation
11. Typology: used for Christology and Ethics.
12. Allegory: helped support doctrine, the common method of the day
13. Traditional approach: what the orthodox church has taught about a passage
14. **Clement of Rome** (d. 99)

Interpret the OT through Christ

1. **Ignatius of Antioch** (Syria) (c. 35 – c. 107)

The bishop should be “in control” of interpretation for the church

1. Challenges
   1. Two Heresies:
2. **Marcion** (c. AD 150): Rejected the OT
3. **Montanus** (c. 156-200): claimed new prophetic revelations through the Holy Spirit
   1. Christian Apologists used the NT to fight heresy
4. **Justin of Martyr** (114-165 AD) typological exegesis
5. **Irenaeus** (d. 202) authority in the apostles’ teaching as “the rule of faith.”
6. **Tertullian** (c. 155 – c. 240) literal and fanciful, “authoritative hermeneutics”
7. **Relationship of Faith and Reason** (150-400)
8. **Alexandria and Allegory**
9. **Clement of Alexandria** (150-215)

start with historical or literal

**texts have multiple meanings**

**spiritual believers can accessed deeper meanings**

Interpret each passage in view of all of Scripture

Jesus is the “divine Logos” (Word)

Scripture has a two-fold meaning:

1. Body -- literal; this points to a deeper meaning:
2. Spiritual-- hidden; viewed as the more important.
3. **Origen** (185-254)

Begin with literal

Textual criticism and Hexapla

Used allegory to bring OT and NT together

Scripture has three-fold meaning:

* + 1. Body – literal and historical
    2. Soul – moral; ethical instructions about the believer’s relationship with others
    3. Spirit – doctrinal; truths about the nature of the Church and Christians’ relationship to God.

1. **Antioch and Grammatical-Historical Interpretation**

grammatical-historical interpretation: use rules of grammar and the facts of history

1. Theophilus (bishop in 169), Diodore of Tarsus (bishop in 378) John Chrysostom (347-407), Theodore of Mopseuestia (350-428), Theodoret (393-460), Jerome (341-420)
2. emphasized the theological interpretation

Aristotle

Practical application

Rejected allegory

Took history of OT seriously

1. Jerome (350-420)
2. the literal husk of scripture should be taken seriously.
3. Interpret literal and obvious meaning before looking for deeper meaning.
4. Latin Vulgate 425 became the Bible for the western church for over 1000 years (see Session Three).
5. **Church Councils** (400-590)
6. Appeal to Scripture but different methods
7. Authority found in the Apostolic tradition
8. **Augustine** (354-430)
   1. Platonic
   2. Began with literal and historical then moved to spiritual
   3. Used allegorical method
   4. The church became the authority

Augustine’s method:

1. Look at the literal/plain meaning first. If scripture is not clear, then . . .
2. “Rule of Faith”; interpret a passage using other Scripture, then . . .
3. “Authority of the Church”; what does church tradition or the church fathers say about it?
4. If there is any conflict, consult the context for the best interpretation. One must interpret obscure passages in light of clear passages.
5. He stressed the spirit of the text rather than its verbal accuracy.

**Key Ideas of the Patristic Period**

1. Exegesis was more flexible and less controlled.
2. A new academic level of interpretation developed:
   1. Antioch: grammatical, historical, literal.
   2. Alexandria: know the church fathers, allegory.
3. Interpretation was used against heretics. Example: the Arian controversy about the divinity and humanity of Christ was really an interpretation question, which led to the creeds of the early church.
4. Interpretation was conservative but was plagued by allegory. The church fought to save the OT and the purity of Christianity and to fight off heretics.
5. Faith in Christ was kept at the center.
6. The primary purpose of interpretation was practical: to serve discipleship.
7. Decisions were made about the extent of the canon and key theological beliefs.
8. There was a battle between Aristotelian (historical; reason) and Platonic (spiritual; faith) approaches. These issues are still around today in what has been called the “Fundamentalist controversy.” The key question is: which is more significant, reason or faith?
9. **Medieval Interpretation** (590-1500)

Began after the fall of the western Roman Empire in AD 476.

