

WHAT WE TEACH

AT TEMECULA HILLS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is His objective, propositional revelation to man (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), without which we would never know Him (Hebrews 1:1, Psalm 19: 7-11), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture (see Appendix III). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16) in the original autographs.

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

GOD

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; 1 Corinthians 8:4), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14), witnessed in time and space at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 4:16-17) -- each equally deserving worship and obedience.

God the Father. We teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38-47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as His own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5-9).

We teach that God is omniscient, meaning that He knows all truths, including the future decisions of free creatures. Therefore we deny the error of open theism.

God the Son. We teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

We teach that God the Father created the visible and invisible universe according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2).

We teach that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind. In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God-Man (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9) without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15).

We teach that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9-10; Colossians 2:9).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26-35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (John 1:18, 29; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:25-26; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 2: 7-9).

We teach that, in the incarnation, the second Person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Philippians 2:5-8).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 6: 5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24).

We teach that on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; and that he is a new creation, declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (1 Corinthians 5: 21; Titus 3:5-7; Romans 3:25; 5:8-9; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

We teach that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates as our Advocate and High Priest (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

We teach that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Romans 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

We teach that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20).

We teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46)
- Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15)

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31).

God the Holy Spirit. We teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity, including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternality (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 10:15-17).

We teach that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. We recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost, when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 2:22).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).

We teach that the Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher, who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God's revelation, the Bible (2 Peter 1:19-21; John 16:13). Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27) while avoiding grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 14:1-40; Corinthians 3:18).

CREATION AND MAN

We teach that God created everything that exists from nothing, apart from Himself (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17).

We teach that the existence and nature of the creation is due to the direct miraculous power of God (Genesis 1:1). The origin of the universe, the origin of life, the origin of kinds of living things, and the origin of humans cannot be explained adequately apart from reference to His intelligent exercise of power (Genesis 1-2). A proper understanding of science does not require that all phenomena in nature must be explained solely by reference to physical events, laws and chance.

We teach that a historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture is incompatible with a theistic evolutionary account of human origins. Therefore creation models which seek to harmonize science and the Bible should maintain at least the following: (a) God providentially directs His creation, (b) He specially intervened in at least the above-mentioned points in the creation process, and (c) God specially created Adam and Eve (Adam's body from non-living material, and his spiritual nature immediately from God). Inadequate origin models hold that (a) God never directly intervened in creating nature and/or (b) humans share a common physical ancestry with earlier life forms.

We teach that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).

We teach that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).

We teach that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence, incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death, became subject to the wrath of God, and became inherently and utterly corrupt. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly

of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; 11-13; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 John 1:8).

We teach that, because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-18, 23; 5:10-12).

We teach that the Bible is clear in its teaching on the sanctity of life. Life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13-16; Psalm 51:5; Luke 1:39-44; Exodus 21:22-24). We abhor the destruction of innocent human life through abortion on demand, infanticide or euthanasia as unbiblical and contrary to God's will. Life is precious and in God's hands.

We teach that biblical marriage consists only of a faithful, heterosexual union between one genetic male and one genetic female, and biblical marriage is the only legitimate and acceptable context for a sexual relationship (see Appendix II for more details). We teach that in a biblical marriage, husbands are called to be the leaders and spiritual heads over their wives; therefore, marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with His church. As such, husbands should have a posture of sacrificial love towards their wives, and wives should have a posture of respectful submission towards their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 19:4-6; see Appendix I for more details).

SALVATION

We teach that salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

We teach that salvation is only found through Jesus by means of His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, and that faith in Him is the only means by which people can be restored to a relationship with God and thus have eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Regeneration. We teach that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24) when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits that reflect repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works are the proper evidence and fruit of regeneration (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer yields to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life and becomes obedient to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 3:13-16; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10; 1 John 2:2-14). Obedience results in the believer being increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19 with Colossians 1:28). Such transformation is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Election. We teach that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

We teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not based upon any righteousness of their own but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom,

grace, and love (Romans 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Justification. We teach that justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11) . This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6, Titus 3:5) and involves the bearing of our sins by Christ Jesus upon the cross (Isa 53:6, Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us by virtue of our union with the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Redemption. We teach that every believer has been purchased out of the bondage to sin and the curse of the Law by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19; Galatians 3:13). We no longer hold claim to our lives and seek, by His grace, to glorify Him with our earthly bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Sanctification. We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and is therefore identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with the believer's standing before God, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2). This is not to say that our position in Christ has no bearing on our progressive sanctification.

We teach that there is therefore, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, obedience to the Word of God, the edification from the family of God, and the transformation of his mind the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 5:23; Hebrews 3:12-13).

In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in the putting off the old, sinful self and putting on the new self, which is created in the likeness of God. While adequate provision is made for success through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, this struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended this side of heaven. All claims to the eradication of sin are unscriptural, as the eradication of sin is not possible in this life. The Holy Spirit, however, does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9). As the believer walks in the power of the Holy Spirit, he lives victoriously, loving God and one another as he has been loved (Romans 8:4; Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; John 13:34).

Forgiveness. We teach, on the basis of the finished work of Christ and faith in that work, the believer's sins are forgiven by God and he is set free from the eternal consequence of his sin (Matthew 26:28, Acts 13:38-39, Colossians 2:13-14). God has graciously and decidedly removed our transgressions from us and has determined never to bring them to mind as grounds for condemnation (Psalm 103:12, Hebrews 8:12; 10:17), having done so for the glory of His name (Psalm 79:9; Isaiah 43:25). Notwithstanding this truth a believer can be caught in sin, but by confessing his sins, finds God to be faithful in restoring him to intimate fellowship with Himself. God forgives his sin and cleanses him from all unrighteousness (Galatians 6:1; 1 John 1: 8-10).

Security. We teach that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24).

We teach that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Romans 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Galatians 5:13, 25-26; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 5:13; Romans 8:16).

Separation. We teach that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

We teach that, out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us, and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so not bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. We also teach that separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 John 9-11).

We teach that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-10)

THE CHURCH

We teach that God has always purposed to redeem a people for Himself. We teach that prior to Christ, God's plan of redemption focused on the nation of Israel, and at the present time, His work of redemption is being carried out through the church. We teach that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11-3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1-6; 5:32). We teach that all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are brought near by the blood of Christ and are made into one new man, the dwelling of God in the Spirit, the church (Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:10).

We teach the church began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47) when, in fulfillment of Scripture and the teaching of Jesus (John 7:37-39), the Holy Spirit came upon and indwelt the followers of Christ. Now everyone who places their faith in Jesus Christ are placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15). We believe God's redemptive purposes are now being accomplished through His Church and will continue until the coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). God will fulfill the promises made through the prophets to the nation of Israel (Romans 11:25-27, Jeremiah 31:31-33).

We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2, Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). We teach that every follower of Jesus Christ is both a member of the universal church and called to be a connected member of the local church (1 Corinthians 11: 18-20, Romans 12: 4-5, Hebrews 10:25). Each member is connected to the Lord Jesus, the Head, and is drawing spiritual life from Him and in turn is a conduit of that Life to the other members of the Body. It is this mutual building up of one another in love that is considered the proper working of the individuals parts and which builds up the Body numerically and spiritually (Ephesians 4:15-16, Colossians 2:19).

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the local church are elders (also called bishops, overseers, and pastors; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and corporately the elders have His authority in directing the church. The local church is to submit to their leadership under Christ when they rule in unanimity and in harmony with Scripture (Hebrews 13:7, 17). We teach that men alone may serve as elders (1 Timothy 2:11-13; Titus 1:6).

We teach the priority of discipleship to Christ (Matthew 28:19-20) so that Christ may be seen in each member (Galatians 4:19) as each member matures in Him (Colossians 1:28-29; Romans 8:29). We teach the mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:5-14; Ephesians 4:21), as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the

local church in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15-22; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; Titus 1:10-16).

We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by the use of spiritual gifts, by corporate worship and prayer in the Spirit, by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42), by being a light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Peter 2:11-12), and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

We teach the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12).

