

Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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Hermeneutics

Principles of Biblical Interpretation

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Hermeneutics 1

What is Hermeneutics? Hermeneutics is the study of the laws and principles of interpretation, specifically as it applies to ancient text (H = hermeneutics).

We all engage in hermeneutics, consciously or unconsciously, e.g. 1 Cor. 11.2-16, in our interpretation and application or rejection of head coverings for women in church. Hermeneutics are crucially important for our reading of Scripture. We need to be conscious of our presuppositions when we come to a text, and the principles we use for interpretation, e.g. consider a roadside STOP sign – what are our presuppositions that influence our decision to press the pedal and come to a halt?

- There is an author.
- The author had intent.
- Authority of author over reader.
- Commonly understood interpretation of the sign.
- A reader to read and understand the sign.

These are modernist assumptions, not entirely valid in a post-modern mindset, which would state on seeing a roadside STOP sign:

- The author is unknown and possibly unknowable.
- It is impossible to know the intent of the author.
- The author certainly has no authority over anybody today.
- Interpretation is private, and there is no common interpretation possible.
- Therefore, why stop? If one stops to avoid a penalty, then the only interpretation for the post-modern mindset is that might is right and the exercise of power is intrinsically self-justifying. This is a terrifying conclusion when taken to societal levels, e.g. we do this to you simply because we can.

Hermeneuo = a verb, meaning to interpret, to explain, to expand, to make something clear. All interactions with a given text involve 3 elements:

Me ----- hermeneutical assumptions / principles ----- the given text.

All reflections on a text are hermeneutical in nature, so it is crucial to understand one's own hermeneutical assumptions / principles. There is no communication without hermeneutics. Modernist faiths assume hermeneutical agreement, and therefore doctrine (commonly understood understanding of a text) is possible. Our SDA movement and faith are rooted in modernist understandings of Scripture, and thus we find it hard to communicate meaningfully with a new post-modern generation, even within the SDA church – in the post-modern mindset, the concept of doctrine is a non-starter. Charismatic faiths are based on personal experience, and there is no common way of sharing / understanding ideas, and so faith becomes personal and un-communicable. The study of H is crucial for Protestants particularly, as we believe in *Sola Scriptura*.

There is an hermeneutical triangle:

Text

Author

Reader.

As the reader interacts with the text and the author, the reader enters a private experience which can result in physiological changes, e.g. hair standing on end during a concert, or in moral changes, e.g. character transformation.

In the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) started the formal process of studying H. Until this time, Biblical interpretation had to do with method, without a clear understanding of the assumptions behind one's method, but from Schleiermacher onwards, scholars first developed their assumptions, and then their subsequent

methodology. Allegedly, we do not choose primarily between doctrines to believe, but between H approaches, and then doctrines we uphold flow from these underlying H approaches.

Our study will take us through the following areas:

1. NT hermeneutics, including the H principles of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.
2. H approaches used in the patristic era, the Middle Ages, and then to the early reformation with Erasmus / Luther.
3. Enlightenment approaches to H, including higher critical methodologies and assumptions.
4. Narrative Criticism, fundamentalism and post-modernism.
5. The H of William Miller, development of SDA H / theological history, and methods of Bible study.

Diachronically, we can view the study thus:

OT	NT	Church Fathers	Middle Ages	Renaissance / Reformation	18 th / 19 th Centuries	Adventism
Inner Biblical	Allegorical		Quadrigena / Authoritative Interpretation	Focus on text	Higher Criticism	Millerism EGW 'Methods of Bible Study'

Inner Biblical Interpretation

Before the time of the New Testament (NT), there was a rich and developed approach to H within Judaism:

- Midrash – interpretation of OT texts. From the verb *darash*, to seek, ask, e.g. appears in Ezra 7.10, 2 Chron. 13.22, 24.27. Whilst it uses exegetical methods, it is not strict exegesis, but arises from the symbiotic relationship between the people of Israel and the Old Testament (OT).
- Halakic midrash – interpretation of legal OT texts, specifically Leviticus – Deuteronomy. The Sermon on the Mount may be considered a form of halakic midrash.
- Haggadic midrash – interpretation of OT non-legal texts, including the Oral Torah.
- Homiletic midrashim – interpretation of the annual liturgical calendar of OT readings.
- Midrash had certain assumptions: 1) Scripture is divine speech, it originated in the mind of God, the prophets were merely channels through whom the message was passed. Scripture is therefore polyvalent, has inexhaustible meanings and applications. If there are apparent contradictions, this is because we are looking from a human, finite perspective at a divine entity – the words of God Himself; 2) Scripture is totally coherent and a self-consistent body of material; 3) there is oral Torah as well as written Torah. Oral Torah is not closed, but is open-ended, ever developing. Whilst the oral Torah traditions are open-ended, they do not allow for entirely open-ended interpretation, for the interpreter must stand within the confines of existing oral tradition.
- Peshar – a subset of midrash, normally associated with Qumran Essenes in their eschatological writings.
- OT scholars, called *soferim* (*sefer* = book) developed rules of interpretation, e.g. Hillel had 7, Ishmael had 13, and R. Eliezer had 32, e.g. one argues from the lesser to the greater, analogy and principles of logical deduction.
- A foundational principle of Judaic interpretation was that the Torah was to be interpreted from the Torah – written or oral.
- Oral Torah – the oral explanation of the written Torah, both given at Mt. Sinai to Moses, transmitted in pairs of rabbis through time to give conservative / liberal interpretations, 'oral traditions' of Gal. 1.14.
- Targumim - aramaic paraphrases at the time of Jesus to translate from Hebrew into Aramaic because the common people could no longer understand Hebrew in the synagogue services.

Old Testament

In the OT, we find certain interpretive helps:

- Glosses, giving an interpretive angle / explanation, e.g. Gen. 23.2 (Hebron). Judges 19.1, 21.25, 1 Sam. 9.9. (seers / prophets). Glosses assume a distance between hearer / original story, e.g. cultural, time, linguistic, geographical etc. Glosses are verses which appear, or are alleged, to have been added secondarily to the text, and lend themselves to a subjective process of interpretation. Often 19th century higher critical scholars discarded the 'glosses' to get to the 'authentic sayings', particularly in the Gospels.
- Amos 2.4ff. An example of a gloss. Amos begins with a series of oracles against foreign nations whom God will hold to account. The charges lead up to a very detailed series of charges against Israel, which is portrayed as being no better than the surrounding pagan nations, but when we get to Judah, we have a very bland description using conventional language. How is this? Possibly because Amos may have been edited during the final days of Judah as a nation before the Babylonian conquest, and the editors wished to speak to their contemporaries directly but inoffensively.
- Rewriting, e.g. Joshua 1.13 and Numbers 32.20.
- Arrangement of materials. 1 Sam. 8-10 describes the origin of the monarchy. 1 Sam. 8.10-18 is critical, and 1 Sam. 9.15-21 is very favourable. By placing these two accounts side by side, the author is making the theological point that monarchy, like all human institutions, is ambivalent. It can be used for God's glory, and it can be used as a source of tyranny and corruption.
- Narrative allusions / echoes, e.g. 3 wife / sister stories in Genesis (chs. 12, 20 and 26), Genesis 19 / Judges 19 form a narrative echo (the parallel stories of the men of Sodom and the men of Gibeah demanding to 'know' a male visitor to their town), woman at the well narratives, e.g. Jesus / woman, Eliezer / Rebekkah, Jacob / Rachel, and the narratives of the golden calves in Ex. 32 and 1 Kings 12.28.
- The purpose of these narrative echoes was to transfer authority from the old story to the newer story, to bring in the spiritual lessons from the older story, and to transfer meaning from the past to the present.
- 1 & 2 Chronicles is a form of spiritual midrash on the history of Israel / Judah in 1 & 2 Kings.

Jesus' use of OT.

- Kingdom of God principle. The KoG has drawn near, has now come upon the people of Israel. Christ is the fulfilment of the messianic hopes of the Israelites, and of all the prophets of the OT. Jesus shows how the messianic hopes are being fulfilled, e.g. Matt. 13.52. This is unique in Judaism. He is the suffering servant of Jehovah from Isaiah 53 (Matt. 11.5, Luke 7.22). He is the Son of Man from Daniel 7.13 (Mark 14.64).
- Messianic expectations were high from about 100BC, as the Jewish leaders studied the prophecies of Daniel. Expectations of a world ruler to arise in Judea were also extant amongst the Roman / Greek elites, and also in the Mesopotamian world. Many false christs arose before and after the time of Jesus, culminating in the Bar Kochba revolts of 132AD across the Roman empire, after which time Jerusalem was totally destroyed and Jews were banned from Jerusalem by the Emperor Hadrian.
- Jesus assumes the divine authorship of the OT (Mark 7.9, Luke 4.4, Matt.4.4, Mark 11.17). He stresses the human and divine origin of Scripture – Mark 12.36. Jesus also regards the OT as being historical, e.g. Abel was murdered (Matt. 23.35), God made male and female (Mark 10.6).
- Jesus sweeps away the accumulated dust of human history and asserts that religion is for man and is not to be a burden for man, e.g. Mark 2.25.
- Jesus radicalizes the Torah – it is not merely something to do, but calls for an inner transformation, e.g. Sermon on the Mount. Christ calls for internal change, not external change, and this is radical as it can only be judged by God, whereas external change can be evaluated by men. This is Halakik interpretation.
- Haggadic interpretations, e.g. Mk 12.26ff.

New Testament H

In the NT, outside of the teachings of Jesus, we find certain interpretative approaches:

- Christianity arose from within Judaism. It was from the Jewish Scriptures therefore that concepts of God, sin, redemption, salvation and forgiveness were taken.

