Interpreting Scripture According to the Scriptures: Toward an Understanding of Seventh-day Adventist Hermeneutics

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How shall we approach Scripture? With what hermeneutic shall we conduct our theological investigations? A bewildering array of past and current hermeneutical theories confronts us. These range from the allegorical hermeneutic of the Alexandrian school and the medieval Church, to the literal-historical and typological hermeneutic of the Antiochene school and the Protestant Reformers; from the antisupernatural rationalist (historical-critical) hermeneutic of the Enlightenment to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic of subjective understanding; from the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and Brunner, to the existentialist models of Heidegger and Bultmann; from the metacritical hermeneutical theories of Gadamer and Pannenberg, to the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval of Paul Ricoeur; from the hermeneutics of socio-critical theory (including liberation and feminist hermeneutics) to the new literary-critical hermeneutical approaches (rhetorical criticism, New Criticism, structuralism, semiotics, narrative theory, etc.); from reader-response criticism to radical deconstructionism.[1]

In the face of this plethora of suggested hermeneutical methodologies, how shall we proceed in our approach toward Scripture? It appears evident that without specific divine revelation on the subject of hermeneutics, we will never be able to find our way through the maze of human theories. On the other hand, if we accept the full authority of Scripture[2] with regard to other biblical doctrines, should we not also expect to find in Scripture the divine perspective on how to interpret Scripture? Seventh-day Adventists believe that just as we go to Scripture to find the doctrines of God, humanity, sin, eschatology, etc., so it is appropriate, yes, essential, that we should go to Scripture itself to discover the doctrine of Scripture, and in particular, to learn the Scriptural teaching on hermeneutics as a basis for constructing a theology that is hermeneutically faithful to Scripture.

Of course we come to Scripture acknowledging our own biases, our own pre-understandings, but we come willing, and claiming the divine promise, that the Spirit will bring our presuppositions ever more in harmony with the biblical presuppositions (see John 16:13; 14:16, 17, 26, etc.). In this paper an attempt is made to summarize what Seventh-day Adventists understand to be the main contours of the Scriptural

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1. See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) for an overview of these hermeneutical approaches.

2. This is not the place for a full-blown discussion of Revelation-Inspiration-Illumination.The doctrine of revelation-inspiration is foundational to the whole enterprise of biblical interpretation. According to the biblical record God has revealed Himself and His will in specific statements of propositional truth to His prophets (Heb 1:1). Through the inspiration of the Spirit He has enabled His prophets to communicate the divine revelation as the trustworthy and authoritative Word of God (2 Tim 3:15-16; 2 Pet 1:19-21). The same Spirit who has inspired the prophets has been promised to illuminate the minds of those who seek to understand the meaning of the divine revelation (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:10-14).

presuppositions and principles of interpretation, as they emerge from a study of the biblical passages that speak to this topic.[3]

I. Foundational Principles for Biblical Interpretation

A. By the Bible and the Bible Only (*Sola Scriptura*)[4]

A fundamental principle set forth by Scripture concerning itself is that the Bible alone is the final norm of truth, the primary and absolute source of authority, the ultimate court of appeal, in all areas of doctrine and practice. The classical text which expresses this basic premise is Isa 8:20 (NIV): "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." The two Hebrew words *tōrāh* ("Law") and *teʿudah* ("testimony") point to the two loci of authority in Isaiah's day which now constitute Holy Scripture: the Pentateuch (the Torah or Law of Moses) and the testimony of the prophets to the previously revealed will of God in the Torah. Jesus summarized the two divisions of OT Scripture similarly when He referred to the "Law and the prophets" (Matt 5:17; 11:13; 22:40). The NT adds the authoritative revelation given by Jesus and His apostolic witnesses (see Eph 2:20; 3:5). The principle of *sola Scriptura* implies two corollaries: the primacy and the sufficiency of Scripture.

1. The Primacy of Scripture. Isaiah warned apostate Israel against turning from the authority of the Law and the Prophets to seek counsel from spiritist mediums (Isa 8:19). In the NT era other sources of authority were threatening to usurp the final authority of the biblical revelation. One of these was tradition. But Jesus and Paul clearly indicate that Scripture is the superior authority over tradition, including the tradition of the religious authorities (Matt 15:3, 6; Col 2:8). This does not deny the usefulness of Judeo-Christian tradition, as some wrongly interpret *sola Scriptura*, but rather upholds the primacy of Scripture over all tradition as the final norm of truth. Tradition, even ecclesiastical tradition, must be judged by Scripture.