We teach the need of the church to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

We teach that though there may be many fillings of the Holy Spirit, there is only one baptism which occurs at the time of regeneration. We teach that the gifts of the Spirit are given to believers according to the will of God for the purpose of building up the Church. During the foundational era of the Church (i.e., the time of Christ and the Apostles) God gave special manifestations of the overtly supernatural and miraculous gifts (e.g., tongues, healings, miracles) as “signs” that witness to the validity of those bearing new canonical revelation (c.f. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). We teach that beyond the foundational era, God in His sovereignty may grant any spiritual gift and work miraculously for the benefit of His Church at any time.

We teach that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with and submission to the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42; Ephesians 5: 15- 21).

We teach that the Lord’s Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). We also teach that, whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, participation in the Lord’s Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ, who indwells every believer, and so is present, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

ANGELS

Holy Angels. We teach that angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

Fallen Angels. We teach that there is a personal devil, a being of great cunning and power, called Satan. He can exert vast power only as far as God allows him to do so. We teach that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-15).

Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 4:1-11; Revelation 12:9-10); the prince of this world, the deceiver, the father of lies, who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 16:20; 1 John 3:8); and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

ESCHATOLOGY

Personal Eschatology. We teach that all those who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord, and who confess Him as such before their fellow men, become children of God and receive eternal life. They become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. At death their souls depart to be with Christ in conscious blessedness, and at the Second Coming of Christ their bodies shall be raised and transformed into the likeness of the body of His glory (Revelation 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:8). We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).

We teach that all those who persistently reject Jesus Christ in the present life shall be raised from the dead and throughout eternity exist in the state of conscious, unutterable, endless torment of anguish. We teach the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Romans 8:19-23; 2 Corinthians 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 20:13-15). We teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:13-15), when the soul and the resurrection body will be united (John 5:28-29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cut off from the life of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Last Things. We teach the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11) to reward believers according to their works produced by faith (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 5:6). This is the blessed hope of the church (Titus 2:13; 2 Timothy 4:8).

We teach that in fulfillment of God's historical purpose for humanity to rule and establish God's kingdom on earth (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-8; Matt. 6:10; Heb. 2:6-9), the Scriptures teach a millennial reign of Christ with His saints on earth following His literal return.

We teach that the nation of Israel, having been redeemed, will play a central role in bringing the blessings of salvation to all nations during the millennium in fulfillment of biblical prophecies (e.g., Is. 2:1-4; 11:1-12; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 37; Amos 9:9-15; Zech. 14; Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; Rev. 20:4-6). We teach that before these millennial events, the believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-17). The time of this "rapture" is unknown, and thus believers are to live constantly watchful and ready.

We teach that following the millennium, this kingdom will be merged into the eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 15:22-28). The dwelling place of God will be with redeemed man, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Revelation 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Appendix I – The Danvers Statement

RATIONALE

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;
6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
9. the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
10. and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

AFFIRMATIONS

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.

- In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
 - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).
 8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
 9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).
 10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

Appendix II – The Nashville Statement

PREAMBLE

“Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves...” –Psalm 100:3

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God’s design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God’s beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual’s autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God’s good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of shortsighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonor God.

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?

We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it—particularly as male and female. Christian Scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is Creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad-hearted thanksgiving, heart-felt praise, and total allegiance. This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our Creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself. And we cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God’s design for his creation and his way of salvation serve to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good. God’s good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure. He is for us and not against us. Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ’s church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

ARTICLES

Article 1. WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

Article 2. WE AFFIRM that God’s revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage. WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

Article 3. WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

Article 4. WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God’s original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

- Article 5.** WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God’s design for self-conception as male or female.
WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.
- Article 6.** WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about “eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb.” With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.
WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person’s biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.
- Article 7.** WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God’s holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.
WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God’s holy purposes in creation and redemption.
- Article 8.** WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.
WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God’s original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.
- Article 9.** WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality— a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.
WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.
- Article 10.** WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.
WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.
- Article 11.** WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.
WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God’s design of his imagebearers as male and female.
- Article 12.** WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.
- Article 13.** WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender selfconceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one’s biological sex and one’s self-conception as male or female.
WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God’s revealed will.
- Article 14.** WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ’s death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure.
WE DENY that the Lord’s arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-24; Ex. 20:14; 20:17; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Dt. 5:18, 21; 22:5; Jdg. 19:22; 2 Sam. 11:1-12:15; Job 31:1; Ps. 51:1-19; Prov. 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; Isa. 59:1; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 5:27-30; 19:4-6, 8-9, 12; Acts 15:20, 29; Rom. 1:26-27; 1:32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 18-20; 7:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:15, 20-24; 5:31-32; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 1 Tim. 1:9-10, 15; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:11-12; Heb. 13:4; Jas. 1:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:11; Jude 7

Appendix III – Literal Interpretation of Scripture

Introduction: The article below is meant to introduce and summarize a literal grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. It is chapter 3 from the book, Progressive Dispensationalism by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock. For a more in-depth analysis and explanation of this hermeneutic, see the rest of this book, and additionally see the following books:

- 40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible by Robert L. Plummer. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010.
- Introduction to Biblical Interpretation by William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.
- The Hermeneutical Spiral by Grant Osborne. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006.
- Is There a Meaning in This Text? By Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us¹

By Darrell L. Bock

One major aspect of the problem of defining ‘literal’ is that in many instances words, but not sentences, have a literal or normal meaning. Moreover, for both words and sentences context is all-important in determining meaning at any given point in an act of communication. What contexts are to be looked at, and how they are to be looked at, in the determination of meaning is very important,” notes covenant theologian Vern S. Poythress.

Evangelical theology has always discussed the principles by which we interpret the Bible. As a community, we share a heritage that takes the divine message of the Bible seriously. If evangelicals were asked what method of hermeneutics they use, they might reply in a variety of ways. The average believer might say that he or she reads the Bible “in a plain or normal way, as I would any book, but recognizing that God is its ultimate author.” Others might say that they read it for “what it means to me.” But to be done well, what would such a reading involve? Some theologians would respond that they use the “historical-grammatical method.” In fact, evangelical scholars have been comfortable for some time describing their approach to interpretation as the historical-grammatical method. It means pursuing initially the meaning of the author/Author as expressed in the text with a sensitivity to its original textual setting. It means that reading for what it means to me may miss what the text meant and means. But what exactly does such a reading involve?

We will survey this approach in three categories: (1) the historical, (2) the grammatical, and (3) the literary-theological. These are three components in assembling the portrait of the meaning of Scripture, and we will examine them in three distinct subsections. Again we break up into pieces what is really an interactive, dynamic process. Think of these three sections as separate overlays that together form a picture on an overhead. This reflects the multidimensional aspect of interpretation. First, the historical level seeks to be sensitive to the message as it came to its initial audience, understanding original terms and ideas. Second, the grammatical level considers how the terminology of that message is laid out. Terms are not understood in isolation from each other but in conjunction with one another. Third, the literary-theological level highlights the fact that there is an abiding message and unity in the text, which is laid out literarily in various ways called genres. Each genre presents truth in its own way and makes unique demands for how it should be read. Reading the Bible requires an awareness of the changing nature of the terrain within the text, as well as an appreciation of the various angles used to present the truth.

A closing subsection will consider how to relate different texts to one another, by discussing the various ways the Bible interrelates passages. The category of prophecy and fulfillment receives special attention. What emerges is what we will call the “historical-grammatical-literary-theological” method. This fourfold description of hermeneutics is really what most mean when they speak simply of the historical-grammatical method. Though differences exist in how to apply the method to individual texts, there is agreement that this is the most appropriate approach to use in interpreting and understanding texts. So what is involved in this method?

PAINTING THE BACKDROP: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

The first context of interpretation is the historical one. Communication never occurs in a vacuum. A message utilizes categories of understanding the author shares with the audience. Even if the author is seeking to create new categories of understanding for his audience, the road taken to achieve this new understanding requires rearranging old categories or making fresh associations that break old barriers of understanding. For the reader, the degree of understanding the text depends in part on sharing with the author a network of background information. This includes ancient social norms, cultural expectations, historical and geographical facts, as well as a comprehension of the communication’s literary form.

¹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 76–105.

Sometimes the Bible is unclear to us because we do not share enough of this background information to appreciate the text. We may be unaware of how an ancient person might have felt about certain things. Because access to such data can be difficult, it is often the case that a layperson hopes the preacher or Bible teacher will supply any important background, so that the text might be clearer. This problem of “historical distance” can be a major hurdle to grasping the text’s message.