- The concept of the OT didn't start to arise until the early Christians were putting together their own Scriptures. 2 Cor. 3 refers to the new / old covenants (KJV = 'testament'). The old covenant referred to the Sinai covenant in common understanding, to which all the legislation of the Pentateuch was attached. By extension, this came to embrace all of the Hebrew canon (John 10.34). Christians claimed that God, in Jesus, was bringing in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31.31-34. Thus prophecies of the future in the OT were now taking place in the apostolic era.
- Within contemporary Judaism, there were 2 streams of thought: eschatological interpretation from the Qumran Essenes, who regarded themselves as the nucleus of the people of the new covenant; and secondly there were various schools of OT interpretation amongst the rabbis. Within this dialogue there was space for the teachings of Jesus. His emphasis on the Kingdom of God with a Biblical (OT) basis is therefore possible.
- The Wisdom teachings of the OT provided the early church with the scriptural basis for the development of Christology. Startling is Paul's observation that the 'Wisdom of God' is expressed in the 'Christ event' (1 Cor. 1-3), thus opening up a cosmic interpretation of Jesus as the one in whom divine Wisdom resides (Col. 1.15-20, Hebrews 1.1-3).
- The sacrificial death of Jesus was viewed as the fulfilment of the OT sacrificial system, particularly in Hebrews. The OT shows the standard of what an atoning sacrifice is, and in the NT Jesus is shown as providing the eschatological fulfilment.
- Testimonia, i.e. texts from the OT that are attributed directly to Jesus and His messianic claims, e.g. the OT allusions of Matthew 1-4, Ps. 2 – Acts 13.33, Ps. 110.1 – Mk. 12.36, Ps. 118.22 – Mk. 12.16. Testimonia often seem to be out of context to the modern western reader, or represent a misuse of the original intent of the passage, and were taken either from the Hebrew or LXX (Septuagint), often freely quoted, yet all was done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, e.g. in Galatians 3.15-18, Paul's use of 'offspring' clearly reduces it from a broad understanding to the person of Jesus alone.
- Testimonia often drew on the 'suffering servant of YHWH' from Isa. 53. Testimonia were taken from both the Masoretic Text (MT) and the LXX, although most often from the MT.
- Testimonia were essential to prove that a crucified Galilean could in fact be the Messiah of God.
- For Paul, the cross is central, the prism through which all Scripture is to be understood and interpreted. As a result of the cross, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit has the absolute right to guide into greater understanding and truth.
- Midrash, e.g. Hebrews 1, a string of pearls, *haraz*, leading from a proposition (the exalted Christology of Hebrews 1.1-5) via the 'string' of seemingly unrelated and misquoted texts of Hebrews 1 to the conclusion (Hebrews 2.1-4). The texts of the *haraz* of Hebrews 1 are, to the western mind, used irresponsibly, for Paul seems to be quoting out of context and even misquoting – yet it is accepted as valid midrash under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- Allegories, e.g. Galatians 4.22-26. This was not a major H principle, but was used extensively by Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish scholar in the 1st century BC and by Origen, an early church father in the 3rd century AD. In this approach, a deeper spiritual meaning is sought in the text over and above the purely historical / theological meaning. The deeper meaning may be spiritual, eschatological, moral etc.
- Types / typology. A major Christian understanding of the OT. OT types point forward to the NT antitypes, e.g. Romans 5.14, Adam was a type of the One to come.
- Proof-texting. Often used in 21st century, but Paul used it under inspiration. He took OT texts and gave them a radical new interpretation, e.g. 1 Cor. 9.9, he takes provisions for oxen to apply to the rights of apostles for sustenance as they labor for the Gospel. It is better today to find principles and then discover applications for them than to engage in mere proof-texting, as we do not act under inspiration in the same way that Paul did.
- Christological basis. Luke 24, road to Emmaus.
- Re-writing of history, e.g. Acts 7 – Hebrews 11, for a Christological conclusion.

Formation of NT

The formation of the NT is a very difficult topic. As we read in Irenaeus, we see a couple of principles used by the early church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the closing of the NT canon:

- A text had to have apostolic authority.
- A text was according to the rule of faith, as preached by the apostles.
- The early church rejected anything outside the 'rule of faith', including the pseudo and Gnostic gospels, e.g. Barnabas, St. Peter, Judas.
- The early church recognized that certain writings of the apostles were difficult to understand, e.g. in 2 Peter 3.14-17, Peter comments on Paul's difficult writings.
- Gospels arose out of oral traditions of the life and teachings of Jesus, with apostolic eye-witness authority, e.g. John, Matthew, Mark (Peter), Luke (Peter & Paul). We detect common underlying oral traditions in the (unproven) Q / Marcan priority theses, with subsequent Matthean and Lucan accretions under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. More on the issue of priority amongst the Gospels and the synoptic problem in a later week. At its most basic level, the issue of priority and redaction of the Gospels (the editorial amendments made by later Gospel writers to the earlier Gospel writers around the same basic text) is a problem for those with the H presuppositions of higher critical methods, but those who accept the inspiration of the Scriptures do not run into the same academic dilemmas.
- The writings of Paul were amongst the first, and John / Revelation / 2 Peter were amongst the last to be written within the NT canon.

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Patristic Era

- A period from the 2nd – 5th centuries AD. The church was growing rapidly in the Roman empire. Many new translations were undertaken, e.g. Syriac and Coptic. The church was beset externally by persecution and then by worldly wealth and prestige, and internally by divisions over various heresies.
- There was debate about the person of Christ, and in this era there were attempts to construct a common, unified understanding of the person of Christ. This involved references both to OT and NT texts.
- Two early misconceptions seem to be resisted within the NT itself, but remain influential in the patristic writings.
- Firstly, that Christ was a heavenly being but only seemed to be human – docetism. Sometimes this was coupled with the suggestion that the Christ or the Spirit left Jesus before the passion week, and in that the sense the suffering of Christ was not 'real'. Ignatius of Antioch led in the defence of the portrayal of Jesus Christ from the 4 canonical Gospels, and the 4 Gospels were central to the defence against docetism.
- Secondly, implied by the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the first chapter labours to differentiate Jesus from the angels – they are merely God's ministers whereas Jesus is Lord and Son. In *The Shepherd of Hermes*, Jesus appears as the greatest of the archangels. Jesus was really a supernatural visitant, an archangel, rather than the Son of God, verily God in and of Himself.

- In the early patristic era, in the defence against docetism the goodness of the material creation and the reality of the flesh of Jesus Christ were affirmed. But in the earliest centuries, it was the divinity of Jesus that was most explored, not His humanity.
- Prov. 8.22ff was taken to be the words of the pre-existent Christ: He was the Wisdom of God, the one through whom God had created. So the Word who is God's Son was understood to be the Logos 'spoken forth', God's reason projected forth into speech, including through the prophets and the life of Jesus Himself.
- As a result, Christ had cosmic and universal significance. Christ was the universal reason from whom proceeded forth all reason and creation.
- This kind of thinking shaped the pre-Nicene theology of the patristic era. Various other forms arose – adoptionism, i.e. that God adopted Jesus as His Son at His baptism, and modalism, i.e. that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were different 'modes' of the One God, thereby cutting out the Logos. Arianism developed, insisting that Jesus was created, not self-existent. Arianism developed in part because the eastern bishops had developed a hierarchy, God at the top, the Logos in between, and mankind below.
- There was therefore a strong and fierce debate between Alexandrian / Antiochan viewpoints on the nature of Christ, between Logos-theology, arianism, modalism, adoptionism, appollinarianism (a body-soul view of human nature, or body-soul-spirit-mind view of human nature).
- As a result of the fierce debates and theological confusion, the nascent Roman Catholic church developed the notion of 'authoritative interpretation'. Vincent, a 5th century monk, wrote that 'the line of interpretation of the prophets and apostles must be directed according to the norm of the ecclesiastical and catholic sense', i.e. all Biblical interpretation must be according to the rules / interpretation of the Roman Catholic church. All exegesis is to support the teachings of the Church. The Church has the exclusive right to interpret Scripture, so the Church is above Scripture, not subject to Scripture.
- Due to the concept of authoritative interpretation, the promptings of the Holy Spirit on the individual were no longer considered supreme in guiding to all truth – now the most important locus for determining truth is the ecclesiastical council.
- It is important to note what happened in the writings of Vincent. Historically, we may understand that new theological movements / concepts often arise in reaction to what went before, e.g. the Reformation arose in response to the theological confusion of the Roman Catholic theology and practices of the late middle-ages; Methodism arose as a personal response to the impersonal theology and spiritual life of the Anglican communion; and the desire for theological order, as represented by the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church, also arose as a natural response to centuries of bitter theological dispute, division and dissension.

Authoritative interpretation

- The Roman Catholic church claimed supreme authority in Biblical interpretation, as seen in the various councils of the Middle Ages. All interpretation was within the confines of the Church's supreme authority to interpret. Today, this is witnessed in the stamp '*nihil obstat*' in RC writings. When a book is published by a Roman Catholic author, the phrase '*nihil obstat*' means that there is nothing in the book that is contrary to Roman Catholic dogma.
- Augustine, from north Africa, 354-430AD, was a key figure for RC theology. He developed the concept of looking for multiple senses within Scripture. All meanings that can be found in Scripture, if consistent with dogma, are valid, and the text must make sense as it is stated, with a few exceptions. This led to the development of the Quadriga, or the four-fold interpretation of Scripture.
- Under Augustine's interpretation, Scripture was viewed as being inerrant, but there are also some things we can never understand unless we believe first, and vice versa, i.e. some things we can never believe unless we first understand. Therefore, the revelation of Scripture only makes sense to believers, as the outsider is not open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. For Augustine, the unworthiness of ministers / priests doesn't invalidate the efficacy of the sacrament, making it possible (in more recent times) for paedophile priests to officiate at the mass without any spiritual significance for the worshipper.
- With the Vulgate (405AD) comes the first Latin translation of the Scriptures. This was a common text, not in the original languages, and incomprehensible to the laity. This text became the key text for all RC

debate and scholarship. Moving on in time, we come to the Renaissance, and the next major developments in H.