The influence of Roman and Greek thought began to diminish.

Bible study done mostly in monasteries.

Few people could read or write. Clergy poorly educated.

1. **Tradition: The use of quotations from Church Fathers**.
2. Quotations used to support the church’s doctrinal positions.
3. Glosses from the Church Fathers were added to the margins of Bibles, called “catena.”
4. Church Dogmatics (authoritative doctrines) and creeds of the church controlled exegesis.
5. **Use of Allegory**
6. Allegorization was the dominant approach of interpretation.
7. The allegorical method of the period followed a fourfold sense to Scripture:
   1. Literal (or historical): what the words actually meant
   2. Allegorical (or doctrinal): more of a symbolic interpretation
   3. Moral (or tropological): how a person should respond and live
   4. Anagogical (or eschatological): how the passage refers to heavenly realities

The classic example is the interpretation of Jerusalem:

* In the literal sense, Jerusalem is the ancient city in Palestine.
* In the allegorical sense, the city refers to the Christian Church.
* In the moral sense, it represents the soul of the believer.
* In the anagogical sense, the city is the heavenly city.

(anagogy means the ideal for living)

1. There is a Latin rhyme from the 16th century used for this approach that was easy for clergy to follow:

The letter shows us what God and our Father did.

The allegory shows us where our faith is hid.

The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life.

The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.

1. **Contemplative or Mystic**

Sought direct contact with the Scriptures in a devotional way, hunger for communion with God. Used *Lectio divina* (“spiritual reading”) for Bible study (see Session Eighteen).

1. **Historical Exegesis**

The school of Antioch influenced continued. Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) emphasized the literal meaning. Influence became stronger over time, leading to the Renaissance and the rise of the universities.

**Key Ideas:**

1. This period used the tradition of the church fathers as proofs for interpretation.
2. People continued to use allegory as the primary method.
3. The mystical traditions continued to emphasize devotional reading.
4. The historical-literal approach did not completely disappear and developed later during this period.
5. **Reformation Interpretation (1500-1600)**
   1. Influential Factors at this time:
6. **The Renaissance** (14th cent.) renewed interest in Greek and Roman art and philosophy. Shift from faith to reason, from allegory to historical
7. **The Use of Original Languages** of Greek and Hebrew
8. **Textual Criticism**: Comparing ancient manuscripts and translation from original languages
9. **Invention of the printing press** (1454) made the Bible more available and affordable.
10. **Translation of the Bible** into European Languages
    1. **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) **and the Protestant Reformation** (16th century)

German monk. Realized the Bible talks about justification by faith. A Bible scholar who knew biblical languages. Major principles (in Latin and German):

* *Sola Gracia* – Grace alone
* *Sola Fide* - Faith alone
* *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone
* *Was Christum Treibet* – that which deals with or treats Christ.

**Luther’s Principles of interpretation:**

* 1. Supreme authority of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*): The church is the daughter of the Word, not the Bible the daughter of the church.
  2. Sufficiency of authority: Scripture leads to salvation.
  3. Scripture interprets Scripture when in doubt.
  4. Analogy of faith: What is easiest to understand in the Bible should be the hermeneutical key for unlocking the rest of the Bible.
  5. Psychological Principles: Faith precedes understanding.
  6. Literal Principles. We must begin with the literal meaning.
     + 1. Luther rejected allegory and saw it as empty speculation.
       2. He believed in the priority of the original biblical languages.
       3. He taught that interpreters should study the historical circumstance, grammar, times, and context.
  7. Christological Principle: The OT and NT point to Christ.
  8. Law-Gospel Distinction Principle: There is a division between justification by works (Law) and justification by faith (Gospel).
  9. Right of Private Judgment: Scripture should be available to everybody.
  10. Concept of Inspiration: The Holy Spirit is essential in interpretation.
  11. Prayer, meditation, and the personal experience of worship were to be practiced every day.
  12. Theology dominates his interpretation.
  13. **John Calvin** (1509-1564)

French theologian in Geneva. Emphasized God’s sovereignty. Outstanding Bible scholar.

