

Hermeneutics
(2Tim 2:15; 3:16-17)
by Dr. David J. Rodabaugh

- I. Grammatico-Historical Method (see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Zondervan))
 - A. Defined—the natural meaning for the words to the original hearers (authors).
 - 1. Grammatico—(=literal=)—the most simple, direct and ordinary meaning
 - 2. Historical—that meaning of author’s words required by historical considerations
 - B. Implications
 - 1. Words and sentences have but one meaning in one place.
 - 2. No subsequent passage can destroy the only meaning the original hearers would have understood.
 - a. For example, see Gen 15 and the promise of offspring and land.
 - b. You can’t nullify that with something that Abraham couldn’t have understood.
 - 3. Thus, the older passage sets the tone for a doctrine. This is called the ‘law of first mention’.
 - C. Importance
 - 1. This is the only interpretative scheme that allows the scripture to be ‘objective truth’
 - 2. Any other interpretative scheme inputs the prejudices of the interpreter.
 - 3. Only with this hermeneutic is there a way to settle doctrinal differences between interpreters
 - 4. It is the difference between
 - a. The Word of God is what the scriptures become to you as you ‘understand them’
 - b. The Word of God stands eternally as that given by God whether or not you study it.
- II. Spiritualization/Allegorical method—the enemy of the truth. Comments on the allegorical method as practiced by so-called Christians (see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, (Zondervan, 1958) for some of this expanded)
 - A. Definition of the allegorical method:
 - 1. From Joseph Angus & Samuel Green, *The Bible Handbook*, p. 220: “Any statement of supposed facts which admits of a literal interpretation, and yet requires or justly admits a moral or figurative one, is called an *Allegory*. It is to narrative or story what trope is to individual words, adding to the literal meaning of the terms employed a moral or spiritual one.”
 - a. Trope (NWD)—the use of a word in a figurative sense, *et al.*
 - 2. From Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 21: “Allegorism is the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense.”
 - 3. From Charles Frisch, “Biblical Typology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April 1947: “According to this method the literal and historical sense of Scripture is completely ignored, and every word and event is made an allegory of some kind either to escape theological difficulties or to maintain certain peculiar religious views...”
 - B. Dangers of the allegorical method
 - 1. It does not interpret scripture.
 - a. From Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 224: “...it will be noticed at once that its habit is to disregard the common signification of words and give wing to all manner of fanciful speculation. It does not draw out the legitimate meaning of an author’s language, but foists into it whatever the whim or fancy of an interpreter may desire. As a system, therefore, it puts itself beyond all well-defined principles and laws.”
 - b. From Angus & Green (same page cited above): “There is ... unlimited scope for fancy, if once the principle be admitted, and the only basis of the exposition is found in the mind of the expositor. The scheme can yield no *interpretation*, properly so called, although some valuable truths may be illustrated.
 - 2. The basic authority in interpretation ceases to be scripture but the mind of the interpreter.
 - a. From F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 238: “... When once the principle of allegory is admitted, whenonce we start with the rule that whole passages and books of Scripture say one thing when they mean another, the reader is delivered bound hand and foot to the caprice of the interpreter.”
 - 3. There is no way to test the interpretations
 - a. Farrar (cited above): “He may be sure of absolutely nothing except what is dictated to him by the Church, and in all ages the authority of ‘the Church’ has been falsely claimed for the presumptuous tyranny of false prevalent opinions.”
 - C. The only alleged case of NT allegorizations of the OT is Gal 4:21-31
 - 1. Note: Strictly speaking, this is not ‘allegorical interpretation’ since Paul *added* the allegorical meaning (as an application) to the literal meaning.
 - 2. In allegorical interpretation, the allegorical meaning is *substituted* for the literal meaning.
 - D. Allegorical interpretation is and has been the interpretative scheme used by the Roman Catholics and others.
 - 1. This is why it is so often difficult to explain a passage to an ‘informed’ catholic. They have been schooled to use the ‘hidden’ or ‘deeper’ meaning. These are often code words for the allegorical meaning.
 - 2. Note the following from Theodore G. Tappert, editor and translator, *Luther’s Works, vol. 54, Table Talk*, (1967, Fortress Press, Phil.), No. 335, p. 46 (note: Luther’s expressions are not the ones we would use but here goes!):

“When I was a monk I was a master in the use of allegories. I allegorized everything. Afterward through the Epistle to the Romans I came to some knowledge of Christ. I recognized then that allegories are nothing, that it’s not what Christ signifies but what Christ is that counts. Before I allegorized everything, even a chamber pot, but afterward I reflected on the histories and thought how difficult it must have been for Gideon to fight with his enemies in the manner reported (Judg. 7:1-23). If I had been there I would have befouled my breeches for fear. It was not allegory, but it was the Spirit and faith that inflicted such havoc on the enemy with only three hundred men. Jerome and Origen contributed to the practice of searching only for allegories. God forgive them. In all of Origen there is not one word about Christ.”