Some attempt to overcome this hurdle by simply relating the text to present experience. The false assumption is that attitudes, expectations, customs, and worldviews will match across twenty or more centuries, that the biblical world is exactly like the modern world. To say as much is not to deny the possibility of common bonds between the two periods; both then and today, people experience the ebb and flow of life. We should attempt to identify with the biblical characters because we all are human, but we must be careful not to assume what is true of our customs and feelings was true of theirs.

How can we comprehend those aspects of the biblical world that strike us as so foreign when we first encounter them? How can one enter a time machine in order to traverse the vast gulf back to ancient time and perspectives?

First, we must recognize that we have incomplete access to the biblical world, because our knowledge is often limited to ancient artifacts and writings that represent only a small portion of what once existed. In one sense, we can never entirely overcome this problem of distance. We can never understand the ancient world exactly as ancient people did. But despite that limitation, we do possess a vast array of materials that show us how life was lived and help us draw closer to that world. They name, picture, describe, or reflect major historical events, ancient categories of thinking, along with ancient customs and religious ideas.

In the following discussion, we will focus on literary remains. Some of these details are present in the Bible itself, but many of them are contained in extrabiblical texts. Jewish historians, like Josephus and Philo, retell the story of Genesis through Malachi in a way that lets us see how some educated first-century Jews read many scriptural texts. Josephus even goes on to detail what happened in Israel from the end of that period to A.D. 70. Texts on Jewish religious customs and respected teachings on wisdom and religious life exist in collections known as the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. In the famous Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran, we learn about the views and practices of a separatist Jewish community. These texts show us both the unity and variety of thought in first-century Judaism. The rabbinic rules of everyday life for the Judaism of the second century A.D. are found in the Mishnah, but some of these rules probably go back to the time of Jesus and the apostles. In addition, numerous Greco-Roman works reveal how those outside of Judaism lived in this period. Numerous documents from the various Ancient Near Eastern cultures tell us about the Sumerians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and other ancient ethnic groups and so illuminate details in the Old Testament.

All of the documents above reveal how the ancients lived and how they looked at the world. They did not see their world the same way. In fact, the rich diversity of ancient life at all levels is evident in these texts. Such works are not authoritative truth, but they do describe ancient life and perspective. They help form the backdrop for certain ideas referred to in the Bible. Those engaged in serious study of the Bible can benefit from learning about some of these sources and how to use them. All of us can come to appreciate how they help to open up the way people lived and thought in the ancient world.

Two examples can illustrate how this material enables us to appreciate better the message of the Bible. The first is the statement that Herod is a “fox” in Luke 13:32. In current English colloquial usage the normal figurative meaning of this term has nothing to do with a male; it refers to a female. Whatever Herod is, he is not that kind of “fox”! But even the second contemporary option refers to one who is crafty. This also is the meaning in some ancient Greek texts and in the Fathers (Plutarch, *Solon* 30.2; Dio Chrysostom in *Discourses* 74.15). However, another common ancient meaning is that a “fox” is one that destroys or is a scavenger (Song 2:15; Lam. 5:17–18; Ezek. 13:4; 1 Enoch 89:10, 42–49, 55). This meaning of destroyer fits well with the context of Luke 13, where the issue is the attempt of Herod to destroy Jesus. This is an example of where historical figurative usage coheres nicely in the context. Of course, the best ancient evidence is that which is contemporary to or is sure to predate the event being studied. It’s also crucial that any extrabiblical text the interpreter might use be close to the biblical text in terms of cultural contact. Sensitivity to date and connection can keep one from making hasty associations.

A second example is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The title even subverts the effect of the passage in its original historical context. The parable is well known. A man is overrun by robbers and left for dead. Of the three men who could help, only one does. The priest and the Levite pass on the other side of the road, while the Samaritan stops and helps the man. This is why the parable is named what it is.

But a study of ancient Judaism would show that this is precisely contrary to ancient expectation. In its original context, this story would have been shocking, since Samaritans were regarded with disdain as half-breeds, while priests and Levites were held in high regard as pious and righteous. This view of Samaritans is clear both from a text like John 4 and in the descriptions of Josephus (*Antiquities* 9.288–91; 11.340; 12.257) and the Apocrypha.

In fact, the intertestamental apocryphal Jewish work Sirach reads, “Two nations my soul detests, and the third is not even a people: Those who live in Seir and the Philistines, and the foolish people who live in Shechem” (50:25–26). The verbal insult of this ancient historical remark is unclear if one does not know ancient geography. Shechem is located next to Mount Gerizim, which is where the Samaritans worshiped and gave sacrifice to Yahweh rather than in Jerusalem. The Samaritans’ distinct locale for worship and different customs resulted in strong Jewish rejection. So Sirach’s attitude is that Samaritans are “not even a people.” Yet it is this “nonperson” who is the example of a neighbor according to Jesus. Two thousand years of public relations on this parable has taken some of the sting from its original meaning. Jesus’ story will never shock us as it did the first-century hearers. But reflection on the

ancient background will help us not only see that Jesus is exhorting His listeners to be good neighbors, but realize that sometimes neighbors come in surprising dress.

But historical reading also means not being anachronistic in our approach to the text. We should be careful not to attribute to the understanding of the recipients of the text a concept that only emerges later. An example here is Genesis 3:15, what some call the “first hint of the Gospel,” the protoevangelium. This understanding argues that God predicts that Eve’s seed, Jesus, will crush the Serpent, Satan. Now in the context of the development of the theme of Adam’s seed in the Bible, this meaning does eventually emerge from the text and is a legitimate reading of the passage. However, it is too specific for the original audience of Genesis. First of all, the early Jewish readers of the text could never have known that Messiah’s name would be Jesus. What is more, in the context of the Pentateuch, the coming of a regal figure for the nation of Israel is at best only alluded to as a minor point (Gen. 49:10). Third, the specific identification of the serpent with Satan is not transparent within the Pentateuch. All these connections emerge only later in the Scripture.

So what did the text originally mean? It simply pointed to the introduction of chaos into the creation as a result of sin. Nature would now be in conflict with man. A snake, now limited by God’s curse to crawl on the ground, would nip at man’s heel. Meanwhile, as man attempted to defend himself, he would seek to crush the head of the serpent. Of course, this emphasis fits with the message of Genesis, explaining why God raised up Israel—a nation of grace and promise—through whom He would bless all nations. Such a message also prepares for the New Testament point of the reversal of Adam’s work in the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

The point is that historically sensitive study in the Old Testament can open up additional teaching beyond issues highlighted in the New Testament’s teaching about the Old. Though the New Testament develops Old Testament teaching as divine history moves on, one should not lose the teaching of the Old in the process. So historical sensitivity serves as an important potential backdrop for interpretation, but the central pieces of the portrait come from the text—the grammatical and literary contexts of the message.

ASSEMBLING THE PIECES: GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATION

The second context for interpretation is the combination of expression and words woven together through sentences and paragraphs. Notice that we did not speak of words alone, because words in isolation do not carry meaning, only possible meanings. The word “gross” can mean many things, depending on whether teenagers, business partners, or order forms are present. Someone has said that words are like a game of chess. They take on their sense and importance from the other words to which they are linked. A pawn is generally an insignificant chess piece, but put it in a certain position on the board and it is the most important. Words are like that, and their grammatical-literary context means almost everything. One should work through texts with special attention to the relationship of the terms to other terms in the sentence and paragraph. In addition, attention has to be paid to the work as a whole, its historical setting, and the genre of the passage. We will return later to the importance of a text’s literary nature, but now we focus on terms.

Even nuances of words can shift as context shifts. A patriot as a historical term for an American revolutionary is a positive term, but speak of a German patriot in Nazi Germany who was loyal to Hitler and the nuance changes significantly. Finally, mention the term Patriot with reference to the recent Gulf War and one is not speaking of a person, but of a missile. So texts referring to an American patriot, the German Nazi patriot, or the Patriot missile will bear different meanings because of their limiting and identifying contexts. This shows how flexible terms are and how central context is for determining meaning, which, in most settings, is not random. In other words, one does not count how often a word is used in a particular way, but asks if that meaning is most appropriate in the context which is being studied. One looks for the background and concepts with which the terms being studied are associated.