Paul also emphatically rejects another source of authority, that of human philosophy, as final norm of truth for the Christian (Col 2:8). Even the philosophical presuppositions of fundamental theology must be judged by the standard of *sola Scriptura*. Seventh-day Adventists believe that much of Christian fundamental thinking ("the principles behind the principles") since shortly after NT times has been dominated by dualistic (Platonic-Aristotelian) philosophical foundations which present a timeless and spaceless concept of God. Thus the passages in Scripture that speak of God dwelling in a spatio-temporal reality, must be deconstructed and reinterpreted in allegorical, figurative, or metaphorical terms. Adventists see the biblical teaching about God as including a call to Christians for a radical return to the biblical realism of *sola Scriptura* that views the being of God compatible with space and time.[5]

Paul likewise rejects human "knowledge" (KJV "science"; Greek *gnōsis*) as the final authority (1 Tim 6:20). Both OT and NT writers point out that since the Fall in Eden, nature has become depraved (Gen 3:17-18; Rom 8:20-21) and no longer perfectly reflects truth. Nature, rightly understood, is in harmony with God's written revelation in Scripture (see Ps 19:1-6 [revelation of God in nature] and vv. 7-11 [revelation of the Lord in Scripture]); but as a limited and broken source of knowledge about God and reality, it must be held subservient to, and interpreted by, the final authority of Scripture (Rom 1:20-23; 2:14-16; 3:1-2).

Humankind's mental and emotional faculties have also become depraved since the Fall; but even before the Fall, neither human reason nor experience could safely be trusted apart from or superior to God's Word. This was the very point upon which Eve fell--trust-

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3. This is a working document, prepared by a single author, which has not been voted or otherwise approved by the Seventh-day Adventist Church Annual Council or General Conference Session, and therefore does not purport to be an official statement of beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists on the approach toward Scripture. It represents one scholar's attempt to elaborate the Adventist understanding of how to interpret Scripture, in harmony with the biblical teachings, as these are summarized in the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and "Methods of Bible Study" document voted by the Annual Council of Seventh-day Adventists in 1986. Many of these points are adapted from the author's article, "Biblical Interpretation," in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 58-104.

4. The term *sola Scriptura* is best translated as an ablative phrase ("By Scripture alone") in parallel with the other two defining phrases of the Protestant Reformation, *sola fidei* "by faith alone" and *sola gratia* "by grace alone."

5. See especially Fernando Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36/2 (Autumn 1998): 183-206.

ing her own reason and emotions over the Word of God (Gen 3:1-6). The wisest man in history (who ultimately failed to heed his own warning) perceptively observed: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Prov 14:12).

2. The Sufficiency of Scripture. The principle of *sola Scriptura* implies the further corollary of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible stands alone as the unerring guide to truth; it is sufficient to make one wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience must be tested (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa 8:20; John 17:17; Acts 17:11; 2 Thess 3:14; Heb 4:12). Scripture thus provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture is not just in the sense of *material* sufficiency, i.e., that Scripture contains all the truths necessary for salvation. Adventists also believe in the *formal* sufficiency of Scripture, i.e., that the Bible alone is sufficient in clarity so that no external source is required to rightly interpret it.

Adventists maintain the rallying cry of the Reformation--*sola Scriptura*, the Bible and the Bible only as the final norm for truth. All other sources of knowledge and experience must be tested by this unerring standard. The appropriate human response must be one of total surrender to the ultimate authority of the word of God (Isa 66:2).

B. The Totality of Scripture (*Tota Scriptura*)

A second general principle of biblical interpretation is the totality of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*). It is not enough to affirm the primacy of Scripture. Those like Martin Luther, who called for *sola Scriptura*, but failed to fully accept the Scriptures in their totality, have ended up with a "canon within the canon." For Luther this meant depreciating the book of James (as an "epistle of straw") and despising other portions of Scripture (as presenting the way of Law and not the Gospel).

The self-testimony of Scripture is clear in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

All Scripture--not just part--is inspired by God. This certainly includes the whole OT, the canonical Scriptures of the apostolic church (see Luke 24:17, 32, 44-45; Rom 1:2; 3:2; 2 Pet 1:21; etc.). But for

Paul it also includes the NT sacred writings as well. Paul's use of the word "scripture" (*graphē*, "writing") in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. He introduces two quotations with the words "Scripture says," one from Deut 25:4 in the OT, and one from the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7. The word "scripture" thus is used simultaneously and synonymously to refer to both the OT and the gospel accounts in the technical sense of "inspired, sacred, authoritative writings."

Numerous passages in the gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the OT Scriptures (e.g., John 1:1-3 paralleling Gen 1:1; John 14:26; 16:13; 19:35; 21:24; Luke 1:2-4; Matthew 1 paralleling Genesis 5; Matt 23:34). Peter's use of the term "scriptures" for Paul's writings supports this conclusion (2 Pet 3:15, 16) ["So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures."] By comparing Paul's letters to the "*other* Scriptures," Peter implies that Paul's correspondence is part of Scripture.