Renaissance

- This was a movement in art, social affairs, politics and literature to return to classical roots, i.e. Greek literature, language and philosophical approaches.
- The revival of arts and letters was under the influence of classical models, and began in Italy in the 14th century. In southern Europe, it focussed on the arts, and in northern Europe it focussed on religion.
- 1453AD – the fall of Constantinople (Orthodox) to the Ottomans (Muslims). This caused a flood of refugees to western Europe, including Greeks who brought a cargo of art works, manuscripts, learning and philosophy. The fall of Constantinople and subsequent arrival of Greek learning / manuscripts in western, Latin Europe had a huge impact, bringing changes in attitude to the sciences, religion and sociology.
- An era of rapid change then came about. Printing was developed, the so-called 'Black Death' / bubonic plague brought an end to feudalism and transferred economic power to the merchant classes, merchant wealth increased enormously and Columbus arrived in the Americas. There were rapid changes in politics and economics, with the development of modern nation states with centralized bureaucracies. Businessmen became the benefactors of learning and colleges and of scientists.
- A new kind of humanism arose. It was not anti-religious, but it was an attitude of scepticism / intellectual individualism that brought out new attitudes to authority. Luther was humanist in this sense as he was not afraid to challenge established institutional authority. Secularism didn't exist as a force at this time.
- Interest in the classical languages arose. The Vulgate was challenged, and people focussed on Greek / Hebrew / Aramaic.
- Printing made it possible to disseminate ideas widely, across an entire continent, almost independently of government control. Previously, people had to travel to learn, but with books the learning could be done at home.

Erasmus

- Erasmus was a key figure, in Rotterdam, 1469-1536AD. Holland was a tolerant place, good for pseudo- and proto-protestants, and people fled there from persecution. Erasmus opened the way for Luther, as Erasmus brought new objectives to Bible study.
- Erasmus advocated the restoration of Scripture, i.e. an effort to restore the Bible, particularly the Greek of the New Testament. Erasmus produced his first Greek NT in 1516.
- Erasmus advocated the restoration of theology, which would bring down mediaeval scholasticism. This promoted a 'pure theology of Christ', which Erasmus promoted for teaching and learning. The 'pure philosophy of Christ' could be found in the Gospels and Pauline writings. The NT became the centre for theological research, no longer the writings of the RC mediaeval scholastics.
- Erasmus also advocated the renewal of true piety in Scripture through a personal study of Scripture. He promoted a personal, vivid religion rather than a corporate, liturgically dominated religion.
- Erasmus wrote extensively on salvation. Rejected the Quadriga for the 2-fold interpretation of Scripture: literal and spiritual.
- Erasmus' H was grammatical and historical analysis. His spiritual interpretation focussed on morality, but this wouldn't affect dogma. Erasmus believed many parts of Scripture were unclear, and what was most important was moral transformation rather than perfect understanding.

Luther

- Luther began to separate theologically during his lectures in 1515-18, as he used the Hebrew and Greek texts, and a range of H approaches not previously used by the Augustinians. He lectured on Romans, the Psalter, and Genesis, coming to a basic understanding of Righteousness by Faith from his study of the Psalter.

- Technically, he believed in the 'life-giving spirit' of 2 Cor. 3, and the 'flesh that kills'. This was the law / gospel dichotomy he found in the Pauline corpus. It results in the centrality of Christ for all Biblical interpretation. Therefore, for Luther, Scripture is only canonical if it points directly towards Christ. He therefore dismissed much of the OT, Revelation and James. The 'centrality of Christ' was essential for Luther.
- The Protestant principle of Sola Scriptura clearly stated. However, the question is which physical book do we consider to be Scriptura?

Q. Which Bible – Vulgate + Apocrypha, or MT / Greek NT?

Q. Which books – Apocrypha or no Apocrypha?

Q. Translations, e.g. Matt. 4.17 – 'do penance' or 'be penitent'?

Q. Indulgences – yes or not?

Q. 2 Macc. 12.39-46 – prayers for dead or not?

Q. Which language – German, Greek, Hebrew or Latin?

Q. Who reads – clergy alone, laity also?

Q. Limits of doctrine – tradition and councils, or Scripture only?

- Luther also used the Quadriga, which he viewed as literal / prophetic, each with 4 dimensions, 8 in total.
- Historical / literal for Luther – possible to read the Bible purely as history, but this misses the point of Scripture.
- Prophetic / spiritual for Luther – Bible can be read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as pointing all to Christ. This is the key for Bible study, and for finding deeper meanings in Scripture.
- Literal prophetic = this sense of Scripture refers to the person of Jesus Christ in history.
- Allegorical = the sense of Scripture in which Jesus Christ brings aid to His church.
- Tropological = the sense of Scripture referring to the work which Jesus Christ performs in the individual believer.
- Anagogical = the sense of Scripture referring to the eschatological completion of this work.
- Luther explained this in reference to Mt. Zion:

Historic

Literal

The land of Caanan.

Prophetic

The people of Zion.

Allegorical

The synagogue.

The church.

Tropological

The righteousness of the law.

The righteousness of faith.

Anagogical

Future earthly glory.

Future heavenly glory.

- From 1515, Luther was placing greater emphasis on the tropological sense of Scripture. Luther believed this referred to the work of God in the believer, an act of God in Christ in and for the believer, rather than the believer's individual response to God.
- This led to the breakthrough of 1515. Romans 1.16-17 had caused problems for Luther – 'righteousness of God' was the promise of eternal judgement for sinners, as it reveals us as sinners to be destroyed, but in a spiritual sense Luther realised that it applied to us by faith in Christ, i.e. that God's righteousness is imputed to us, and we become righteous rather than subject to God's judgement through our faith in Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.
- Righteousness by faith was the key Christian experience for Luther, and applies to all Christians.
- In 1520, in the 'Appeal to German Nobility', Luther insisted that all believers have the right to read and understand Scripture as every believer has to experience Righteousness by faith. This results in a reduction of the teaching role of the church, and of the pope's claim to be the final arbiter in matters of doctrinal truth. This gives rise to the idea of 'exegetical optimism'.

- Exegetical optimism. This is the principle, clearly enunciated by Luther that any person can read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and understand sufficient for salvation. Today this is accepted as commonplace – our entire SS system is based on this principle. However, in Luther's time, this was dangerously radical. This principle of course necessitated the Scriptures in the common vernacular – German, so Luther translated the entire Bible into German by 1534, revised in 1539, 1541 and 1545. This was one of the finest pieces of German literature ever produced, as seminal in the development of German culture and language as the King James Version is for the English language. The NT came out in 1522, and contained Lutheran emphasis, e.g. Romans 3.28 – by faith 'alone', when 'alone' isn't in the Greek!
- This principle however was later drawn back from by Luther subsequent to the chaos and predations of the Peasant Revolt in Germany, with Luther moving back towards the magisterium / teaching office of the church. Luther argued that for a true understanding one needs a good grounding in the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic of the Bible, thus putting the true understanding of Scripture beyond the reach of many laity.
- Exegetical optimism however was firmly rooted in the 'radical reformation', including the Anabaptists. SDAs are in this tradition. There needs to be a balance – structure for theological order, and yet space for the Holy Spirit to lead individuals into new truth and light.
- With the Reformation the road was paved for the tremendous changes in Biblical H wrought by the Enlightenment, which we will deal with next week.

Hermeneutics 3

Our study has taken us through the following areas:

1. NT hermeneutics, including the H principles of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.
2. H approaches used in the patristic era, the Middle Ages, and then to the early reformation with Erasmus / Luther.

Today, we focus on the Enlightenment approaches to H, including higher critical methodologies and assumptions.

We will then cover the following areas:

1. Fundamentalism, deconstructionism and post-modernism.
2. The H of William Miller, development of SDA H / theological history, and methods of Bible study.

Diachronically, we can view the study thus:

OT	NT	Church Fathers	Middle Ages	Renaissance / Reformation	18 th / 19 th Centuries	Adventism
Inner Biblical	Allegorical		Quadrigena / Authoritative Interpretation	Focus on text	Higher Criticism	Millerism EGW 'Methods of Bible Study'

Enlightenment

- The E was viewed by some as a German movement from the mid 18th century, the *Aufklärung*, and was associated with persons such as Herder, Lessing and Kant.
- The French term, *illumination*, was used in some English texts.
- More recently, we speak of the E as a European movement whose origins can be traced back to the mid-17th century, an era of political, social, economic and philosophical upheaval, e.g. the English civil war.
- The E is now synonymous with the 'Age of Reason'. Everything was now subject to reason, and superstition, dogma and faith were challenged per se as being the final arbiter of what was true and what could be accepted.
- In the Reformation, the question was, 'which of the Christian understandings of Scripture is true?' In the E, the question becomes, 'is Christianity per se true?'
- In the E, fundamental Christian beliefs have become problematic, and all our intellectual resources are required to investigate whether and in what sense these Christian beliefs are true.
- During this period, the foundations were developed for the historical-critical study of Scriptures that predominated in German universities during the late 18th century onwards.
- The E was not anti-religion per se, but involved people seeking truth relevant to their age. They wanted to find rational 'proofs' for religion, e.g. cosmological / ontological arguments for God's existence. In so doing, anything outside of common experience was to be rejected, e.g. miracles.