Now in determining meaning there can be both accuracy and distortion in perception. If we say to you, “We have a cat,” you will picture an animal that is not a dog, bat, mouse, or monkey. But you may also conceive of it as an alley cat, a Persian, or a tabby. Now you have made more of our remark than we wanted to communicate, or we may have given too little information to reveal all my remark intended to suggest. But to get our point at its most basic level, only the first set of discriminations of meaning was necessary. A general understanding of the meaning of cat is good enough, though the detail of the more specific meaning may represent a type of distortion of our sense. Someone who knew us well would know that we have a gray alley cat. They would know immediately all we may have implied and not only would appreciate the basic sense but also could supply additional detail. Our point is that often we can get a general sense of a text’s teaching, but the better awareness we have to the appropriate background of the communication, the more detail we may be able to appreciate. As we sensitively incorporate more context, our understanding can deepen.

On the other hand, a general rule of interpretation is that one should not make a technical term out of a word unless the context points to such a force. Less specific meaning is usually more accurate than reading too much into a term, especially when one is historically distanced from a text.

Our cat illustration reveals other features of interpretation. The cat illustration has the advantage of allowing us, the authors, to explain to you, the reader, what we were trying to communicate. However, some degree of distortion of meaning is inevitable in the interpretation of ancient texts. We cannot ask those human writers what was meant. In fact, often a writer is not aware of all the

factors that contribute to the writing and choice of terms. These factors mean there is a provisional character to all interpretation no matter how careful we are.

But this provisionalism need not result in relativity. Some distortions of meaning are trivial, while others matter a great deal. Those who understood we meant “cat” and not dog, but pictured a tabby in their mind, were not really harmed by the incorrect detail, since all we desired to communicate was the basic identity of the pet. On the other hand, had someone understood we had a bat, not a cat, they may have been unwilling to visit! In texts, the only way an interpreter can sort out understanding or the degree of potential distortion is to pay close attention to other terms in the context to confirm or further clarify a reading. If we mention fur or that a pet goes “meow,” the other clues of the context confirm one identification over another. Where such additional confirmation is lacking and the disputed term is vague, care should be taken not to get too specific.

Two other features about words are important. Some words are obscure, others are broad, while others are quite precise. The Bible often uses broad terms or words, which can be referred to with more specificity or can take on additional representations as the concept is repeated later in Scripture. A great illustration of this is the concept of the servant. In Isaiah 49:3 the servant is called Israel, but in Isaiah 53, he is described with the traits of an individual. The New Testament also plays on this ambiguity. In Luke 1:54, Israel is the servant, but in Acts 8:32–33, the servant is tied to Jesus. Finally, in Acts 13:47, Paul and Barnabas describe their mission in terms of the servant by citing Isaiah 49:6. The servant figure describes various representatives of God. It is not one person but several, though one—Jesus—is a particularly key aspect of fulfillment for the term. He is its realization in a way others are not. Note how each context reveals the diversity in the usage. One context does not guarantee or dictate how the term is used in another context, though it may help to explain the relationship between the various uses.

In fact, there is also an ancient historical concept at work in this theme as well. It is the idea of the “one representing the many” or “the many in the one.” Jesus as servant can be seen as the servant par excellence, a faithful, individual representative of what the nation Israel had been called to be. In turn, Paul and Barnabas can be seen to be “in Jesus” and thus take on a servant role like His. We have similar figures today as when the president speaks for all of his country’s citizens or when a team of lawyers speak for one client.

A second characteristic of terms is that the same idea can be said in different ways. Biblical concepts or themes often involve more than one term. So to limit looking for a concept by looking for the presence of a specific term can often result in underdeveloping the theme in Scripture. An example is that Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:30–36) and Jesus as Head (Eph. 1:19–23) are two ways to portray Jesus’ ruling authority over the church. Both titles are associated with imagery from Psalm 110:1, which is a regal (or royal) psalm. Note how in this example, the presence of imagery about being exalted and seated at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1) helps to fill out the portrait of a “head” (a regal, ruling image). To talk about Jesus’ kingship or lordship includes discussing His headship. In fact, Paul may have chosen to use the term “head” to avoid confusion in Greek contexts in which he preached about what kind of ruler Jesus was as He sat at God’s right hand. Here historical background study and the study of how a term is used may help us be sensitive to the reason for such usage. Putting all the elements together, the imagery suggests that Jesus transcended the political rule of Rome. In fact, Jesus said as much in John 18:36, when He declared, “My kingdom is not of this world.” That was because His kingdom is the kingdom of God. Or, as Jesus said elsewhere, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21, RSV). Whatever type of rule Jesus possessed, it did not represent a current, direct threat to Roman rule. Its reach into people’s lives went beyond political authority by heading for the heart. Historical features set the backdrop that are a context for interpretation, while words in their grammatical context reveal the pieces of the puzzle. One factor remains to be considered. One must put the pieces together in light of the whole, both in terms of the variety of literary genre used to present the biblical message, as well as the theological unity of that message. So we turn to the literary-theological aspect of reading.

UNIFYING MESSAGE AND STORY: LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL

Be Genre Sensitive. The study of genre moves us into the area of interpretation that helps us unify the pieces of the message, even though that unity is achieved through the use of a wide variety of literary means. We can recognize these genres because we can also see them in the larger ancient world as well. One should think of this aspect of interpretation as being like the Olympics, a grand occasion made up of a variety of sports. Though it is all sport, each game is played by its own rules and has its own expectations about how to play the game. The variety of literature is the same way. It all has a message, but it conveys that message in a variety of ways and with a variety of expectations. To try to play basketball with soccer’s rules will never work, though both use a ball and require foot speed. Or think of musical instruments, they all make music, but in different ways with different sounds. One cannot play the violin like a piano or drums; nor should one expect a violin to sound like either a piano or the kettledrum! In the same way, to read the poetry of the Psalms like a historical book is to miss the emotional and pictorial impact of the message, though both genres convey reality about people’s experience with God. To transform the imagery and setting of the Psalter into mere theological proposition is also to take the passion and lifeblood out of its veins.

We will briefly survey the six major genres of the Bible to try to point out their dominant characteristics. Each one tells the biblical story in its own way. By story we mean the presentation of events, pictures, and/or ideas about God and humanity in an organized sequence. The point is: be genre sensitive as you study the text.

1. Theological narrative. Here we refer to the historical books of the Old and New Testaments—Genesis through Esther and Matthew through Acts. These books tell a *story with plot about events*. They discuss events which involve God's interaction with humanity. But they do so with themes, characters, an unfolding story line, and conflict. These elements all interact with each other to make up the story and provide contact with life. The characters often represent not just individuals in history but types of people. The story itself is usually centered around promises or hope that people have in their relationship with God. Conflict arises because an obstacle gets in the way of that hope. Interaction between character, plot, and conflict surfaces themes and lessons about walking with God. A theological narrative is more than a collection of past events and facts. It is the story of people's lives expressed in terms of hope and disappointment.

For all the triumph of the Exodus, there is a tragic note to the end of Moses' life, since he is not able to enter the Promised Land at the end of the Pentateuch. The hope of reaching the land lives on and the story continues in Joshua, but there is a note of pain as disobedience prevents Moses from sharing in the moment of triumph. All he gets is a glimpse of its reality. Disobedience often cheats us of a fuller experience of promise. Here is a major lesson of the narrative in terms of life, but there are others as well. Though we have a wonderful taste of God's involvement now, it is but a glimpse of what we often could have if our obedience were more complete. Moses also came to realize that in God's plan, he was but a table setter. Others would experience the fullness of God's promise in ways he would not. But he came to be content in the wonderful servant role God had called him to have.

Subgenres within narrative literature include miracle accounts, parables, and discourse material. They too have their own ways in which they should be read. Miracles also have a representative quality by picturing within the event the power of God over forces that oppose humanity (Luke 5:17–26; 11:14–23). Parables often picture through stories theological truth or ways to live (Luke 10:25–37; 15:1–32; 16:1–13). Discourses can be read more like epistles, the communication of teaching in logical sequence, though even within this subgenre there can be the heavy use of figures and imagery.