The NT is the apostolic witness to Jesus and to His fulfillment of the OT types and prophecies. Jesus promised the twelve apostles to send the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance the things He had said (John 14:26). Paul states that "the mystery of Christ" was "revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph 3:4-5). The apostles held a unique, unrepeatable position in history (Eph 2:20) as bearing witness of direct contact with the humanity of Christ (Luke 1:2; Gal 1:11-17; 2 Pet 1:16; 1 John 1:1-4). This certainly validates the apostolic writings by the apostles like Peter, John, and Matthew. Paul also was called to be an apostle (see Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1, and the greetings in the other Pauline epistles), and he indicates that his writings are given under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and have full apostolic authority (1 Cor 7:40; 12:13; 14:37; 2 Cor 3:5-6; 4:13; Gal 1:11-12; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:6-15). Thus the NT embodies the witness of the apostles, either directly, or indirectly through their close associates Mark, Luke, James, and Jude (see Luke 1:1-3; Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37; 16:11; Col 4:10, 14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24).

The principle of *tota Scriptura* involves several related issues/corollaries.

1. *Tota Scriptura* and the Canon. What is the full extent of the Biblical canon, and what forces/sources "authorized" the various biblical writings to be canonical? Adventists join other Protestants in af-

firming that the canonization of both OT and NT is not a product of human agencies but of the Holy Spirit, and that the canonical books contain internal self-authentifying and self-validating qualities that were recognized as such by the community of faith.[6]

Regarding the OT, Adventists, along with other Protestants, accept only the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, and not the so-called deutero-canonical books of the Apocrypha. The latter books, while containing some helpful historical information, were not written by inspired prophets, but came after the close of the OT prophetic period (ca. 400 BC.).[7] Adventists accept a sixth-century date for the writing of Daniel (in harmony with the internal claims of the book), and place the canonization of the OT in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 400 B.C.), both of whom as prophets played a role in popularizing and affirming the canonized books among the Jewish people (Ezra 7:10; Neh 8:2-8). Jesus Himself recognized the three-part Hebrew canon (Luke 24:44), which was later reaffirmed at the Council of Jamnia (ca. 90 A.D.).[8]

Regarding the NT, we have already noted above the apostolic witness inherent in all of these writings--all written by an inspired apostle or an apostle's direct disciple who was an inspired eyewitness--and thus the canon of the NT was closed by the end of the first century when the last inspired apostolic document had been written. Such inspired apostolicity/canonicity was eventually recognized by the NT covenant community. The Church "came to recognize, accept, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the Church."[9] In sum, the Church did not *determine* the Canon, but *discovered* it, did not *regulate* the canon, but *recognized* it; the Church is not the *mother* of the canon, but the *child* of the Canon, not its *magistrate*, but its *minister*, not its *judge*, but its *witness*, not its *master*, but its *servant*.[10]

2. Inseparable Union of the Divine and Human. All Scripture, both OT and NT, is of divine origin. It is "inspired by God," literally "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). The picture here is that of the divine "wind" or Spirit coming upon the prophet, so that Scripture is a product of the divine creative breath. Thus it is fully authoritative: profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

A corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle is that all Scripture is an indivisible, indistinguishable union of the divine and the human. A key biblical passage which clarifies the divine nature of Scripture in relation to the human dimensions of the biblical writers is 2 Pet 1:19-21 (NIV): "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain. and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will [*thelēma*] of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [*pherō*] by the Holy Spirit."

Several related points are developed in these verses. V. 19 underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture: it is "the prophetic word made more certain." In v. 20 we learn why this so: because the prophecy is not a matter of the prophet's own interpretation, i.e., the prophet does not intrude his own interpretation. The context here primarily points to the prophet giving the message, who does not inject his own ideas into the message, although the implication may be heeded by the non-inspired interpreter of Scripture.

V. 21 elaborates on this point: prophecy does not come by the *thelēma*--the initiative, the impulse, the will--of the human agent; the prophets are not communicating on their own. Rather, the Bible writers were prophets who spoke as they were moved, carried along, even driven [*pherō*] by the Holy Spirit.

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6. See, especially, Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Inspiration and the Canon of the Bible," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/1 (1994): 68-105.

7. For further discussion of additional reasons why Protestants (including Adventists) do not accept the canonicity of the Apocrypha, see, e.g., Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 157-175; Hasel, 74-75.

8. For discussion of the new scholarly consensus that rejects the older theory that the OT canon was not fixed till the Council of Jamnia, see Hasel, 90-96; and Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 146-162.

9. Bruce M. Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 287.

10. Adapted from Geisler and McKenzie, 173.

This Petrine passage makes clear that the Scriptures did not come directly from heaven, but rather God utilized human instrumentalities. An inductive look at the biblical writings confirms that the Holy Spirit did not abridge the freedom of the biblical writers, did not suppress their unique personalities, did not destroy their individuality. Their writings sometimes involved human research (Luke 1:1-3); they sometimes gave their own experiences (Moses in Deuteronomy, Luke in Acts, the Psalmists); they present differences in style (contrast Isaiah and Ezekiel, John and Paul); they offer different perspectives on the same truth or event (e.g., the four Gospels). And yet, through all of this thought-inspiration, the Holy Spirit is carrying along the biblical writers, guiding their minds in selecting what to speak and write, so that what they present is not merely their own interpretation, but the utterly reliable word of God, the prophetic word made more certain. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth in thoughts and so assisted them in writing that they faithfully committed to apt words the things divinely revealed to them (1 Cor 2:10-13).

This corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle, that the human and divine elements in Scripture are inextricably bound together, is reinforced by comparing the written and incarnate Word of God. Since both Jesus and Scripture are called the "Word of God" (Heb 4:12; Rev 19:13), it is appropriate to compare their divine-human natures. Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God was fully God and fully man (John 1:1-3,14), so the written Word is an inseparable union of the human and the divine. Just as Jesus' humanity was sinless, so the holy Scriptures, though coming through human instrumentalities, is fully trustworthy.

3. The Bible is Equivalent To, Not Just Contains the Word of God. Another corollary of the *totality of Scripture* principle is that the Bible *is equivalent to*, and not just *contains*, the Word of God. The testimony of Scripture is overwhelming. In the OT there are about 1600 occurrences of four Hebrew words (in four different phrases with slight variations) which explicitly indicate that God has spoken: (1) "the utterance [*neᵓum*] of Yahweh," some 361 times; (2) "Thus says [*ᵓāmar*] the Lord," some 423 times; (3) "And God spoke [*dibbēr*], some 422 times, and (4) the "word [*dābār*] of the Lord," some 394 times. Numerous times are recorded the equivalency between the prophet's message and the divine message: the prophet speaks for God (Ex 7:1,2; cf. Exod 4:15,16), God puts His words in the prophet's mouth (Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9), the hand of the Lord is strong upon the prophet (Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 1:3; 3:22; 37:1),

or the word of the Lord comes to him (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1; etc.). Jeremiah (chap. 25) rebukes his audience for not listening to the prophets (v. 4), which is equated with not listening to the Lord (v. 7), and further equated with "His words" (v. 8).

Summarizing the prophetic messages sent to Israel, 2 Kgs 21:10 records, "And the Lord said by his servants the prophets," and 2 Chr 36:15-16 adds: "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers . . . ; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets . . ." The prophets' message is God's message. For this reason the prophets often naturally switch from third person reference to God ("He"), to the first person direct divine address ("I"), without any "thus saith the Lord" (see Isa 3:4; 5:3 ff.; 10:5 ff.; 27:3; Jer 5:7; 16:21; Hos 6:4 ff.; Amos 5:21 ff.; Joel 2:25; Zech 9:7). The OT prophets were sure that their message was the message of God!

Numerous times in the NT "it is written" is equivalent to "God says." For example, in Heb 1:5-13, seven OT citations are said to be spoken by God, but the OT passages cited do not always specifically ascribe the statement directly to God (see Ps 104:4; Ps 45:6-7; Ps 102:25-27). Again Rom 9:17 and Gal 3:8 (citing Exod 9:16 and Gen 22:18 respectively) reveal a strict identification between Scripture and the Word of God: the NT passages introduce the citations with "Scripture says," while the OT passages have God as the speaker. The OT Scriptures as a whole are viewed as the "oracles of God" (Rom 3:2).

Though the Bible was not verbally dictated by God so as to by-pass the individuality of the human author, and thus the specific words are the words chosen by the human writer, yet the human and divine elements are so inseparable, the human messenger so divinely guided in his selection of apt words to express the divine thoughts, that the words of the prophet are called the Word of God. The individual words of Scripture are regarded as trustworthy, accurately representing the divine message.

This is illustrated by a number of NT references. Jesus says, quoting Deut 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [Greek *hrēma*, "word," translating Hebrew *qol*, "everything"] that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). Paul says of his own inspired message: "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13). Again Paul writes: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you ac-

cepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13).

What is stated explicitly in the NT is also indicated by the instances when Jesus and the apostles base an entire theological argument upon a crucial word or even grammatical form in the OT. So in John 10:33 Jesus appeals to Ps 82:6 and the specific word "gods" to substantiate his divinity. Accompanying His usage is the telling remark: "The Scripture cannot be broken [*luō*] . . ." It cannot be *luō*--loosed, broken, repealed, annulled, or abolished--even to the specific words. In Mt 22:41-46 He grounds His final, unanswerable argument to the Pharisees upon the reliability of the single word "Lord" in Ps 110:1. The apostle Paul (Gal 3:16) likewise bases his Messianic argument upon the singular number of the word "seed" in Gen 22:17-18. As we shall see below, Paul is recognizing the larger Messianic context of this passage, as it moves from a collective plural seed to a singular Seed.

Jesus shows His ultimate respect for the full authority of the OT Torah when He affirms its totality: "For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18).

C. The Analogy of Scripture (*Analogia Scripturae*)

A third general foundational principle of biblical interpretation may be termed "the Analogy (or Harmony) of Scripture" (*analogia Scripturae*).