Enlightenment H

- The E involved five main aspects of Biblical interpretation that proved of lasting significance.
- Firstly, the reformation had drawn a sharp distinction between Scripture and tradition, between the original Biblical texts and the subsequent developments in the life of the Church. The E accentuated this distinction. Its stress on reason is often not directed against Scripture as such but against the way it has been used / misused by the Church. The metaphor of 'Enlightenment' presupposes that the past was an era of darkness, superstition, fanaticism and ignorance, from which mankind was now emerging to see things clearly.

- Reason was the primary guide to Scriptural interpretation. Whilst the reformation had rejected tradition, the E rejected scholarship that engendered superstition and irrational beliefs. The E writers assumed a need to distinguish between dogma and spirituality, and an attempt was made to return to apostolic Christianity, shorn of 1800 years of accumulated myth and tradition.
- A distinction was made between what the Church taught and the Bible taught. This was possible because since the reformation the political power of the Roman Catholic church was much diminished. There had been political fragmentation across Europe, the doctrine of 'divine right' for kings had been done away with, parliaments / national assemblies were flexing their political and economic muscle over the rights of previously absolute rulers, printing presses disseminated ideas rapidly across the continent outside of government control, Bibles were published in local languages, and there was a renewed interest in the study of science and human origins.
- Biblical scholarship was to be free from dogma, but was to be objective, free from the bondage of Church dogma, and utilising a strong historical awareness.
- Secondly, the traditional claims or theories of the divinity of Christ were ignored or denied outright. Within this tendency we find the origins of the 'search for the historical Jesus', shorn of Church dogma / doctrine, the Jesus of history rather than the Jesus of faith.
- Locke's 'The Reasonableness of Christianity' in 1695 was an important work in this regard. Locke started with the question, 'what is essential to believe in order to be a Christian?', and went back to the apostolic preaching that Jesus is the Messiah whose mission was authenticated by miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy.
- In this light, the NT became viewed as being problematic. It was not an historical accurate collection of writings, but was a document of faith, arising out of oral faith traditions from the Levant of followers of Jesus Christ who were intent on validating their nascent faith in the face of mockery and persecution.
- The 'pure' faith of Jesus was the preaching of a universal and pure religion of love, whereas the early church's focus on the resurrection was viewed as being problematic.
- Thirdly, the E looked at Bible 'evidences' for the truth of Christianity, and in this regard focussed on the question of miracles. Various apologists were arguing for the Biblical miracles, but the sceptics attacked the concept of miracles. Locke initially focussed on the historicity of the Biblical accounts, addressing issues such as the number of witnesses, their motives, the accuracy of the historical record, the intent of the author, the psychological condition of the witnesses. However, Hume went further in his 'Essay on Miracles' (1748) in which he argued that there is a fundamental problem in accepting anything that is outside of uniform experience, e.g. a physical resurrection. The existence of miracles in Scripture became a huge stumbling block for E scholars, and led many to reject the Biblical accounts as being faith-based rather than historically accurate accounts.
- Fourthly, the E exposed the Biblical accounts to intense derision and mockery. For instance, Woolston questioned whether the angels who troubled the waters of Bethesda (John 5) dived in head first, feet first, come up head first, feet first, or breast first like a goose. Why wasn't the mad rush to the waters better organized, with a lottery system or queue? The only conclusion was that the NT lies 'damnable'.
- Fifthly, the E required rational historical investigation of the Scriptures like any other document. This is a profound shift. The Bible is no longer the inspired Word of God, a living document, but it is an historical document that can be studied, critiqued, cut apart, hypothesized about as with any other document.
- The E approach to H came from a free position, without the need to defend a confessional position. There was no attempt to defend a dogma / creed, no interest in apologetics, but a focus on the Bible itself from the perspective of reason and reason alone. The result was that dogma / teachings came under attack. Assumptions, e.g. the virgin birth, came under attack. The principle of inspiration was rejected.

Historical Critical method

- The HC approach arose from the freedom to question of the reformation and E. It was based on exegetical optimism, and was viewed as a science. It continued in the historical review of ancient documents that had existed from the time of the Greek and Roman cultures.
- The HC approach also arose out of the understanding that meaning and substance are not necessarily the same. For instance, a painting = (paints and chemicals) + (meaning outside of the materials). So all artistic expressions, including literary works such as the Bible, had a distinction between meaning and substance.

- Sceptical scholars had difficulties in the following areas: no original texts of the Bible; unclear understanding of the authorship of the Biblical narratives; uncertainty over the understanding of inspiration; differing views of what were canonical writings or not.
- Modern MSS (manuscripts) of the OT were distant from the autographs, e.g. Moses wrote in the 15th century BC, but the earliest MSS of Genesis was from 925-1008AD (Aleppo MSS in Hebrew). A gap of 2,500 years – is the Aleppo MSS reliable?
- Other ‘problems’ included alleged inconsistencies with Moses writing his own obituary in Deuteronomy, Sarah’s age, intertwined narrative accounts, e.g. of creation or of the flood, historical accuracy of genealogical lists in the OT, ‘at that time’ glosses (Judges 21.25) imply time difference between events and writing, different names for God in the OT, e.g. YHWH, Elohim, Adonai etc., hinting at different writers, differences in writing style and grammatical constructions, *Sitz im leben*, i.e. the ‘setting in life’, or the concept that Scripture had to mean something to the original hearers.

Source Criticism

- This higher critical approach assumes different authors of a given document, and looks for the alleged individual sources behind the finished literary product. Evidence for different authors / sources is the inconsistencies / repetitions / differing grammatical and vocab styles throughout a given document, e.g. Wall Street Journal!
- SC started with the ‘problem’ of the Pentateuch, an OT discipline. Before the arrival of the Dead Sea Scrolls. From Spinoza onwards, questions were directed at the Pentateuch.
- 1753, Dr Astruc wrote a defence of Mosaic authorship for the Pentateuch, arguing that Moses used his own memoirs for the Pentateuch, and differences within the Pentateuch arise from the divergence between Moses’ written memoirs and physical memories at the time of writing the Pentateuch.
- Wellhausen published in Germany in 1883 the ‘*Pro Legomena* to the History of Israel’, an introduction to Israelite history. In this, he proposed a documentary hypothesis, i.e. many authors to the Pentateuch, not all written by Moses. Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis proposed 4 documents:

J = Jahwehist, 850BC.

E = Elohimist, 750BC.

D = Deuteronomist, 621BC, at time of Josiah’s reforms.

P = Priestly writer, 500-450BC.

- This is acceptable once you accept the original presuppositions, i.e. authors don’t make repetitions, are always internally consistent, don’t operate with parallel stories, present clear rather than blurred meta-narratives, and ignore the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. This H approach is incorrect if you don’t accept the presuppositions per se, and has been rightfully rejected by the SDA church.

Form Criticism

- Form critics criticised SC, arguing that SC was unnecessarily restrictive in focussing purely on the written documents, which were in doubt anyway. Rather, the true path to understanding Scripture was in recognizing that the Scriptures represent the literature of an entire given culture. Ancient Israel used genres and oral forms to pass on different traditions from tradent to tradent, not primarily using written forms, so there needed to be a shift in study focus away from the later written texts to the underlying and older oral forms.
- Started by Herman Gunkel in his ‘Genesis’ commentary of 1901. The main idea is that you go behind the written sources to the oral sources / tradition from which the written sources are drawn.
- The key issue becomes oral composition and transmission, looking at repetitions and inconsistencies. These happen due to the oral / non-written nature of the traditions being passed on, and by the differing needs of the tradents who use the oral traditions for given and locally-specific needs.
- Scholars looked at the OT patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and argued that they were 3 separate traditions merged into a single coherent narrative with a single deity.

- Scholars focussed on the *Sitz im Leben*, seeking for the original context, purpose, mode of transmission of the underlying oral tradition behind a given text. Study was done on genres, e.g. wisdom literature, poetry, song, worship material, historical narrative, cultural mythology, and various parts of the OT were identified as being from differing genres. Each type of genre was assumed to exist for a different purpose, and these purposes were taken from the texts, e.g. the Psalms were understood to be the worship song-book of the Israelites, spoken / sung responsively between congregants / celebrants.
- This gave rise to a circular problem. If one cannot understand a given book until we know which genre it is, and if there is no way of determining a genre conclusively, then one is left with an unreadable and unintelligible reading of Scripture.
- All decisions about genre rest on intuition rather than historical proof – ironic given E assumptions. The only way of determining a genre is by looking at comparative extant material, e.g. is Deuteronomy a law book comparable with Hammurabi's law code, or is it a vassal treaty, similar to Assyrian / Babylonian vassal treaties? If a book is unique, e.g. Exodus, how can one read it?
- Both SC and FC end up dissecting a given book into smaller and smaller parts. Both ask 'how could a single author have written this text?' SC answers by assuming one author didn't in fact write, but any given document in the OT is the final product of many different authors. FC answers by looking at the multiple oral sources and genres within a given document, and argues that there was no single author, rather the final document is the product of a long, unknowable and unexplainable community / cultural process involving faulty transmission of oral traditions.
- This results in the Scriptures being chopped into smaller and smaller parts. The question remains however, how did we get the final versions we have today? The focus of higher critical scholarship then switched to the larger picture, and here we have Redaction Criticism.