- E. Allegorical interpretation is and has been the interpretative scheme used by the rabbis (after Ezra) and today survives in the Jewish Commentaries (midrashim). The substance of these have found their way into the Talmud
1. James Hastings, ed.; Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, eds of revised edition, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (1963, Scribner, NY) in article on “Commentary” on p. 171: “Mentioned only in RV in 2Ch 13:22; 24:27 (AV, RSV ‘story’). The Hebrew word is *midhrāsh*, which does not mean exactly what we understand by a commentary. It is ‘an imaginative development of a thought or theme suggested by Scripture, especially a didactic or homiletic exposition, or an edifying religious story’ (Driver)”
 2. Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, (1950, Baker, Grand Rapids), p. 15: mentions the midrash and its parts. He points out that the interpretation of the scribes was “used to set the Written Word aside.” He adds that the verdict of Christ on this is in Mk. 7:13
 3. Milton Terry (book cited above) on page 607 and following mentions briefly what the midrashim really did. We give a few quotes and hope the reader will read the entire section:
 - a. On pp. 607-8, commenting on Halachic part of the Midrashim on the Pentateuch: “This was, in the main, a reading into the laws of Moses a great variety of things which they could not, by any fair interpretation, be made to teach. The Hagadic exegesis, on the other hand was extended over the entire Old Testament Scriptures, and was of a more practical and homiletical character... The Midrashim thus became a vast treasury of Hebrew national lore. It was developed gradually, by public lectures and homilies, and became more and more comprehensive and complicated as new legends, secret meanings, hidden wisdom, and allegorical expositions were added by one great teacher after another. We have the substance of the Midrashim preserved in the Talmud and Hagadic literature of the first three centuries of the Christian era.”
 - b. On p. 609: “It is easy to see how such hermeneutical principles must necessarily involve the exposition of the Scripture in utter confusion. The study of the ancient Jewish exegesis is, therefore, of little practical value to one who seeks the true meaning of the oracles of God.” (He adds that they add evidence to the text when they quote or refer to the Hebrew Scriptures.)
 4. Jacob Neusner, *Midrash in Context*, (1983, Fortress Press, Phil.) is an authoritative Jewish reference to the Midrashim. On pp. 25-27, he surveys briefly the conceptual relationship between various Mishnah tractates (the Mishnah is part of the Talmud), on the one side, and laws of Scripture, on the other. We should note that Mr. Neusner is in favor of what he finds in the Talmud, yet he is an honest reporter.

“First, there are tractates which simply repeat in their own words precisely what the Scripture has to say, and at best serve to amplify and complete the basic ideas of Scripture. ...”

“There are, second, tractates which take up facts of Scripture but work them out in a way that those scriptural facts could not have led us to predict. A supposition concerning what is important about the facts, utterly remote from the supposition of Scripture, will explain why the Mishnah tractates under discussion say the original things they say in confronting those scripturally-provided facts. For one example, Scripture (Num. 19:1ff) takes for granted that the red cow will be burned in a state of uncleanness, because it is burned outside the camp (temple). The priestly writers cannot have imagined that a state of cultic cleanness was to be attained outside of the cult. The absolute datum of Mishnah-tractate Parah, on burning the red cow, by contrast, is that cultic cleanness not only can be attained outside of the ‘tent of meeting’; the red cow was to be burned in a state of cleanness even exceeding the cultic cleanness required in the Temple itself. The problematic which generates the intellectual agendum of Parah, therefore, is how to work out the conduct of the rite of burning the cow in relationship to the Temple: Is it to be done in exactly the same way, or in exactly the opposite way? This mode of contrastive and analogical thinking helps us to understand the generative problematic of such tractates as Erubin and Besah, to mention only two.”

“Third, there are, predictably, many tractates which either take up problems in no way suggested by Scripture, or begin from facts at best merely relevant to facts of Scripture....”