Since all Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit, and all of it is the Word of God, therefore there is a fundamental unity and harmony among its various parts. The various parts of OT Scripture are considered by the NT writers as harmonious and of equal divine authority. NT writers may thus support their point by citing several OT sources as of equal and harmonious weight. For example, in Rom 3:10-18 we have Scriptural citations from Ecclesiastes (7:20), Psalms (14:2,3; 5:10; 140:4; 10:7; 36:2), and Isaiah (59:7,8). Scripture is regarded as an inseparable, coherent whole. Major OT themes are assumed by the NT writers and further developed.

The two Testaments have a reciprocal relationship in which they mutually illuminate each other. Jesus described how the OT illuminates the NT (and Himself in particular) in John 5:39: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; *and it is they that bear witness to me*." Elsewhere Jesus describes how He is the Illuminator, even the fulfillment, of the OT: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Mt 5:17).

Neither Testament is superseded by the other, although the later revelation is tested by the former, as illustrated by the example of the Bereans, who "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, *examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Even Jesus insisted that the conviction of His disciples not be based primarily upon sensory phenomena alone, but that they believe in Him because of the testimony of OT scripture (Luke 24:25-27).

The "analogy of Scripture" principle has three main aspects: (a) Scripture is its Own Expositor (*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*); (b) the Consistency of Scripture; and (c) the Clarity of Scripture.

1. "Scripture is Its Own Interpreter." Or as Martin Luther put it, "Scripture is its own light." Because there is an underlying unity among the various parts of Scripture, one portion of Scripture interprets another, becoming the key for understanding related passages.

Jesus demonstrated this principle on the way to Emmaus when, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Later that night in the upper room, he pointed out "'that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures . . ." (Luke 24:44-45).

Paul expresses this same principle in 1 Cor 2:13 (NKJV): "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, *comparing spiritual things with spiritual*." This text has been translated in different ways, but certainly the apostle's own use of Scripture indicates his adoption of the principle. We have already noted the whole catena of OT quotations cited in Rom 3:10-18. The same phenomenon may be observed in Heb 1:5-13; 2:6-8, 12, 13.

In practical application of this principle that the Bible is its own expositor, Jesus, on the way to Emmaus, shows how all that Scripture says about a given topic (in His case the Messiah) should be brought to bear upon the interpretation of the subject (Luke 24:27, 44-45). This does not mean the indiscriminate stringing together of passages in "proof-text" fashion without regard for the context of each text. But since the Scriptures ultimately have a single divine Author, it is crucial to gather all that is written on a particular topic in order to be able to consider all the contours of the topic.

2. The Consistency of Scripture. Jesus succinctly stated this aspect of the analogy of Scripture: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Since Scripture has a single divine Author, the various parts of Scripture are consistent with each other. Thus Scripture cannot be set against Scripture. All the doctrines of the Bible will cohere with each other, and interpretations of individual passages will harmonize with the totality of what Scripture teaches on a given subject. We have already seen how the NT writers linked together several OT citations from different OT genres as having equal and harmonious bearing upon the topic they were explaining.

While the different Bible writers may provide different emphases regarding the same event or topic, this will be without contradiction or misinterpretation. This is evidenced especially with parallel passages such as in the four Gospels. Each gospel writer recorded what impressed him most under the inspiration of the Spirit, and each facet of the whole is needed in obtaining the full and balanced picture.

3. The Clarity of Scripture. The principle of the analogy of Scripture also involves the aspect of the clarity of Scripture. Adventists, with other Protestants, understand that the Bible is perspicuous. The biblical testimony encourages the readers to study the Bible for themselves in order to understand God's message to them (e.g., Deut 30:11-14; Luke l:3,4; John 20:30-31; Acts 17:11; Rom 10:17; Rev 1:3).

The implication is that the meaning of Scripture is clear and straight-forward, able to be grasped by the diligent student. Jesus illustrates this in his dealing with the lawyer. He asked him, "what is written in the law? How do you read?" (Luke 10:26). In other words, He expected that the Bible could be understood. When the lawyer cited Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, Jesus commended him for having correctly answered (Luke 10:27). Numerous times in the gospel accounts Jesus makes the same point: "Have you never read in the Scriptures . . . ?" (Matt 21:42); "Have you not read . . . ?" (Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31; Mark 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3); "Let the reader understand" (Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14).

The consistent example of the Bible writers is that the Scriptures are to be taken in their plain, literal sense, unless a clear and obvious figure is intended. Note especially Jesus' own distinction, and the disciples' recognition, of the difference between literal and figurative language (John 16:25, 29). There is no stripping away of the "husk" of the literal sense in order to arrive at the "kernel" of the mystical, hidden, allegorical meaning, that only the initiated can uncover.