Redaction Criticism

- In 'discovering' various sources or oral traditions, scholars simultaneously 'discovered' editors, redactors, who put the sources / oral traditions together into the forms we now have.
- During the SC / FC periods, the redactors were shadowy assumptions, and it was assumed they can't have been much use as they put together documents that were so obviously full of inconsistencies, inaccuracies, myths, repetitions etc.
- The focus switched in NT scholarship to the discovery of redactors, particularly in the studies of the Gospels and the Synoptic problem. Theological emphasis and doctrinal development were both read from the development in redactional emphasis through the Gospels.
- Synoptic problem – which is primary in the Synoptics, Matt, Mark or Luke? Was Matt first, and if so, how did Mark use Matt's material? Was Mark first, together with 'Q', and if so, how and why did Matt & Luke put their Gospels together? What was the theological emphasis in the later Gospels from the original Gospel material?
- Parallel to the 'Synoptic Problem' was the search for the 'historical Jesus'. There have been 3 such searches, beginning with Reimarus (1767) publishing 'The Jesus of History and the Jesus of Faith'. Schweitzer wrote 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus', which summarized many earlier studies and critiqued them. Bultmann and Dibelius (20th century higher critics) were interested in 'demythologising' the Jesus of history from the Jesus of faith. Miracles were out, as were any sayings of Jesus that could be attributed to another person in the 1st century AD other than Jesus. On this basis, the number of 'authentic' sayings of Jesus was whittled down to almost nothing. The 'Jesus Seminar' used the same approach, and ended up with wildly different understandings of what were and were not authentic sayings of Jesus, and eventually lost all forward momentum as it was an exercise in futility.
- However, there is an underlying conceptual problem with RC. Assume there was a redactor for Genesis. He took various sources and moulded them together with great skill. He weaves the two accounts of creation together with great skill and artistry, until his 'hand' disappears and it appears as if the original account was in fact written by a single individual, rather than by 2 different writers whose sources have been combined by the final redactor. The more impressive the critic makes the redactor's work appear, the more he shows that the redactor has put together a single, coherent piece of literature, the more he reduces the evidence on the which the existence of these sources was established in the first place. The redaction critic makes the redactor simply disappear!

- For instance, consider Genesis 1 and 2. If Gen. 2 follows on naturally from Gen. 1, then this is evidence for the skill of the redactor, but only if we know that Gen. 1 and 2 were originally distinct documents. But the only ground we have for thinking that they were distinct documents is the observation that Gen. 2 doesn't seem to follow naturally on from Gen. 1. Thus, we end up with the redactor vanishing, and a single author stepping forward, e.g. Moses!
- Thus the RC approach can be self-defeating if played too confidently.

Hermeneutics 4

Our study has taken us through the following areas:

1. NT hermeneutics, including the H principles of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.
2. H approaches used in the patristic era, the Middle Ages, and then to the early reformation with Erasmus / Luther.
3. Enlightenment approaches to Scripture, including Higher Critical methods such as Source / Form / Redaction Criticism.

Today, we focus on postmodernism, deconstructionist and fundamentalist approaches to H.

We will then cover the following areas in the final part of this mini-series:

1. The H of William Miller and the Millerites.
2. The development of SDA H / theological history, and SDA methods of Bible study.

Diachronically, we can view the study thus:

OT	NT	Church Fathers	Middle Ages	Renaissance / Reformation	18 th / 19 th Centuries	Adventism
Inner Biblical	Allegorical		Quadrige / Authoritative Interpretation	Focus on text	Higher Criticism	Millerism EGW 'Methods of Bible Study'

Post-Modernism

- Postmodernism literally means 'after the modernist movement'. While 'modern' itself refers to something "related to the present", the movement of modernism and the following reaction of postmodernism are defined by a set of perspectives. It is used to refer to a point of departure for works of literature, drama, architecture and design, as well as in marketing and business and the re-interpretation of history, law and culture in the late 20th Century after the collapse of colonialism.
- Postmodernism was manifest in the 1920s in the arts, but post-modernity was expressed in social and political thought in the West particularly from the 1960s.
- Postmodernism was originally a reaction to modernism. Largely influenced by the Western European "disillusionment" induced by WWII, postmodernism tends to refer to a cultural, intellectual, or artistic state lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity or interconnectedness in a way that is often indistinguishable from a parody of itself. It has given rise to charges of being a fraudulent, empty philosophical approach to life.
- Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche and other late 19th and early 20th century authors laid the groundwork for the existential movement of the 20th century; they did so through arguments against objectivity and an emphasis on skepticism, especially concerning social morals and societal norms.
- Art and literature of the early part of the 20th century play a significant part in shaping the character of postmodern culture. Dadaism attacked notions of high art in an attempt to break down the distinctions between high and low culture; Surrealism further developed concepts of Dadaism to celebrate the flow of the subconscious with influential techniques such as automaism and nonsensical juxtapositions.

A practical example

- Imagine a 'STOP' sign by a road. It is written with modernist assumptions: there is an author; the author is knowable; the author intends to communicate to the reader; the author has a communicable message to communicate; the message is understandable in a predictable manner for the reader; the author has real authority in the matter of the message vis a vis the reader; the reader accepts the authority of the author in terms of the scope of the message.

- A postmodern reader denies these assumptions. Common understanding is impossible, as the focus is now on the experience of the reader with no allowances made for the role of the text or the author in the hermeneutical process.

Deconstructionism

- Within postmodernism, a major approach to texts is known as 'deconstructionism' (D).
- D is more an attitude than a particular methodology towards a text, and it prevents the reader from ever definitively stating the 'meaning' of a text.
- It is a way of reading a text that shows that the text actually defies what it ostensibly seems to affirm, i.e. no text has meaning or intention behind it, or if it does, this is ultimately unknowable.
- For instance, let us consider Ps. 23. In verses 1-3 – If the Lord is my Shepherd, what am I? I am a sheep. The Shepherd does for me what we expect a shepherd to do - care for me, look after my needs. This text **seems** to give comfort.
- However, V. 6 – 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord' – in the temple of Jerusalem, which is where I, as a sheep, can only expect to be slaughtered. Ps. 23 ends in my death as a sheep in a slaughterhouse. The text is not really providing comfort.
- Please understand – this is not my personal conviction re. this text, but a sample deconstructionist reading of Ps. 23.

A sample deconstructionist reading of Job

- Job is often viewed by conservative Christians as being a theodicy – an exploration and explanation of God in the midst of a world of suffering. With a D approach, this understanding unravels.
- Q 1 – what does the text reveal of the author and its socio-economic setting? All texts are products of their socio-economic environment, reflecting the political / economic forces at play in the original context.
- Any text presumes a given readership or audience, and Job presumes a Hebrew-speaking audience. The audience is male, as all the major characters are male.
- The role of women, and women's interests, are systematically marginalized throughout the book.
- A highly literate audience with a taste for nuance, rhetoric, philosophical arguments – an educated audience. Intellectuals used to dealing with abstract concepts.
- An audience with a non-literal mindset, appreciating hyperbole, irony and suggestion – intellectuals.
- Not a book for peasants or working people!
- An audience not seeking quick, simple answers – therefore an audience with time on its hands and that is happy with ambiguity. A leisured audience, having time to think and read and discuss.
- It is therefore a small audience, leisured, intellectual, literate and wealthy.
- The author is a rich man, not a woman. The author is a reflection of his audience.
- When we consider poverty, the poor generally experience the wealthy as being oppressors. Therefore, in Job, the concept of a rich and righteous man is obviously a rich man's perspective.
- Job is therefore essentially an apology for wealth – a total lack of realism about poverty.
- Job's massive riches are never questioned on ethical or other grounds – in ch.1. he is a 'great man'. A rich elite is assumed, not questioned nor challenged. Issues of social justice, wealth re-distribution do not arise.
- Patriarchalism is never questioned. A series of wise men engage in arguments – the only woman, Job's wife, is a 'foolish woman' (Job 2.10).
- The discussions focus on Job's loss – the losses his wife experiences are never recognized or discussed, either by the 'wise men' or by God Himself.
- In ch. 42, Job's wife bears 10 children, yet barely is recognized. Job's 3 daughters are recognized for their beauty, and so receive an inheritance. Misogyny!
- The book has a class agenda, trying to minimise the class conflict between rich and poor.
- The book portrays social mobility – Job is rich, becomes poor, and then gains wealth again. Wealth is therefore open to all, and those in poverty are not facing automatic social exclusion by the wealthy.

- Job therefore is a book by a wealthy man to justify a wealthy, patriarchal society, perpetuate the status quo (extremes of wealth and riches), and legitimize the existence of a socially dominant male elite.
- Job seduces the reader in chapters 1-2 by raising profound questions of wealth, the relationship between piety and wealth, and divine will. However, the book's key points are that a) patriarchalism is acceptable; b) the behaviour of the wealthy is acceptable; c) extremes of wealthy and poverty raise no ethical dilemmas; d) women are to be marginalized and muted; and e) there is a causal relationship between wealth and piety.
- Modern readers therefore, in the D mindset, know that these points are untrue, so the book is necessarily rejected as having any modern relevance.
- Deconstructionism therefore says that the text looks like it is about X, but in reality it is about Y. Truth and meaning reside with the reader alone. Without a reader, a text has no meaning. There is no room for common understandings, as meaning resides with the reader alone. The text has no authority over the reader, but the reader has full authority over the text. Authority is a passé concept. The Bible therefore is full of charm, but has no inherent authority. This can be 'liberating' as all can have their own interpretation. Once again, I am simply describing the D approach, not my convictions on the matter!