“So there we have it: some tractates merely repeat what we find in Scripture. Some are totally independent of Scripture. And some fall in-between.... Scripture confronts the framers of the Mishnah as revelation, not merely as a source of facts. But the framers of the Mishnah had their own world with which to deal. They made statements in the framework and fellowship of their own age and generation. They were bound, therefore, to come to Scripture with a set of questions

generated elsewhere than in Scripture. They brought their own ideas about what was going to be important in Scripture. This is perfectly natural.”

“The philosophers of the Mishnah conceded to Scripture the highest authority. At the same time what they chose to hear, within the authoritative statements of Scripture, would in the end form a statement of its own....”

“The way in which the sages of the Mishnah utilized the inherited and authoritative tradition of Scripture therefore is clear. On the one hand, wherever they could, they repeated what the Scripture says. This they did, however, in their own words. ... On the other hand, they selected with care and precision what they wanted in Scripture, ignoring what they did not want....”

5. Christ clearly condemned the allegorical interpretive schemes of the Midrashim in Matt 15:1-20 and in Mk 7:6-23 and asserts that they are mentioned in Isa 29:13.

III. Examples of Allegorical or Midrashim-style(?) Interpretation

A. In a context extolling ‘midrashing’ a modern interpreter dispenses with the stated meaning of the communion in favor of a, “meal of covenant unity with God and with each other.”

1. Matt 26:26-28—says nothing of the sort. Indeed the interpreter talks of the elements partaken and midrashed! God’s word talks only of the body and blood of Christ.
2. In no way can this distract from our practice of 1Cor 11:23-26 unless this midrashed meaning is substituted for the literal meaning.
3. Paul specifically states in 1Cor 11:26, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
 - a. This is not a quote from the gospels but from God’s special revelation to Paul.
 - b. Since a literal hermeneutic is not used, there is no way to discuss.

B. Examples of ‘Midrash’ (Jewish Commentary) from the Mishnah (quoted in Jacob Neusner (cited above))

1. What is the Mishnah? From Hasting’s Bible Dictionary (cited above):
 - a. 954) **TALMUD** (‘learning’).—The principal literary production of post-Biblical Judaism. The collection is divided into two parts: the **Mishnah** (‘second law’), ...; and the **Gemara** (‘completion’)....
 - b. He goes on to state that the Mishnah is supposed to represent a form of the law carried on orally and allegedly to have originated with Moses. The Mishnah is in the earlier apostolic era and the Gemara is later.
2. On the interplay of Mishnah and Scripture, Neusner says, “... But comparing the way in which Scripture and the Mishnah, respectively, treat a given topic is easier said than done. The framers of the Mishnah devote entire tracts, running on for eight or ten chapters, each made up of seven or more paragraphs, to subjects dealt with in Scripture’s law codes in a sentence or two. For example, Deut. 25:5-10 states that if a brother dies childless, his surviving brother marries his widow and produces a child to bear his name; if he refuses, a rite of removing the shoe is prescribed. These five verses [*sic—should be six verses*] find, in tractate Yebamot on the levirate connection and its dissolution, a counterpart of sixteen chapters, thus approximately one hundred fifty paragraphs. ...”
3. Commentary on Lev 13:2-4 (p. 14ff in Neusner). He points out that, “... the Mishnah uses the Hebrew word *nega* which he translates as ‘plague,’ instead of Scripture’s word choice, *Saraat*, ‘leprous disease.’” He then gives three groups of comments:
 - a. First group
 1. The appearances of plagues are two, which are four:
 2. A Bright spot is as bright-white as snow. And secondary to it is [a shade as white] as the lime of the Temple.
 3. “And the swelling is [as white] as the skin of an egg. And secondary to it is [a shade as white] as white wool,” the words of R. Meir.
 4. And sages say, “The swelling is [as white] as white wool. Secondary to it is [a shade as white] as the skin of an egg” (M. Negaim 1:1).
 - b. Second Group
 1. “The [reddish] mixture which is in the snow-white is like wine mixed in snow. The [reddish] mixture in the lime is like the blood which is mixed in milk,” the words of R. Ishmael.
 2. Rab. Aqiba says, “The reddishness which is in this and in this is like wine mixed in water. But that which is in snow-white is strong, and that which is in lime is duller than it” (M. Negaim 1:2).
 - c. Third Group
 1. Rab. Hananiah Prefect of the Priests says, “The appearances [colors] of plagues are sixteen.”
 2. Rab. Dosa ben Harkinas says, “The appearances of plagues are thirty-six.”
 3. Aqabya b. Mehallel says, “Seventy-two.”
 4. —several more comments are listed