Scripture also maintains that there is a definite truth-intention of the biblical writers in any given statement, and not a subjective, uncontrolled multiplicity of meanings. Jesus and the apostles spoke with authority, giving not just one of many individual readings of a passage, but the true meaning as intended by the human writer and/or divine Author (see, e.g., Acts 3:17-18, 22-24). At the same time the NT interpretation does not claim to exhaust the meaning of a given OT passage; there is still room for careful exegesis. There are also instances where the biblical writer intentionally used terminology or phraseology with a breadth of meaning that encompasses several different nuances indicated by the immediate context of the passage (e.g., John 3:3).

This is not to deny that some parts of Scripture point beyond themselves (e.g., typology, predictive prophecy, symbols and parables) to an extended meaning or future fulfillment, but even in these cases the extended meaning or fulfillment arises from, is consistent with, and in fact is an integral part of the specific truth-intention of the text; and Scripture itself indicates the presence of such extended meaning or fulfillment in such cases.

It is also true that not every portion of Scripture was fully understood by the original hearers, or even by the inspired writers. In 1 Pet 1:10-12 the apostle indicates that the OT prophets may not have always clearly understood all the Messianic implications of their prophecies. Thus Peter implies another facet of the principle of the clarity of Scripture, i.e., that additional clearer revelation becomes a key to more fully understanding the less clear passages. This same point seems implied also from a different perspective in 2 Pet 3:16 when Peter writes that some of the things Paul has written are "hard to understand." These difficult passages are not to be the starting point, which "the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction," but are to be viewed in the larger context of clearer Scriptural statements of truth (v. 18; cf. v. 2).

The clarity of Scripture corollary also involves the concept of "progressive revelation." Heb 1:1-3 indicates this progress in revelation from OT prophets to God's own Son (see also John 1:16-18; Col 1:25-26; etc.). This is not progressive revelation in the sense that later Scripture contradicts or nullifies previous revelation, but in the sense that later revelation illuminates, clarifies, or amplifies the truths presented previously. So Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) does not nullify the precepts of the Decalogue, but strips away from them the accretions of erroneous tradition and reveals their true depth of meaning and

application.[11] The basic insights on this fuller import of the law were already in the OT, and Jesus enables these gems of truth to shine with even greater brilliance as they are freed from the distorted interpretations of some of the scribes and Pharisees. Progressive revelation also occurs in the sense that Jesus is the fulfillment of the various types and prophecies of the OT.

A final practical application of this principle of clarity is to recognize the increasing spiral of understanding as one passage illuminates another. On one hand, later biblical authors write with conscious awareness of what has been written before and often assume and build upon what comes earlier (sometimes called the epigenetic principle or analogy of antecedent Scripture).[12] A close reading of a later passage may indicate echoes of, or allusions to, earlier passages, and the earlier passages in their context become the key to interpreting the fuller meaning of the later (see, for example, the rich intertextuality in the book of Revelation). On the other hand, earlier passages may not be fully understood until seen in the light of the later revelation. This is true in particular with typology and prophecy (see Matt 12:6, 42, 43; 1 Pet 1:10-12.) Thus the spiral of understanding grows as later illuminates earlier, and earlier illuminates later.

D. "Spiritual Things Spiritually Discerned" (*Spiritalia spiritaliter examinatur*)

A fourth general principle of biblical interpretation concerns the issue of preunderstanding or objectivity. In modern hermeneutical approaches toward the Bible, both among conservative/evangelical and liberal critical scholars, it is often assumed that the original intent of the Bible writer can be ascertained by the rigorous application of hermeneutical principles and exegetical tools, quite apart from any supernatural spiritual assistance. Thus non-Christians can determine the meaning of Scripture as well as Christians, if they use the tools and apply the principles correctly. This assumption is maintained in the laudable interest of upholding a degree of objectivity in interpreting the biblical text.

However, Scriptural data leads to a different conclusion. We note in particular, 1 Cor 2:11, 14: "For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

1. The Role of the Holy Spirit. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned." Since the Bible is ultimately not the product of the human writer's mind but of the mind of God revealed through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-13), it is not possible to separate "what it meant" to the human writer--to be studied without the aid of the Holy Spirit, from "what it means"--to be applied by the help of the Spirit. Both the original meaning and its present application involve the thoughts of God, which according to Paul can only be adequately comprehended if we have the aid of the Spirit of God (cf. John 6:45; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:14-18).

Some have resisted letting the Spirit have a place in the hermeneutical spiral because it seems to them to allow the subjective element to overcome solid exegetical/hermeneutical research. It is true that "spiritual exegesis" *alone*--that is, an attempt to rely totally on the Spirit without conscientiously applying principles of exegesis and hermeneutics arising from Scripture, can lead to subjectivism.

But the proper combination of dependance upon the Spirit with rigorous exegesis based upon sound hermeneutical procedures, far from leading to subjectivity, constitutes the only way of escaping subjectivity. Modern scholars are increasingly more willing to recognize that all come to the Scripture with their own preunderstandings, presuppositions, biases. This cannot be remedied by approaching the text "scientifically" without a "faith bias." In fact, since the Scriptures call for a response of faith, an attempted "neutral" stance is already at cross-currents with the intent of Scripture (cf. Matt 13:11-17; John 6:69; Acts 2:38).