We now turn to another recent way of reading Scripture, fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism

- Technically speaking, fundamentalists emerged in the USA in the early 20th century, between 1909-1915.
- A set of pamphlets entitled 'The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth' was published by the 'World Christian Fundamentals Association' in 1909.
- In 1920, a Baptist editor referred to the anti-modernist groups within the Baptist communion as being 'fundamentalists'.
- In 1919 a cross-denominational (Protestant) convention in the USA agreed on 9 'Fundamental Beliefs'. These included: virgin birth; physical resurrection of Jesus; substitutionary atonement; Christ's full inherent and not adoptive divinity; 2nd Coming – either post or pre-millennial; a rejection of higher critical methods of Bible study; and a rejection of the theory of evolution. The original fundamentalists were partly a reaction to the advances of the theories of Darwin and Marx in the bio-theological and socio-political spheres.
- Originally, fundamentalists were those who adhered to these core 9 beliefs, but now the term is broader and for many people refers conservative evangelicals.
- Evangelicalism began in the UK in the 1730s, and includes 4 central beliefs: the need to be born again; the need to 'live' the Gospel personally; a high regard for the authority of Scripture; and a theological emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Today, all fundamentalists are conservative evangelicals, but not all conservative evangelicals are fundamentalists.
- Fundamentalists view themselves as being 'true Christians', have strong self-designations, and view themselves as being 'conservative' in terms of being opposed to higher critical methods of Bible study, evolution and Marxism.
- George Marsden in 'Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicals' states that a 'fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something'. Alternatively, Bruinsma views the purpose of fundamentalism as being 'to defend orthodox, Protestant Christianity against evolution, higher criticism and other modernisms'.
- Fundamentalists were therefore a reaction to the broader developments in the later Enlightenment – evolution and Marxism, and narrower theological developments of higher criticism.
- Fundamentalism focussed as a core belief on the inerrancy of Scripture.

Verbal inspiration Words inspired Fundamentalists	Thought inspiration The writers were inspired. Bible is the 'Word of God'. Seventh-day Adventist Church	Contains the 'Word of God'. Liberal denominations	Bible is just like any other book. Secular / humanist
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- SDAs – a different understanding of inspiration from the fundamentalists.
- Inerrancy is crucial for fundamentalists. Believing that higher criticism / evolution / Marxism have undermined the authority of Scripture, the fundamentalists revert to verbal inspiration and inerrancy.
- Fundamentalists try to 'prove' the inerrancy of Scripture through scientific method, e.g. archaeology. They support the supernatural element of Scripture, reject 'demythologisation', and seek to support the Biblical accounts with scientific reasons.
- In this, fundamentalists are modernists, using quantifiable science to believe in the accuracy of the Bible instead of mere faith. Scripture is believable because we can prove it is true.
- For SDAs, we have elements of this approach with our history of archaeological digs, geo-science institute, BRI etc. We seek to 'prove' Scripture, e.g. believing that the spade will validate the text, and going on archaeological digs to validate the text from the attacks of sceptics.
- Inerrancy of Scripture means Scripture is inspired by God, word for word, and as in God there is no hint of darkness, therefore every word of God is true and without error.

Critique of Fundamentalism

- Fundamentalism arose as it offered simple, black / white solutions to a world increasingly disillusioned by modernity as expressed in the slaughter of World War I.
- It offered a simple response to new issues such as mass immigration, industrialisation, poverty, wealth inequality, slavery etc.
- As a result, many universities became the domain of higher critics, whereas seminaries remained the domain of the confessional church.
- Many mainline churches have accepted evolution and higher criticism, together with a move towards a social gospel (creating the Kingdom of God here on earth) rather than a personal, eschatological Christianity with millennial hopes.
- In the USA, fundamentalism became powerful by the 1970s, and 2 denominations became officially fundamentalist (Missouri Synod of Lutherans and Southern Baptists).
- Today, fundamentalists are active politically, and engage with issues such as abortion, gay marriage, support for Israel, the creation / intelligent design debate, the New Age movement and socialism / communism / Marxism.
- A fundamental problem with verbal inerrancy is the question of which text are we to use? There are thousands of NT sources – uncials, miniscules, Fathers, translations and papyri – which version is the 'inerrant version'?
- Hermeneutically, fundamentalism is a vacuum. The idea that there is anything other than the text is anathema.
- The 'hermeneutical triangle moves from including the text, author and reader to as follows:

Text

Text

Text

- All fundamentalists don't believe in the same thing....and if you don't agree with me, then you are less spiritual than me! There is no room for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in personal understanding.
- The need for 'scientific proof' of Scripture removes the basis of faith in Scripture, and forces fundamentalists into lifelong searches for key objects, e.g. Noah's ark, Ark of the Covenant, Mt. Sinai etc. This search will probably never be completed.

Having covered postmodernism and fundamentalism, we move in our final seminar to Millerite hermeneutics, SDA hermeneutics, and the broad development in SDA theology from the time of the early pioneers.

Hermeneutics 5

Our study has taken us through the following areas:

1. NT hermeneutics, including the H principles of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.
2. H approaches used in the patristic era, the Middle Ages, and then to the early reformation with Erasmus / Luther.
3. Enlightenment approaches to Scripture, including Higher Critical methods such as Source / Form / Redaction Criticism.
4. Postmodernism, deconstructionism and fundamentalism.

Today, we focus on The H of William Miller and the Millerites, the development of SDA H / theological history, and SDA methods of Bible study.

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Millerite Hermeneutics

- William Miller became the leader of a revivalist group during the religious revival that occurred in the USA in the 1830-1840s. This group anticipated the 2nd Coming of Jesus in 1844. The Millerites began as an interdenominational group of Bible students who focussed on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.
- However, as the anticipated time of Christ's 2nd advent grew closer, differences with established denominations became greater, and by 1844 the Millerites were a distinct group within the North American religious milieu.
- Miller was not a trained theologian, but was a farmer whose understanding of Scripture grew as he systematically read Scripture through from Genesis – Revelation. As he read, he developed and then outlined systematically his hermeneutical principles.
- Key H principles for Miller included:
 - All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by application and study.
 - Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible.
 - *Sola scriptura*.
 - Scripture must be its own expositor. Human opinions are merely guesses, desires, human wisdom or creedal statements, but are not the Scriptures themselves.
 - To understand doctrine, bring all the Scriptures together on the subject, then let every word have its proper influence.
 - God has revealed things to come by visions, in figures and in parables. Some things are revealed in visions and in parables, and if you wish to understand, you must combine all revelations on a given subject.
 - Visions are always mentioned as such (e.g. 2. Cor. 12.1).
 - If a word makes sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, let it stand. If it does not make sense as it stands, interpret figuratively rather than literally.
 - Figures always have a figurative meaning, and are used in prophecy to represent certain things, e.g. waters = people, lamp = Word of God, day = year.
 - To learn the true meaning of figures, trace your figurative word through the Scriptures, and where you find it explained, put that meaning onto the figure.
 - Figures sometimes have different significations, e.g. a day is used in a figurative sense to represent 3 different periods of time: indefinite – Eccles. 7.14; a day for a year – Ezek. 4.6; and a day for 1,000 years – 2 Peter 3.8.

- Parables are used as comparisons to illustrate subjects and must be explained in the same way as figures.
 - To know whether we have the true historical event for the fulfilment of a prophecy. If you find every word of the prophecy (after the figures are understood) is literally fulfilled, then you know that your history is the true event. If one word lacks fulfilment, then look elsewhere for the fulfilment of the prophecy.
 - The most important rule is that in reading the Scriptures, we are to have faith – a faith that involves sacrifice, and if tried, would give everything up for our belief in God's living word.
- Millerite H involved typology and an historicist approach to prophetic interpretation. Other denominations of his time preferred futurism or preterism for prophetic interpretation.
 - For Miller, every verse must be interpreted according to the plain, obvious and literal understanding unless a figure is employed. The Bible is universally applicable, and you don't need to read it in the original languages to understand it.
 - Millerism was a product of a modernist culture, with a very rational, historical and intellectual approach to the understanding of prophecy. Millerism was not a mystical or spiritual religion – it was the product of calm and systematic Bible study leading to certain conclusions. Miller was also against developing a formal creed for the Millerite movement – the Bible was to be their creed and not any human formulation.
 - For early Adventists, the historicist understanding of prophecy was absolutely central, and remains central today. Without the historicist understanding of prophecy, Adventism's prophetic self-understanding as being the 3 Angels of Revelation 14.6-12 is untenable. Possibly on the Sabbath doctrine is not based entirely or partially on an historicist interpretation of Scripture.

1888-1920

- In this era, within the SDA movement there was a focus on soteriology and Christian doctrine within Adventism rather than the focus on Adventism within Christianity that had characterized the period from 1850-1888 when the early movement struggled to differentiate itself within Christendom.
- Butler had the idea of degrees of inspiration, that bits of the Bible are more inspired than others, and Uriah Smith has the idea of progressive revelation. EGW corrected Butler. SDAs today do not accept either position *in extremis*, but do accept the idea of progressive revelation in terms of 'present truth', i.e. more knowledge of God results in increased responsibility.
- For SDAs, the Scriptures are the creed, and there was no need of a creedal statement. Thus the concept of 'present truth' could be validly maintained and theological exploration could occur without the need to defend a denominational creedal statement.
- Adventists had a high view of Scripture as the Word of God, and there were some debates on the nature of the relationship between EGW and the Scriptures. EGW had supported Miller's H principles, and urged confidence in the inspiration of Scripture.
- The Bible has one source – God, so is the ultimate and normative authority for life today. EGW also supported the concept of 'present truth', and the concept of the Spirit of Prophecy being God's prophetic voice to the present generation. The Bible wasn't for knowledge alone, but for personal transformation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

1920-1957

- EGW died. The church had a crisis of confidence after her death, as many had looked to her for guidance in many matters, spiritual and administrative.
- At the same time, there was the rise of fundamentalism within the USA in response to the triple challenges of evolutionary biology, higher criticism, and Marxism. Caught between the lack of the prophetic voice with the death of EGW and the pressures of fundamentalism, the SDA movement 'brought down the shutters' theologically and sought to preserve what they had understood. There was no

longer a focus on moving forward in heterodox understandings of Scripture, as there wasn't the prophetic presence to guide into new 'present truth'.