2. Poetic literature. The poetical books and some portions of the prophets are theological song. It is *story from the heart*. Hymnic material is less frequent in the New Testament, but some does exist (e.g., Luke 1:68–79). This is story with emotions worn on the sleeve. Psalms picture events that become representative to the reader. Though a reader's experience differs from the psalmist in detail, he or she still can identify with the hymn's attempt to communicate one's experience and emotions before God.

It is important to recognize the representative quality of this material. Such literature often had a concrete setting in the life of the psalmist. What is interesting is that the language is often so symbolic that we cannot be sure of the details of that experience. But the mere placing of the psalm into the Psalter (or into the Bible for other hymns) demonstrates that the people of God recognized that what is expressed here is something all God's people could share in and identify with. Whether in praise, pain, or both, the psalmist's experience, often unknown to us, can still be shared and taught. Through the combination of emotions and theological reflection comes understanding.

Most of the psalms are "laments," where the pain of disappointment in life pierces the heart. The psalmist verbalizes the pain and the anger before realizing that God does care about, and is sovereign over, these events. Other psalms, "songs of praise," are outright acclamations of God, pure joy in a high octave. Still others, "regal psalms," reveal promises about the king of Israel and express the hope that he will be all that God promised. The unique realization of this ideal kingship comes in Jesus Christ in the context of His two comings. Other psalms, "psalms of the righteous sufferer," depict the suffering of the people of God or an individual at the hands of those who reject God. Here again the psalms portray the heart of a certain kind of person. Once more as well, Jesus becomes in the New Testament an example of the "righteous sufferer" par excellence, and by doing so models our walk in the midst of a hostile world.

In sum, the psalms come in various subtypes (or "forms"), the understanding of which helps to reveal the message. But one should never ignore the emotion that comes in its graphic imagery. It is that element, along with the possibility of identifying with the psalmist, that gives the psalms their power. To interpret sensitively is to explain the imagery and to retain a sense of its emotion.

3. Wisdom literature. This genre's texts, like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and James, contain short sayings of generalized approaches to life, *story in generality*. They often are not designed to be understood as true in every particular moment, since some proverbs are internally in tension (Prov. 26:4–5). But they do serve, again often through emotively driven pictures, to motivate one to live with a sense of responsibility and accountability before God. Wisdom calls the reader to avoid the traps that often lead into destructive relationships and ways of living. It can be helpful to trace a particular theme through the book, rather than to focus on one proverb at a time, in order to appreciate the breadth and variety of advice on a theme. Thus one can examine with profit the wise man, the fool, money, labor, and the lazy. Or one can examine the seductions of sin with profit by collecting all the references to the theme and then considering each one in turn. Often these proverbs are contextless. That is, the proverb before or after it is not relevant to its meaning. Such detached proverbs are more profitably studied as collected clusters on the same theme, than within a flow of a literary context.

4. Prophetic literature. The Old Testament prophets and prophetic sections of other books are not primarily prediction, though there is some. Rather, they are *story of confrontation and fresh perspective*. They are designed to subvert spiritual complacency and declare accountability to God, while affirming the presence, promise, and judgment of God. The prophets set forth an image of a different world order from the one the people of God currently experience. In doing so, they remind the people that God is in control, that judgment will come to the unrighteous, and that God holds all accountable for how they live and treat others. In this

genre, rebuke and exhortation dominate. The prophets rely heavily on symbolic imagery to make their points. Such imagery makes the prophets difficult to read if one does not appreciate the background of the metaphors. Their message appeals for righteous character and warns of the consequences for relating to others unjustly. At the heart of their preaching is the revelation of divine values and virtues. Thus the prophets also drive for the heart and shun the importance of rules or routine, opting to look instead at motive. As with the Psalms and poetic literature, lessons for the modern reader here are not necessarily found by paralleling the particular circumstances the prophet addresses, but in considering the attitudes that are displayed in the midst of such events.

5. Epistolary literature. This genre of the New Testament is *story with explanation*, or teaching discourse. Like the discourse sections in a narrative, the epistle is the most explicitly propositional of all the genres. Whereas the message of non-discourse sections in narrative emerges through characters, plot, conflict, dialogue, and interaction, here the teaching is expressed more directly. Often these letters provide the most natural reading for us, if we understand most of the theological terminology used. It is amazing to read these letters and realize that they were originally addressed to everyday people, not theologians. Of course, in the case of Paul's letters, his audience often had the advantage of having heard him teach and preach on these themes, so they knew the force of his terms, including the technical ones. Still, we read in 2 Peter 3:16 that Paul's letters are often hard to understand.

In sorting out the use of terms in this genre, it is often important to stay within the usage of the given human author being studied before considering how other authors use a term. For example, Paul's use of *righteousness* in his epistles is often limited to what theologians describe as the doctrine of justification, or God's declaring us righteous through the work of Christ in response to faith, or to what many people call "getting saved." But in Matthew the term *righteousness* means the display of righteousness in our actions, or what theologians label "ethical righteousness." Such ethical righteousness has nothing to do with getting saved, but rather has to do with the response to God's grace. The example is a reminder and variation of a point made earlier: terms are determined by their context. In this material it is the meaning of terms and the grammatical-syntactical relationships between sentences that bear a great deal of the burden in interpretation.

6. Apocalyptic literature. Found in Daniel, Revelation, portions of Zechariah and Isaiah, along with portions of Jesus' eschatological discourses (Matt. 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 17:20–37; 21:5–38), this genre is by far the most cryptic in the Bible. This is *story which views the present through the lens of heavenly perspective, conflict in the world, the future, and end times*. Apocalyptic is forward-looking literature, penetrating the corridors of time and eternity through visions, dreams, and journeys into the counsels of the heavens. It is heavily symbolic literature, which is why its force is often so debated. This literature deals with the basic conflict between God and the world, but also comforts those in suffering by reminding them that one day God will restore righteousness and order to the earth. Because of the difficulty of its imagery, and its relevance to the wider topic of this book, we will discuss this genre in some detail.

In the Book of Revelation, much of the imagery echoes concepts presented in the Old Testament. In fact, though no verse in Revelation appears with an introductory formula marking its wording as from the Old Testament, allusions to ancient Scripture can be found many times on any page. These allusions convey a link to Old Testament teaching and hope, which serves to underline the perception that Revelation details the climactic chapter of the story of the promise of God.

To argue that apocalyptic literature is heavily symbolic is not to argue that it is non-referential. There is a reality present in the imagery, even though that imagery may seem strange. In fact, one of the many points of unusual imagery (like the blood-drinking harlot riding a seven-headed monster in Revelation 17) is to communicate graphically through pictures. The image of the harlot and monster portrays the grotesqueness of the sinful world system which Revelation condemns. It reveals that this system horrifically stands opposed to God and will manifest itself eventually in a worldwide rebellion against God's people. Its presence necessitates Christ's return, which will bring about its fall. The picture is supposed to yield a response like, "what an ugly looking scene! Who would want any association with her?" This scene portrays the death of believers. How will God react? He will react by crushing her in judgment.

Commentators debate about how to understand apocalyptic images, what they represent, and how they relate exactly to future events. Some attempt to explain the text by using the method of "literal interpretation." Others stress their "figurative" quality. But lack of agreement about what these labels actually mean shows the difficulty of appealing to them as the key to interpreting such biblical texts. Imagery can legitimately represent reality in various degrees of detail and by various means. It can be specific, general, or even representative, and can be expanded while maintaining a basic unity of sense. Some specific textual examples may help us sort through whether such labels really help us appreciate the complexity of this genre.

For instance, should we simply substitute things like helicopters and modern weapons for the imagery of locusts, scorpions, and other such images in Revelation 9:3? Is the imagery of Revelation always this specific? Should we assume the prophet saw something like a motion picture of the future in his vision and then attempted to explain it in terms of images he understood? Or did he see a picture precisely in the images he gives, images which paint reality rather than describing it? Which description of those options is "more literal"? Is it the one that focuses on how it might look to us, so we explain what he meant in words and images very different from the prophet's terms and images? Or should one focus on how it looked to the prophet and how it appears in the ancient text? We would thus attempt to understand his words in their literary character, both by examining the image in context and the Old Testament images and background(s) it evokes.