Believing and Spirit-led interpreters also come with their own biases and preunderstandings and are not impervious to error (cf. Acts 11:15). But for Christians who believe the promises of Scripture, it is possible to ask God to transform their minds so that they increasingly adopt and incorporate the presuppositions of Scripture and not their own (see Rom 12:1). The Spirit of truth was promised to the disciples, and

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11. See J. H. Gerstner, "Law in the NT," *ISBE* (1986), 85-88.

12. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 8, 14, 22; idem, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 134-140.

to us: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). It must be noted that the "you" here is plural; the Spirit directs interpreters together in the fellowship of the church body (Ps 119:63; Acts 2:42; 4:32; Rom 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Eph 4:3-6), where they may be benefitted by exchange with and correction of other believers.[13]

Interpreters must make a decision that their pre-understandings will derive from and be under control of the Bible itself, and constantly be open for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. They must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether it be naturalistic (closed system of cause and effect without any room for the supernatural), evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (man the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes). They must ask the Spirit who inspired the Word to illuminate, shape, and modify their pre-understandings according to the Word, and to guard their understandings to remain faithful to the Word.

2. The Spiritual Life of the Interpreter. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned" implies not only the need of the Spirit to aid in understanding, but also the spirituality of the interpreter. The Spirit not only illuminates the mind, but also must have transformed the interpreter's heart. The approach of the interpreter must be that called for by Scripture, an attitude of consent or willingness to follow what Scripture says, if he/she is to understand Scripture's meaning: "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17).

There must be diligent, earnest prayer for understanding, after the example of David: "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end" (Ps 119:33; cf. vv. 34-40; Prov 2:3-7). There must be an acceptance by faith of what the prophets say (2 Chr 20:20; cf. John 5:46-47).

In sum, the Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely "from below" with sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive process, the book inspired by the Spirit can only be correctly understood "from above" by the illumination and transformation of the Spirit. God's word must be approached with reverence. Perhaps the best encapsulation of the interpreter's appropriate stance before Scripture is recorded by Isaiah: "But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and *trembles at my word*" (Isa 66:2).

II. Specific Guidelines to Interpretation

The specific guidelines for interpreting biblical passages arise from and build upon the foundational principles we have observed in Scripture thus far. These guidelines encompass essentially the grammatico-historical method, in contrast to the historical-critical method that arose out of the Enlightenment project.

A. Two Hermeneutical Methods Compared

The two major hermeneutical methods we have just mentioned--the historical-critical method and the historico-grammatical (also called the historical-Biblical)--may be schematically compared by means of the following chart.

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13. This is perhaps an appropriate place to briefly mention the role of the church in the interpretation of Scripture and formulation of doctrinal statements. The Preamble to the "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" states this as follows: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs. . . constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word" (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2003* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald], 5).

A Comparison of the Two Major Modern Hermeneutical Methods

Historical-Critical Method

A. **Definition:** The attempt to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science.

B. **Objective:** To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is the human author's intention as understood by his contemporaries.

C. **Basic Presuppositions:**

    1. **Secular norm:** The principles and procedures of secular historical science constitute the external norm and proper method for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data.

    2. Principle of **criticism** (methodological doubt): the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate on his own apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.

    3. Principle of **analogy**: present experience is the criterion of evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred, since all events are in principle similar.

    4. Principle of **correlation** (or causation): a closed system of cause and effect with no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.

    5. **Disunity** of Scripture, since its prediction involved many human authors or redactors; Scripture therefore cannot be compared with Scripture ("proof-texts") to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

    6. **"Time-conditioned"** or "culturally-conditioned" nature of Scripture; the historical context is **responsible** for the production of Scripture.

    7. The human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated: the Bible **contains** but does not equal the Word of God.

Historical-Biblical Method

A. **Definition:** The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.

B. **Objective:** To arrrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it is fully known by the human author or his contemporaries (1 Peter 1:10-12).

C. **Basic Presuppositions:**

    1. *Sola Scriptura:* The authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation. (Isa 8:20)

    2. The Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism: biblical data is accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, validity, intelligibility, etc. (Isa 66:2)

    3. Suspension of the compelling principles of analogy to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture and in the process of the formation of Scripture. (2 Pet 1:19-21)

    4. Suspension of the principle of correlation (or natural cause and effect) to allow for the divine intervention in history as described in Scripture. (Heb 1:1-2)

    5. **Unity** of Scripture, since the many human authors are superintended by one divine author; therefore Scripture can be compared with Scripture to arrive at biblical doctrine. (Luke 24:27; 1 Cor 2:13)

    6. **Timeless** nature of Scripture: God speaks through the prophet to a specific culture, yet the message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth. (John 10:35)

    7. The divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished or separated: the Bible equals the Word of God. (2 Tim 3:16, 17)

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures:

1. **Literary (source) criticism: The attempt to hypothetically reconstruct and understan**d the process of literary development leading to the present form of the text, based on the assumption that sources are a product of the life setting of the community which produced them (often in opposition to specific Scriptural statements regarding the origin and nature of the sources.)