- There was a reaction against higher education, the bastion of higher criticism, and there was a focus in the SDA educational system on 'Bible colleges' that had a confessional approach rather than on university degrees.
- 2 groups developed: EGW types, who sought to identify Biblical principles and apply them in the modern context; and fundamentalist types, who sought to maintain the 'old landmarks'.
- Many in the SDA church adopted a view of the inerrancy of Scripture and verbal inspiration rather than thought inspiration. Verbal inerrancy / verbal inspiration were never the formal position of the SDA church, but many held to this understanding in local churches.

1957-onwards

- With the publication of the SDA Bible Commentary and 'Questions on Doctrine', the SDA church has faced increasing theological fragmentation.
- The publication of the SDA Bible Commentary forced the church to formulate our Biblical hermeneutics in a public and articulate manner, and whilst the Commentary does do this, the Commentary 'sat on the fence' on certain issues with an extensive use of appendices, explanatory notes and introductory remarks.
- Nevertheless, the publication of the SDA Bible Commentary represents a major theological milestone for the SDA church, as in it the church for the first time addresses all of Scripture in an internally consistent and cohesive manner. This was a fresh approach after the initial approach on Daniel & Revelation from the time of the Millerites.
- 1952, Bible Conference in Sligo. This defended key SDA doctrines. Before this time, the church had held a Bible Conference in 1919, which focussed on EGW and the nature of inspiration.
- 1974, Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics – led by Gordon Hyde and Gerhard Hasel, the first time the SDA church published on H principles. This symposium concluded with a note of caution against the use of higher critical methodologies by SDA scholars, arguing that whoever used the higher critical methodologies was thereby showing their agreement with the humanist presuppositions thereof.
- 1986, Autumn Council of GC – 'Principles of Bible Study', published in Adventist Review in Jan 1987. This was against historical criticism (higher criticism), and adopted an 'Historical Grammatical' approach to Scripture. This has become a standard approach to Scripture within Adventism, although there are some disagreements still to this day. The 'Historical Grammatical' or 'Historical Biblical' approach seeks to understand the meaning of Scripture by means of methodological considerations arising from the Scriptures alone, and devoid of the Troeltschian pre-suppositions or non-Biblical pre-suppositions of Higher Criticism. See this statement below.
- For Adventists, key principles are *sola scriptura*, typology, historicism and exegetical optimism. Adventists reject the *magisterium*, and as a result of the exegetically optimistic approach, are always open to new light. The Bible, as the Word of God, is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and life, and there is no appeal from the Word of God to human councils or reason.

Fragmentation

- However, there has been fragmentation since the late 1950s.
- 'Questions on Doctrine' was a divisive book when it was published. One of the leading SDA theologians in the 1930s – 1950s was M.L. Andreasen, who had developed the concept of 'last generation theology', i.e. that before Christ could return, there would be a generation of Christians on earth living sinless lives, having overcome sin in the same manner that Jesus Christ had overcome sin through obedience to His Father's will. This concept was based on the understanding of Christ's nature that insisted Christ had the nature of Adam after the Fall, with both the innocent infirmities and sinful propensities of Adam. This was never the complete understanding of EGW, who understood that Christ had neither the pre nor post-Fall natures of Adam, but that whilst He had the innocent infirmities, He never had the sinful propensities.
- The debate over the nature of Christ caused ruptures within Adventism. Offshoot groups developed (Our Firm Foundation, Hope International), and these became known as 'Historic Adventists', who sought to

return the SDA church to an understanding of Christ as having the post-Fall nature of Adam with the concomitant possibility for a 'last generation theology'.

- R. Brinsmead started publishing about how sanctified we need to be in preparation for the 2nd Coming. The BRI asked D. Ford and E. Heppenstall to answer Brinsmead, and convince him of his errors, and in response he published 'Judged by the Gospel'.
- The 1975 GC session was in Vienna, and Ms. Silver became a well-known figure within Adventism. She was a copy-writer at the Pacific Press, and alleged that she had not been promoted according to her abilities because she wasn't ordained. She sued the denomination, and won.
- Pierson resigned in 1978, and Neil Wilson became the new GC President. D. Ford then started to argue that the doctrine of the investigative judgement is unscriptural. In August 1980, at Glacier View, a conference of denominational administrators and theologians revoked Ford's credentials, and DARCOM (Daniel and Revelation Committee) was established. Ford left the SDA church and began a new ministry, based in Australia, called Good News Unlimited. At Glacier View however, there was a difference of emphasis between administrators and theologians, with the issue of academic theological freedom being important to many theologians, and theological harmony and unity being the purpose for many administrators.
- 1981, a consultation at Palm Springs, CA. Ford vs. Leo Van Olson, Heppenstall vs. H. Douglass etc. G Paxton published 'The Shaking of Adventism' which asked whether Adventists were a cult or the true spiritual heirs of the Reformation.
- 1982 - 'The White Lie' by Walter Rea. Fred Veltman was asked by the GC to study the extent of EGW's literary borrowings, and he concluded that whilst she did in fact borrow from literary sources, e.g. in Great Controversy for some historical insights, but with a proper understanding of the doctrine of inspiration this is not a problem. The Gospel of Luke clearly indicates that the Luke had used other sources under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.1-4), and this principle may also be applied to the writings of EGW.
- In the 1980s, the GC SS dept. wished to lay out a plan for studying the entire Bible in 10 years, but there were many complaints, so now the SS is ½ focussed on a book of the Bible, and ½ focussed on a topic. As a result, Rev. 14.6-12 has been covered 9 times since 1984, but Galatians only twice.
- 1989 - the year the ASRS and ATS were established, reflecting theological differences in method and conclusions within the SDA theological community.
- 1994, the Bible Amplifier guides began to be published (and, in my opinion, some of the best Bible study materials for small groups I have ever come across), but were discontinued due to a lack of demand.

Adventism today

- Mainstream Adventists, who keep their heads down theologically, and can be concerned by all they see happening in the Church.
- Evangelical Adventists, who like to be seen as being close to the evangelical community. The future of the SDA church resides in gaining a fuller understanding of the life-changing power of the Gospel. Heppenstall and LaRondelle are key theological voices.
- Historic Adventists, who wish to return to what we had believed on the nature of Christ before 1957 and QOD (main theologians are Wieland, Short, Larson, Standish brothers). Are viewed from the outside as veering towards a loveless form of legalism.
- Progressive Adventists, who believe that we need to adjust our theology and lifestyle to the modern era. Key voices include Baldwin, Rice, Daly, Madeleine Holdemann. For this group, which is diverse, the SDA church is no longer 'the remnant, but is part of 'the remnant'. Some argue that we need to update our understanding on key issues of today such as human sexuality based on modern advances in understanding and not on disputed interpretations of Scripture.

The Formal SDA hermeneutical approaches are outlined in the statement 'Methods of Bible Study' below:

Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods

1. Preamble

This statement is addressed to all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the purpose of providing guidelines on how to study the Bible, both the trained biblical scholar and others.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize and appreciate the contributions of those biblical scholars throughout history who have developed useful and reliable methods of Bible study consistent with the claims and teachings of Scripture. Adventists are committed to the acceptance of biblical truth and are willing to follow it, using all methods of interpretation consistent with what Scripture says of itself. These are outlined in the presuppositions detailed below.

In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.

In contrast with the historical-critical method and presuppositions, we believe it to be helpful to set forth the principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures themselves, that preserve their unity, and are based upon the premise that the Bible is the Word of God. Such an approach will lead us into a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.

2. Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture

a. Origin

- (1) The Bible is the Word of God and is the primary and authoritative means by which He reveals Himself to human beings.
- (2) The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words. Therefore the Scriptures are an indivisible union of human and divine elements, neither of which should be emphasized to the neglect of the other (2Peter 1:21; cf. *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).
- (3) All Scripture is inspired by God and came through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it did not come in a continuous chain of unbroken revelations. As the Holy Spirit communicated truth to the Bible writer, each wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the aspect of the truth which he was led to stress. For this reason the student of the Bible will gain a rounded comprehension on any subject by recognizing that the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied as a whole it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth (2Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1, 2; cf. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 19, 20; *The Great Controversy*, v, vi).
- (4) Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.

b. Authority

- (1) The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible revelation of God's will and His salvation. The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (2Tim. 3:15, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 2Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12).
- (2) Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history and God's acts in history. It provides the normative theological interpretation of those acts. The supernatural acts revealed in Scripture are historically true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of historical events.
- (3) The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human. Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history. While at times there may be parallel procedures employed by Bible students to determine historical data, the usual techniques of historical research, based as they are on human presuppositions and focused on the human element, are inadequate for interpreting the Scriptures, which are a blend of the divine and human. Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of the Scriptures can avoid a distortion of its message.
- (4) Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it. Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them (1Cor. 2:1-6). God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent, but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.
- (5) The revelation of God in all nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the written Word, and is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

3. Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture

a. The Spirit enables the believer to accept, understand, and apply the Bible to one's own life as he seeks divine power to render obedience to all scriptural requirements and to appropriate personally all Bible promises. Only those following the light already received can hope to receive further illumination of the Spirit (John 16:13, 14; 1Cor. 2:10-14).

b. Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enables the believer to understand and apply Scripture. Therefore, any study of the Word should commence with a request for the Spirit's guidance and illumination.

c. Those who come to the study of the Word must do so with faith, in the humble spirit of a learner who seeks to hear what the Bible is saying. They must be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions, and the conclusions of reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself. With this attitude the Bible student may come directly to the Word, and with careful study may come to an understanding of the essentials of salvation apart from any human explanations, however helpful. The biblical message becomes meaningful to such a person.

d. The investigation of Scripture must be characterized by a sincere desire to discover and obey God's will and word rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.