Is literal versus figurative the best way to approach this debate? Imagery like the harlot and monster clearly shows that at least sometimes representative portrayal, not a motion picture, is present. The interpretations of the various visions within Daniel also

indicate that the imagery of the text is representative of reality *and* evocative of earlier biblical imagery, while looking to the future, genuine vindication of God's people. The message is *both* real and figurative. It looks to the future not by detailing all that will happen in the future with movie-like imagery, but by emphatically and artistically declaring that such a comprehensive deliverance will happen. It deals with reality though imagery.

For instance, consider the locusts of Revelation. One wonders if a past interpreter of this text, say a seventeenth-century man or the original first-century reader holding to imminence, could have made such an explicit identification of locusts with helicopters? Was the literal meaning of this text totally inaccessible to its original recipients? If this world remains until A.D. 3000, what might the locusts become and could we ever know it now? It is possible that such specific identification is implied by such imagery, but it is not very likely. If the internal interpretation of these texts helps us unlock them and if the lessons of history teach us anything about their interpretation, then we must be sensitive to the literary character of their portrayal of history.

So why refer to locusts? Perhaps one point among many in this text is to depict the presence of moving destructive forces on the earth connected with Satan, without intending to communicate any more detail about what such forces might actually look like. The imagery calls forth the picture from Joel 2. Through this parallelism with the Old Testament imagery, the awareness emerges that here is an allusion to the arrival of the terrible Day of the Lord, that is now related to Christ's return which brings final vindication of the saints and judgment for all. The reality the text communicates is that such judgment is horrible, like going through a swarming plague of locusts, however it eventually manifests itself in history.

Recalling our cat illustration, we know that one can communicate at a general level without filling in all the details. Apocalyptic imagery seems often to operate at this basic level, since its imagery and its internal interpretations seem to reveal a representative approach. The key to apocalyptic literature is to determine the roots—at a general level—of the imagery that is evoked.

On the contrary, other apocalyptic images have a specific, even Israelite, feel to them: the 144,000 (Rev. 7) or the allusion to 42 months (Rev. 13:5), which is similar to the language of Daniel 12:11. Or take the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24–27, where Jerusalem and the temple are described. Promises made here are not yet realized in our time. Since God keeps His commitments, something more in terms of fulfillment can be anticipated. Such uncompleted promises within apocalyptic literature look forward to fulfillment. On the other hand, references in Revelation 20 to the first and second resurrection are not symbolic, but specific, distinct, sequential, and descriptive. These various examples show that some details in apocalyptic literature are not symbolic images, but name concrete realities in the world of the writer. They appear to present a worldview where Israel is present, since many of them point us back so vividly to the world and reality of Old Testament hope.

Still other Old Testament images, while reused, have a fresh force explicitly noted in the new context. For example, Gog and Magog in Revelation 20 refer explicitly to the four corners of the earth (v. 8), rather than to specific national entities as in the Old Testament (Ezek. 38–39). Such a shift in imagery is noted by not just citing the Old Testament and its imagery but by also filling in the details explicitly in the new context.

This mixture of highly symbolic and directly descriptive imagery, along with the presence of fresh referents in some other contexts, makes interpreting the Book of Revelation difficult, even though it clearly refers ultimately to future reality. Interpretation of apocalyptic is not a matter of literal versus figurative/allegorical approaches, but of how to identify and understand the reference of the figure in question. Often the case is that more narrowly defined images of the Old Testament have been expanded to cover a wider scope in Revelation, but not at the expense of the original emphasis of the term; rather, such expansion is in addition to the original image. On the other hand, other texts merely evoke the Old Testament and suggest that to understand the image one can simply look at the earlier text.

Another example of this literal/symbolic difficulty is the debate over the identity of Babylon in Revelation 17. This text shows how multilayered the associations are in an apocalyptic passage and how focusing on only one element may limit its understanding. Should one appeal to Jeremiah 51 and take it literally as Babylon rebuilt, so that the center of the world system in the end will be where Iraq is now? Or is it a cipher for a rebuilt Rome as the reference to seven hills of Revelation 17:9 suggests? Which context helps us identify what is taking place, the Old or the New? Are the two associations in conflict or can they form a unity? Even dispensationalists have not agreed here. Perhaps ultimately a choice between the two contexts is not necessary. This is one of the few texts in Revelation that offers an interpretation with its image. As such, it is a key to the book.

The beast in Revelation 17 is composed of seven heads representing various kingships (or national dynasties in all likelihood). The representative imagery characteristic of Revelation is clearly present. No nation *is* a beast, especially a multiheaded one. The interpretation tells us that five heads have fallen, one is and one is to come for a short time. Then comes an eighth figure related to, but distinct from, the seventh. Those who try to limit Revelation's teaching at this point to a period contemporary to John, referring this remark to past Roman history, have an awful problem explaining whom the five heads on the beast represent in terms of past Roman kings. There is no historical list that fits with John's time period! To simply read Revelation as a reference to history in John's time seems not to work; it is a futurist document.

But what kind of futurist image is present? We would suggest that this image refers to the sweep of history. The beast depicts each worldwide dynasty of biblical times: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece are the five fallen kings. The sixth, Rome, is "the one that is," thus honoring the allusion to seven hills in Revelation 17:9. The seventh, the one to come for a short time, may well be from a region unidentified in the text, as is also the eighth king, the beast. If one asks why the text skips some world dynasties, such jumping of periods and time is not unusual in prophecy. The story simply picks up with the resumption of God's program in association with Christ's return.

The principle for reading the details in this way is careful, contextual study of the imagery within the text. As with other genres, such a reading honors interpretation in context, with the immediate context having priority. Taking the image as a whole, the interpreter can see that each head represents a new period located in a different capital. The world empire's center is always shifting, though each succeeding era is organically related to the previous ones.

Among the many points of the image, we highlight three. First, there is a genealogical and organic relationship between the various dynastic empires of the world that have stood opposed to God. In fact, the "beast from below" image suggests an appeal to the Leviathan image of the Old Testament, the opponent of God and the consummate scriptural image for evil. This conflict is not only cosmic in scope, but it has been ongoing in duration! This connection also raises the point that the conflict transcends human opponents. As Paul says in another context, our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12).

Second, one day that "beast" will manifest itself in a horrible, climactic worldwide rebellion against God and His people. Death will be everywhere, and the beast and harlot will be slaying believers. Such a reading fits the cosmic scope of other imagery in the book as well. Those who associate the image with Babylon are right in that it is the greatest Old Testament picture of such a power. That is why the beast is called Babylon. Those who associate it with Rome are right because Rome was the current manifestation of that beast in the time of John the writer. And yet the beast's imagery reminds us that its real existence is from long ago. So Rome and Babylon both apply, and yet the beast is more than either national identification. But neither Rome nor Babylon is likely to be the final location of this worldwide opposition, given the shifting nature of the location of the eras represented by the heads of the beast. The text is both specific and indefinite at the same time. It describes what the beast is specifically, but not where it will ultimately reside.

Third, there is an organic relationship between evil in John's generation and its culmination in the end. Everyone who identifies with God is urged not to identify with what is represented in the evils of the beast. What is required in the interim, in light of what the future brings, is faithfulness to God and His people, since ultimately vindication of the saints will come. The message applies to John's audience and to the future.

This third reading could be incorrect. In fact, identifying the beast with rebuilt Babylon or Rome here may be correct, as might another interpretation of the text. Yet, our reading demands attention and reflection, because it tries to deal with the imagery from within the context of the book's own interpretation of itself and with a sensitivity to apocalyptic genre. We admit that the imagery here is difficult, but the goal of interpretation is to be as faithful as possible to the imagery in its context. Regardless of who is right on the issue of locale, we would still argue that the three themes—the genealogical character of the beast, the final worldwide rebellion it brings, and the connection between the beast and the present—are among the important points in the passage, and those who hold to different details might also agree with our statement of these central concerns.

All the genres considered together reveal the vast variety of terrain that the Bible contains. One should understand how each genre operates and study it accordingly. Above all, sensitivity must be maintained for each context in which a text falls. One must be sensitive to four levels of context in interpreting the Bible—the historical, grammatical, literary, and theological. The interaction of these contexts raises the issues of different ways to read the text and how to relate different passages to one another.