IV. The Biblical case for the literal (Grammatico-Historical) Method

- A. Did Christ set aside the literal use of the OT? There are those who assert that Christ abrogated portions of the OT while approving of others. (Note: abrogation is a Muslim doctrine not one consistent with the Bible.) We list and comment on the alleged seven examples of such teachings. see Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, (1980, Zondervan, Grand Rapids) (Note: this section reflects important adds to the excellent published treatment by Norman Geisler.)
1. The Sabbath—picking and eating—Mk 2:28 comp Mt 12:8; Lk 6:5
 - a. This is a strange example of what is alleged because Christ's appeal is to the OT—He mentioned David's picking and eating on the Sabbath.
 - b. In short, Christ appealed to the OT studied carefully. He did not approve of tradition based on half-truth.
 2. Sacrifice—compared to mercy—cit. from Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13; 12:7
 - a. Clearly, the meaning is that God desires mercy not just sacrifice. Indeed, sacrifice without mercy is hypocrisy. Compare also 1Sam 15:22
 - b. For a similar figure of speech see Lk 14:26 (comp Mt 10:37). Bullinger in *Figures of Speech* mentions only Lk 14:26 and calls the figure there 'Hyperbole'. The issue is then that our devotion to the Lord is to be much more than our devotion to family.
 3. Cleansing all foods—Mk 7:18, 19
 - a. This is alleged to prove that Christ did not approve of clean vs. unclean.
 - b. Actually, Mk 7:1-13 is a denunciation of those who ignored the law. They did seem to keep what they wished to keep.
 4. The contrasts in the Sermon on the Mount—Mt 5:17-48; especially passages like verses 21-22.
 - a. He did not repudiate the OT. Note how the section is introduced in 5:17-20.
 - b. He did point to a future kingdom when men's thoughts could be put on trial for God sees the very thoughts of men. Thus, he looks to a time in the future when the situation is even harsher than in the OT
 5. Divorce—Mt 5:31-32 comp 19:3ff; Mk 10:2ff; Lk 16:18
 - a. Dt 24:1-4 is clear on what was required and Dt 26:16 states that the people must follow such laws.
 - b. Clearly, the law allowed practices for men in general. However, some practices that are legal are wrong. Christ was pointing this out. Legal and ethical or moral are two different concepts.
 6. Eye for eye—Mt 5:38-42
 - a. The issue in Ex 21:24 etal. was public justice
 - b. There is no place even in the OT for unbridled private revenge
 7. Hate your enemy—Mt 5:43
 - a. Here, men had assumed a corollary to commands to love the neighbor. Yet, Lev 19:18 and 19:34 do not allow such an interpretation of the commands.
 - b. In some sense, the godly man does 'hate' the enemies of God
- B. Implications on our hermeneutic
1. The test of a prophet required the 'literal' hermeneutic—Dt 18:20-22. If a prophecy is not to come to pass except in some allegorical sense, then this passage is meaningless. The allegorical trick was often used by pagan religions.
 2. The use of prophecy as proof of inspiration requires and presumes a 'literal' or 'natural' hermeneutic.
 3. The recognition of great teachings requires teachings which the original hearers could discern from the word spoken to them. This rules out the allegorical method as an approach to prophecy. (of course, we recognize 'figures of speech.' See the book by Bullinger on the subject.)
 4. Examples of interpretation from Jesus
 - a. Mt 22:41-46 takes Ps 110:1 literally
 - b. Mt 22:31-32 uses the verb tense in Ex 3:6 to prove a point
 - c. Lk 4:14-21 proves that the fulfillment of Isa 61:1-2 would be interrupted. We know that interruption to be nearly 2000 years or more.
 5. From the apostles
 - a. Paul uses the literally meanings of OT verses to prove his points in Ro 3:10-20 and 4:1-8. See especially Gen 15:5-6
 - b. Peter uses Joel 2:28-32 in At 2:14-21 and proves that fulfillment can be interrupted by nearly 2000 years (we know that). See Joel 3:1-3, 17-20

V. How to take the Bible away from the people!

- A. Burn the Bibles and forbid their sale—the method of political tyranny.
- B. Tell them that it (or parts of it) are not inspired by God—the method of liberal religious tyranny
- C. Tell them that they can understand the literal meaning but that there is a 'deeper,' 'more profound,' or 'spiritual meaning' and that this is what the passage really means—this too is religious tyranny. This is subtle but the most effective of all.
- D. We tell you to study the Bible under the assumption that it is objective truth from God meant to convey objective truth to the original hearers.