4. Methods of Bible Study

a. Select a Bible version for study that is faithful to the meaning contained in languages in which the Bible originally was written, giving preference to translations done by a broad group of scholars and published by a general publisher above translations sponsored by a particular denomination or narrowly focused group.

Exercise care not to build major doctrinal points on one Bible translation or version. Trained biblical scholars will use the Greek and Hebrew texts, enabling them to examine variant readings of ancient Bible manuscripts as well.

b. Choose a definite plan of study, avoiding haphazard and aimless approaches. Study plans such as the following are suggested:

(1) Book-by-book analysis of the message

(2) Verse-by-verse method

(3) Study that seeks a biblical solution to a specific life problem, biblical satisfaction for a specific need, or a biblical answer to a specific question

(4) Topical study (faith, love, second coming, and others)

(5) Word study

(6) Biographical study

c. Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied.

d. Seek to discover the underlying major themes of Scripture as found in individual texts, passages, and books. Two basic, related themes run throughout Scripture: (1) The person and work of Jesus Christ; and (2) the great controversy perspective involving the authority of God's Word, the fall of man, the first and second advents of Christ, the exonerated God and His law, and the restoration of the divine plan for the universe. These themes are to be drawn from the totality of Scripture and not imposed on it.

e. Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.

f. Study the context of the passage under consideration by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire Bible book.

g. As far as possible ascertain the historical circumstances in which the passage was written by the biblical writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

h. Determine the literary type the author is using. Some biblical material is composed of parables, proverbs, allegories, psalms, and apocalyptic prophecies. Since many biblical writers presented much of their material as poetry, it is helpful to use a version of the Bible that presents this material in poetic style, for passages employing imagery are not to be interpreted in the same manner as prose.

i. Recognize that a given biblical text may not conform in every detail to present-day literary categories. Be cautious not to force these categories in interpreting the meaning of the biblical text. It is a human tendency to find what one is looking for, even when the author did not intend such.

j. Take note of grammar and sentence construction in order to discover the author's meaning. Study the key words of the passage by comparing their use in other parts of the Bible by means of a concordance and with the help of biblical lexicons and dictionaries.

k. In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.

l. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, 256; *The Great Controversy*, 193, 595; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707-708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 33-35).

m. After studying as outlined above, turn to various commentaries and secondary helps such as scholarly works to see how others have dealt with the passage. Then carefully evaluate the different viewpoints expressed from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.

n. In interpreting prophecy keep in mind that:

(1) The Bible claims God's power to predict the future (Isa 46:10).

(2) Prophecy has a moral purpose. It was not written merely to satisfy curiosity about the future. Some of the purposes of prophecy are to strengthen faith (John 14:29) and to promote holy living and readiness for the Advent (Matt 24:44; Rev 22:7, 10, 11).

(3) The focus of much prophecy is on Christ (both His first and second advents), the church, and the end-time.

(4) The norms for interpreting prophecy are found within the Bible itself: The Bible notes time prophecies and their historical fulfillments; the New Testament cites specific fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah; and the Old Testament itself presents individuals and events as types of the Messiah.

(5) In the New Testament application of Old Testament prophecies, some literal names become spiritual: for example, Israel represents the church, Babylon apostate religion, etc.

(6) There are two general types of prophetic writings: nonapocalyptic prophecy as found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and apocalyptic prophecy as found in Daniel and the Revelation. These differing types have different characteristics:

(a) Nonapocalyptic prophecy addresses God's people; apocalyptic is more universal in scope.

(b) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often is conditional in nature, setting forth to God's people the alternatives of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience; apocalyptic emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His control over history.

(c) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often leaps from the local crisis to the end-time day of the Lord; apocalyptic prophecy presents the course of history from the time of the prophet to the end of the world.

(d) Time prophecies in nonapocalyptic prophecy generally are long, for example, 400 years of Israel's servitude (Gen. 15:13) and 70 years of Babylonian captivity (Jer. 25:12). Time prophecies in apocalyptic prophecy generally are phrased in short terms, for example, 10 days (Rev. 2:10) or 42 months (Rev. 13:5). Apocalyptic time periods stand symbolically for longer periods of actual time.

(7) Apocalyptic prophecy is highly symbolic and should be interpreted accordingly. In interpreting symbols, the following methods may be used:

(a) Look for interpretations (explicit or implicit) within the passage itself (for example, Dan. 8:20, 21; Rev. 1:20).

(b) Look for interpretations elsewhere in the book or in other writings by the same author.

(c) Using a concordance, study the use of symbols in other parts of Scripture.

(d) A study of ancient Near Eastern documents may throw light on the meaning of symbols, although scriptural use may alter those meanings.

(8) The literary structure of a book often is an aid to interpreting it. The parallel nature of Daniel's prophecies is an example.

o. Parallel accounts in Scripture sometimes present differences in detail and emphasis (for example, cf. Matt 21:33, 34; Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18; or 2Kings 18-20 with 2Chron. 32). When studying such passages, first examine them carefully to be sure that the parallels actually are referring to the same historical event. For example, many of Jesus' parables may have been given on different occasions to different audiences and with different wording.

In cases where there appear to be differences in parallel accounts, one should recognize that the total message of the Bible is the synthesis of all of its parts. Each book or writer communicates that which the Spirit has led him to write. Each makes his own special contribution to the richness, diversity, and variety of Scripture (*The Great Controversy*, v, vi). The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of the divine self-disclosure.

When parallel passages seem to indicate discrepancy or contradiction, look for the underlying harmony. Keep in mind that dissimilarities may be due to minor errors of copyists (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 16), or may be the result of differing emphases and choice of materials of various authors who wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for different audiences under different circumstances (*Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 21, 22; *The Great Controversy*, vi).

It may prove impossible to reconcile minor dissimilarities in detail which may be irrelevant to the main and clear message of the passage. In some cases judgment may have to be suspended until more information and better evidence are available to resolve a seeming discrepancy.

p. The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the human family. However, in order not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns.

Expressions such as "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Ex. 9:12) or "an evil spirit from God..." (1Sam 16:15), the imprecatory psalms, or the "three days and three nights" of Jonah as compared with Christ's death (Matt. 12:40), commonly are misunderstood because they are interpreted today from a different viewpoint.

A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is indispensable for understanding such expressions. For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, for example, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

Another aspect of Scripture that troubles the modern mind is the divine command to Israel to engage in war and execute entire nations. Israel originally was organized as a theocracy, a civil government through which God ruled directly (Gen. 18:25). Such a theocratic state was unique. It no longer exists and cannot be regarded as a direct model for Christian practice.

The Scriptures record that God accepted persons whose experiences and statements were not in harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible as a whole. For example, we may cite incidents relating to the use of alcohol, polygamy, divorce, and slavery. Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted and bore with in the lives of the patriarchs and in Israel. Jesus made this clear in His statement with regard to divorce (Matt 19:4-6, 8).

The spirit of the Scriptures is one of restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity from the depths of sin to the divine ideal. Consequently, we must not accept as models the actions of sinful men as recorded in the Bible.

The Scriptures represent the unfolding of God's revelation to man. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, for example, enlarges and expands certain Old Testament concepts. Christ Himself is the ultimate revelation of God's character to humanity (Heb. 1:1-3).

While there is an overarching unity in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and while all Scripture is equally inspired, God chose to reveal Himself to and through human individuals and to meet them where they were in terms of spiritual and intellectual endowments. God Himself does not change, but He progressively unfolded His revelation to men as they were able to grasp it (John 16:12; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 945; *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 21). Every experience or statement of Scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today. Both the spirit and the letter of Scripture must be understood (1Cor. 10:6-13; *The Desire of Ages*, 150; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 10-12).

q. As the final goal, make application of the text. Ask such questions as, "What is the message and purpose God intends to convey through Scripture?" "What meaning does this text have for me?" "How does it apply to my situation and circumstances today?" In doing so, recognize that although many biblical passages had local significance, nonetheless they contain timeless principles applicable to every age and culture.

5. Conclusion

In the "Introduction" to *The Great Controversy* Ellen G. White wrote:

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14. (p. vi)

As it is impossible for those who do not accept Christ's divinity to understand the purpose of His incarnation, it is also impossible for those who see the Bible merely as a human book to understand its message, however careful and rigorous their methods.

Even Christian scholars who accept the divine-human nature of Scripture, but whose methodological approaches cause them to dwell largely on its human aspects, risk emptying the biblical message of its power by relegating it to the background while concentrating on

the medium. They forget that medium and message are inseparable and that the medium without the message is as an empty shell that cannot address the vital spiritual needs of humankind.

A committed Christian will use only those methods that are able to do full justice to the dual, inseparable nature of Scripture, enhance his ability to understand and apply its message, and strengthen faith.

This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986