WAYS OF READING THE BIBLE AND RELATING DIFFERENT TEXTS

To think about the process of reading is to consider how one should engage the text. From what has been said, one thing should be very clear. It is important to let each context of a passage speak to its meaning. In particular, it is crucial that each interpretation be sensitive to the passage's own genre and thematic, literary categories before integrating it with the message of other texts given in other settings. This simply allows the story of the Bible to progress while remaining sensitive to how the story is told. It is also sensitive to what kind of terrain a given part of the story is using to advance the journey through the message.

If we're not careful, we can read a text in a way that dilutes another text's message. Sometimes what happens is that an early text is regarded as so clear that a later text simply is read in its terms. But this can flatten out meaning, so that progression in the story is lost. When progress or development of the story occurs, it is indicated by other features in the later context that show the theme's development, even though some terms of the text match terms used earlier in Scripture (e.g., Gog and Magog in Revelation 20). But there is another way to flatten out the text as well. It is to argue that the later text redraws the lines of the earlier text in such a way that what the second text means is what the first text always meant. The effect of this type of reading is also a reduction in the depth of the biblical message. This approach also loses the sense of progress in the story.

An example of how this occurs in both directions is to compare how some handle the theme of the kingdom of God in the New Testament. Some, noting texts that clearly place the kingdom of God in the future, argue that this theme refers only to what the Old Testament pictured it to be, an earthly kingdom. On this basis some commentators claim that either there is no present form of the kingdom today or the present heavenly form of the kingdom has nothing to do with Old Testament kingdom promise. This position holds that to argue for a present form of the kingdom is to contradict the Old Testament texts about its arrival in the future. This approach to eschatology understands the kingdom as residing totally in the future. This limitation is the error of reading the New Testament solely in light of the Old.

On the other hand, some have argued that the texts on the presence of the kingdom mean that the kingdom has already arrived. This has been called *realized* eschatology. The promise of the future has come fully now; Jesus is the presence of fulfillment, so what He brings must come in totality. Texts about the kingdom's futurity are really nothing but extensions of what is already here.

This present reality is merely projected toward eternity. Old Testament texts about the kingdom are then focused on, if not limited to, their meaning for this current form of the kingdom. This approach errs by reading the New Testament back into the Old.

The biblical characteristic of viewing events from a variety of perspectives shows us that one can make points from a “both-and” perspective without denying either side of the present-future relationship. It is possible to get fulfillment “now” in some texts, while noting that “not yet” fulfillment exists in other passages. In fact, in some texts fulfillment can be initial or partial, as opposed to being final and total. As a result, one can speak of *inaugurated* eschatology without denying either what the Old Testament indicates about a future, earthly kingdom or what the New Testament asserts about the arrival of the kingdom as part of fulfillment in the first coming of Jesus. To call such eschatology inaugurated is only to say the process of fulfillment has commenced; there is more—even much more—to come.

Such “already-not yet” tensions are not surprising. They reside in our description of salvation itself. I am saved now when I trust Jesus, but God is going to complete that salvation in the future. In one sense salvation has arrived; in another I await it. In the cases of both salvation and the kingdom of God, one should pay attention to which side of the relationship is being highlighted in any given text. To note the presence of one aspect of the relationship is not to deny the other part of its realization. “Already-not yet” teaching links the plan of God into a unified whole. It allows one to see both continuity and discontinuity in the outworking of God’s promises.

There is another dimension of reading that needs attention. It is that a story can be read from different angles, drawing on differing amounts of context to tell the story. The best illustration for this concept is to think of reading a mystery or going to see a movie about a murder. The first time through as the event is being experienced without knowledge of the end, one is caught in the grip of the drama of trying to decide “who done it.” The story unfolds a step at a time and the perspective and expectations are limited by one’s partial knowledge. Only at the story’s end are all the pieces brought together. If one is observant, though, he or she can sometimes put together the solution to the crime before the story unwinds.

On the other hand, in reading the story or seeing the movie a second time, one sees differently. Now all the tension of the story is reduced, but also connections are seen that were missed the first time through. Note that the story is exactly the same, but it is perceived and evaluated on different terms because of better knowledge or because of the different angle taken in viewing the whole. *Both* ways of relating to the story are legitimate ways to encounter it and to consider it. To return to our previous illustration, it is a little like assessing the Clinton election on November 3, 1992 versus election day 1996 or any other subsequent date in history.

Now as one thinks about event and text in Scripture, one can think through the same kind of analogy. A difference in approach can impact how the text is read. If one views the event of Scripture in its immediate context as event, then one views the event portrayed from the limited perspective of how it was originally experienced. Often the characters’ reactions reflect a perspective that is less knowledgeable than the reader of Scripture today has, since that reader knows the whole story. Connections, though they have the potential to exist, are not transparent in that original time frame. In fact, often events seem disjointed and expectations meet with surprises along the way. But when one examines the story in the light of all the events, the connections can emerge more explicitly and be established with greater clarity. Things that seemed distinct at first glance have a closer relationship than one might have initially imagined. This is like seeing the movie for a second time. Regardless of which angle one takes in viewing the story, both angles are appropriate ways to look at the event.

Our earlier illustration of Genesis 3:15 with the image of Eve’s seed and the serpent is an example of this distinction. In the near context of Genesis the emphasis would be on the chaos that sin introduced into the creation, while in the context of the canonical story that tension is resolved through the work of Jesus Christ.

One can also suggest that this helps to explain the difference in perspective between the synoptics and John. The synoptics tell the story of Jesus by highlighting how the disciples experienced His ministry. The emphasis is on their lack of understanding and the struggle they had in grasping who He was. It tells the story of Jesus “from the earth up,” working from categories the reader can identify with and then showing how Jesus goes beyond those expectations. It is like reading the story for the first time.

John writes from the other angle, highlighting the story in light of his total understanding about Jesus. In fact, at points he notes for the reader that at the time of the events the disciples did not understand the significance of certain actions (John 2:22; 12:16). Only after Jesus was resurrected did they put the pieces together so that they understood who Jesus really was. John’s portrait is “from heaven down,” starting with and exalting Jesus as Word Incarnate from the very beginning. It is interesting that Christians often like the Gospel of John because of its explicitness, but that unbelievers often relate well to Matthew, Mark, or Luke because the non-Christian can identify more easily with its developing portrait of Jesus.

Now what is important here is that each angle on the account is legitimate and carries an aspect of the total canonical message. The Scripture complements its message, not by having one Gospel, but four, so portraits exist from a variety of angles. A sensitive reader will let each story and angle speak rather than flattening them all out into one message where each text says exactly the same thing. But if one pursues such a unified, canonical reading, it is done with sensitivity to the contribution each piece makes to the whole. Rather than laying each account on top of each other to make them say one thing, they are placed together in locked pieces, so that the full portrait and its elements can be observed.

Three Levels of Reading. In sum, texts of the Bible can be read in three ways. First, they can be read at a *historical-exegetical level*, where the issue is the context of the event viewed as a fairly self-contained unit. Though this perspective is a limited one, it can have value in highlighting the immediate impact of an event. Sensitivity to this level of reading will preserve the sense of progress in the story and allows one to appreciate how the story builds as time passes and revelation progresses.

Second, a text can be read in the context of the whole book in which it falls. We can call this a *biblical-theological reading*, provided we do not confuse it with the normal way one speaks of biblical theology, which usually refers to all the writings of a given writer or period. To put it another way, one can read Romans trying to deal with it as a reader in Rome might have, that is, without assuming that the Roman reader had access to 1 Corinthians (or any other of Paul's letters) to help him figure out Paul's meaning. Romans was originally conceived to stand on its own. Now usually this second level of reading will be very close in meaning to the first level, but in longer books this will not be the case. The promise of Abraham's seed in the early chapters of Genesis focuses on Isaac. For Abraham, the most important aspect to the seed promise was its start. Only as the Genesis story moves through the generations do Jacob and his sons emerge as the seed. Only in light of all of Genesis do we see the nation of Israel as the seed. The refocusing of the seed uniquely on Jesus is nowhere explicit in the context of Genesis. Only the movement of the story of promise beyond Genesis begins to show the possibility for such narrowing in the concept of the king as representative of the nation. But that move takes us to the third way to read the biblical text, at a *canonical-systematic level*. This reading takes the passage in light of the whole, either through all of an author's writing, through the lens of a given period, or, most comprehensively, in light of the whole of the canon. Now the story of the seed takes on added dimension as Jesus becomes the seed who brings *the* promise. Abraham's promise is linked with the one to David (see Luke 1–2 [esp. 1:31–35, 67–79]). Jesus as Christ—the promised king of the line of David—fulfills promises to Abraham and bestows the Spirit of God. Jesus brings the initial manifestation of the kingdom (see John the Baptist's announcement of the "one to come"). By linking Spirit and kingdom, Davidic regal hope is tied to the promise of the Spirit in the new covenant, as well as to the hope of Abraham. The entire discussion assumes a context of promise and fulfillment, so it is the realization of one fundamental promise to Abraham that is being realized. Even then, with Jesus as the turning point, we are not done. For those who are "in Christ" also become "the seed," as Galatians 3:29 shows. The Bible loves to give many dimensions to a single theme. To discover those dimensions is like the joy and amazement one gets from seeing light split into many colors as it passes through a prism.