* + 1. Biblical Languages: study Hebrew and Greek.

1. He focused on the historical and literary dimensions of the text.
2. Dual Authorship: Scripture was authored both by human authors and God.
3. Christ Focused: The basic goal of interpretation was finding Christ.
4. Dual Interpreters: Illumination by the Holy Spirit and expertise in the study of the history and language of the Bible are both needed
5. He rejected allegory because it is inconsistent with the historical and literary contexts of the biblical passages.
6. He was aware of the literary nature of the biblical text and understands literary figures of speech such as metaphor.

Calvin followed the following principles in his interpretation:

1. Scripture is clear. Use logic to understand it.
2. Determine the intentions of the original author and the circumstances of writing.
3. Scripture is its own best interpreter.
4. Investigate the context for the meaning.
5. Do not add words to the Bible and do not go beyond the original intent.
6. Concerning metaphors: choose the literal meaning of the figurative language and do not allegorize.
7. The purpose of exegesis is to find Christ.
8. There is a difference between the Word (God’s self-revelation) and Scripture.
9. The Holy Spirit works through exegesis and confirms the truthfulness of Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspires writers and inspires readers.
10. Accommodation: God works with our sinfulness to accomplish His purposes.
11. View of Scripture: The Bible is infallible but he saw minor errors.
12. Progressive revelation: God revealed more over time.
    1. The Response of **Confessionalism**

Return to allegory

Catholic Council of Trent (1545-63): tradition, Vulgate

Development of Protestant doctrines using Scripture and more divisions

**Key ideas:**

1. Access to the original biblical languages and translation into modern languages brought a new level of understanding of the Bible.
2. Development of grammatical-historical interpretation avoided the errors of allegorization.
3. The Reformers saw Jesus as the focus of the Bible.
4. The Reformers developed important methods that are still used today.
5. The Bible became more authoritative than the church.
6. **Post-Reformation Period (1650 - 1800)**
7. **Protestant Scholasticism**
8. Doctrinal wars using the allegorical method
9. Emergence of Inerrancy: Dictation theories of inspiration
10. Emphasis on the original languages
11. Rise of **Rationalism**
12. Resistance to dogmatism of Scholasticism:
    * + 1. A growing philosophical commitment to reason as the ultimate source of truth
        2. Rationalism (Human reason) during the Enlightenment developed secular history and literary methods by which texts (ancient and modern) could be analyzed with objectivity.
13. Scientific Revolution.
14. Find the cause, find the effect
15. Try to explain everything
16. Reason began to be used against the church and the Bible
17. The Bible was read like any other book
18. Hostility between the Bible and science (human reason).
19. Goal: free the Bible from the control of the church
20. **Pietism**
21. Religious experience as an expression of faith, used Bible in prayer and morality
22. Method: careful grammatical study with devotional or practical implications
23. Weakness of subjective impressions to interpret Scripture
24. Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705) Germany, John Wesley (1703-1792) England, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) America.

**Key ideas:**

1. The Bible was used to support doctrinal distinctions.
2. Rationalism emphasized reason as the way to understand the world and challenged many things about the Bible.
3. Pietism emphasized grammatical study leading to devotional application.

**Big Ideas**

1. Allegorization gives spiritual meaning to the details of a passage and was followed by some Jews and the school of Alexandria.
2. The school of Antioch emphasized more historical and grammatical interpretation.
3. The early Christians read the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ.
4. Early Christians followed the methods of Jews and later included Greco-Roman methods.
5. During the Middle Ages, the early Church Fathers were used as the authority.
6. The mystical traditions continued to emphasize devotional reading.
7. Access to the original biblical languages and translation into modern languages brought a new level of understanding of the Bible leading to the Protestant Reformation.
8. The Reformers saw Jesus as the focus of the Bible and used the grammatical-historical method.
9. Rationalism challenged the miraculous claims of the Bible.
10. Pietism emphasized grammatical study leading to devotional application.