Another theme that draws on this type of dynamic reading is the development of kingdom texts in the Bible. The journey moves from its formation in promise to Israel and David to its culminating description in terms of millennium and then the new heaven and new earth. The Old Testament mostly discusses the promise of a kingdom on earth (2 Sam. 7:8–16), with the exception of brief remarks in Daniel that suggest a heavenly origin (esp. Dan. 2 and 7). The New Testament develops these heavenly elements of the hope (Eph. 2:4–7; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22–24), culminating in the Millennium and then the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 20–22). When Revelation is read *canonically-systematically*, its message refracts back on Old Testament kingdom texts to show that the promised kingdom is fulfilled in part within the Millennium and the new heaven and new earth. What Old Testament promises have not been fulfilled yet will be fulfilled in the future. As the Apostle Peter suggests, there is much detail about the career of Jesus and the outworking of promise declared in the Old Testament (Acts 3:21). To appreciate how the entire story unfolds and which promises belong where, one must read the text *historically-exegetically*, *biblically-theologically*, and *canonically-systematically*.

All three levels of reading are appropriate, though ultimately the canonical-systematic reading brings the pieces of the Bible's message together. To consider carefully how God's plan is unified, how fulfillment works, and how the parts of the Bible relate to one another, we must turn to our final topic of concern—the variety of ways that promise and fulfillment link together. What are the various ways the New Testament uses the Old?

The Use of the Old Testament in the New. We have already cleared much ground for this discussion. As has been made clear, promise and prophecy are not always a matter of exclusively direct prophetic texts, where the Old Testament passage refers only to one event or person in one setting. Fulfillment in Jesus can be prepared for by establishing the pattern of God's activity in one age and then reenacting it again later. Sometimes such reenactments occur more than once. Concepts like the Servant of God, the Righteous Sufferer of the Psalms, and the Seed of Abraham operate in this manner. Such prophecy is both prophetic and typological. In the "patterned" design of the event lies the prophecy. But prophecy is only a subset in the larger topic of how the New Testament uses the Old.

There are different kinds of use or combinations of use: some are prophetic, others are illustrative, while others are explanatory. Some texts mix these categories together. Some texts like Daniel 7:14 are *directly prophetic*, having in mind only one referent. For example, there is only one "Son of Man," who returns in judgment.

Texts that reflect pattern can be called *typological-prophetic*. They present the realization of a pattern or the emergence of someone who again fulfills a given role. That makes it a type. But the escalation normally associated with Jesus' fulfillment of the pattern reveals its prophetic character. Escalation means that He fulfills it to a degree greater than others before Him, pointing to His unique and often culminating position within the pattern. Most of the regal promises tied to David's descendants culminate in an escalated fulfillment in Jesus. For example, the New Testament's uses of Psalms 45, 89, 110, 118, and 132 belong here. What was hoped for from any king of David was realized (or will be realized) in Jesus. The fact that He fulfills such promises in a unique way reveals that He is the key and culmination of the pattern. John the Baptist as an Elijah-prophet is another example of such usage. In fact, a significant number of the New Testament uses of the Old Testament fit into this category.

Other texts merely make an illustrative comparison. They involve an *analogical* use. When Paul alludes to the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 or the author of Hebrews looks back at the concept of rest in Psalm 95, they are making comparisons between the divine acts of old and current events.

Some texts relate to promise by noting either its realization or termination. They serve to explain relationships within promise.

Some texts assert the *cancellation* of previous revelation. The law of circumcision is explicitly canceled as texts in Acts 15 and Galatians indicate.

But other texts indicate *substitution*, at least for a given period. The parable of the tenants indicates that the vineyard of promise is given to others and is taken from those who had tended it, namely the nation of Israel. But the nature of such substitution needs to be defined by additional texts on this theme. Romans 11 makes it clear that there comes a time in the future when Israel is grafted back in, and Acts 3:18–21 makes it clear that when Jesus returns He will complete the remaining prophetic promises of the Old Testament.

This kind of qualification means that some themes and texts have a *complementary* relationship. The additional inclusion of some in the promise does not mean that the original recipients are thereby excluded. *The expansion of promise need not mean the cancellation of earlier commitments God has made.* The realization of new covenant hope today for Gentiles does not mean that the promise made to Israel in Jeremiah 31 has been jettisoned. Cancellation of promise only occurs where it is explicitly stated. Chapters 5 and 6 in this volume will develop this point.

Given the variety of possible ways the Old Testament can be cited within the New, the relationship between the Testaments on given themes must be handled on a case-by-case basis. Rules that apply in every case before each text is examined preempt the discussion and ignore the variety of possibilities. In this area, one size does not fit all cases.

Texts are not always associated by means of simple identity, since the progress of promise, issues of genre, and the presence of the developing themes (e.g., seed) allow ideas to deepen and develop. Nor is the relationship always a matter of substitution. For example, the nature of God's promises and program prohibit merely substituting the church for Israel (Acts 3:18–21). Neither does simple analogy always work because some texts develop themes in contexts where promise and fulfillment clearly reside (Acts 2; Heb. 8–10). Texts frequently have a complementary relationship (often by appeal to pattern), so that later realizations of that pattern can occur when Jesus returns. Fulfillment can be "already-not yet," that is, partial and then full. To sort out whether fulfillment is inaugurated, realized, or still anticipated, one must study each passage with sensitivity to the various aspects that contribute to the textual message: historical, grammatical, literary, and theological. Each passage should be allowed to speak on its own terms and should be studied with sensitivity to the various angles from which the text can be read. One must also be aware of the various ways texts can be associated with one another.

CONCLUSION

Interpretation is the product of how we speak to the text and how it speaks to us. However, the text occupies the privileged position. We sit in submission to it. Scripture's role is to transform us daily as we address it and look for it to challenge us. But our dialogue does not occur in a vacuum, nor should our deliberations be private. Others read the text with us. Though we do not always agree with others on what the Bible says, these differences reflect our limitations in understanding. Sometimes our dialogue with others helps us see our own blind spots. As Scripture says, "Iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17). These realities call for humility, even as we seek to gain perspective and conviction from the truth of Scripture. Indeed, the Spirit works to convict the world and encourage His children.

In the end, Scripture tells the story of God's pursuit of humanity. The Bible presents not just His message, but His action on our behalf. In His message He declares His relationship to us and His involvement with us. That message contains promise, reveals the possibility of relationship, and guarantees human accountability to God. The text of Scripture also discloses His authority and program. The activity of Jesus Christ stands at its center. He is the ultimate possessor of promise and the mediator of blessing.

Scripture constructs a worldview. The Word is not just about a random series of events, facts, doctrines, or propositions. Nor is it even a picture of different groups all with equal access to God. There is no relativism in Scripture about how one enters into relationship with God. Rather, the Bible speaks to relationships, whether healthy or crippled, and calls the reader to enter into blessing on God's terms through Jesus or else be left on the outside, subject to the story's divine outworking. Ultimately, Scripture is about God's promise realized in Jesus. Everyone is accountable to Him who is our Creator. In the message of Scripture, we find how God created and entered the world of humanity. God tells us just how He did it, does it, and plans to do it. He invites us to join Him in the journey. The task of hermeneutics is to listen carefully and humbly for His voice, so we might walk with Him.