2. **Form criticism:** The attempt to provide a conjectured reconstruction of the process of pre-literary (oral) development behind the various literary forms, based upon the assumption that the biblical material has an oral pre-history like conventional folk-literature and like folk-literature arises on the basis of traditions which are formed according to the laws inherent in the development of folk traditions.

3. **Redaction criticism:** The attempt to discover and describe the life setting, sociological and theological motivations which determined the basis upon which the redactor selected, modified, reconstructed, edited, altered or added to traditional materials in order to make them say what was appropriate within his new life setting according to new theological concerns; assumes that each redactor has a unique theology and life setting which differs from (and may contradict) his sources and other redactors.

4. **Tradition history**: The attempt to trace the precompositional history of traditions from stage to stage as passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation to the final written form; based upon the assumption that each generation interpretively reshaped the material.

5. **Canon criticism:** The attempt to reconstruct the life setting (sociological and theological forces) in the synagogue and the Early Church that determined the present shape and contents of the biblical canon; assumes that human forces explain the canonization process.

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures:

1. **Literary analysis:** Examination of the literary characteristics of the biblical materials in their canonical form, accepting as a unity those units of Scripture that are presented as such, and accepting at face value the specific Scriptural statements regarding the origins and nature of the biblical materials.

2. **Form analysis:** An attempt to describe and classify the various types of literature found in (the canonical form of) Scripture, accepting at face value the life setting for each form as indicated by the biblical data.

3. **Theological analysis of Biblical books:** A study of the particular theological emphasis of each Bible writer (according to his own mind set and capacity to understand), seen within the larger context of the unity of the whole Scripture that allows the Bible to be its own interpreter and the various theological emphases to be in harmony with each other.

4. **Diachronic (thematic) analysis:** The attempt to trace the development of various themes and motives chronologically (through the Bible in its canonical form); based upon the Scriptural position that God gives added (progressive) revelation to later generations, which, however, is in full harmony with all previous revelation.

5. **History of the canon:** Examination of the process of canonization of Scripture, assuming that the criteria for canonicity are inherent in the biblical materials as inspired by God, and that the Holy Spirit guided the Jewish and Christian communities to recognize these canonical books which preserved the witness of the OT prophets and the NT apostles.

Notice the differences in definition, objective, and basic presuppositions. With regard to the presuppositions of the historical-critical method the first ("secular norm") represents the basic orientation point of the method: "human reason and the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion of truth."[14] Presuppositions 2-4 indicate the crucial underlying principles of the method (see the classic formulation of these by Troeltzsch in 1913); and the last three indicate the method leads to the destruction of the unity, timeless relevance, and full authority of Scripture.

Note how the historical-biblical approach to hermeneutics rejects each of these presuppositions based upon biblical evidence. With regard to the principle of criticism in particular, Gerhard Maier, a noted German scholar who broke with the historical-critical method, writes: "a *critical* method must fail, because it represents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpoint to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text--not even on the basis of a partially recognized an applied revelation-- but it is a let-me-be-corrected."[15]

As to the basic hermeneutical procedures, note how both methods analyze historical context, literary features, genre or literary type, theology of the writer, the development of themes, and the process of canonization. But the historical-biblical approach rejects the principle of criticism; it *analyzes*, but refuses to *critique* the Bible; it accepts the text of Scripture at face value as true, and refuses to engage in the threefold process of dissection, conjecture, and hypothetical reconstruction (often contrary to the claims of the text) that is at the heart of all historical-critical analysis.

Some evangelical scholars in recent decades have attempted to "rehabilitate" the historical-critical method by removing its anti-supernatural bias and other objectionable features and still retain the method. However, Adventists believe that this is not really possible, because presuppositions and method are inextricably interwoven. The basis of the historical critical method is secular historical science, which by its very nature methodologically excludes the supernatural and instead seeks natural causes for historical events.

The central presupposition of the historical critical method is the principle of criticism,[16] according to which nothing is accepted at face value but everything must be verified or corrected by reexamining the evidence. The Bible is always open to correction and therefore the human interpreter is the final determiner of truth, and his reason or experience the final test of the authenticity of a passage. As long as this basic principle is retained even to the slightest degree, the danger of the historical-critical method has not been averted, even though the supernatural element in theory may be accepted. And if this principle of criticism is removed, it ceases to be a historical-*critical* method. The presence or absence of the fundamental principle of criticism is really the litmus test of whether or not critical methodology is being employed. Seventh-day Adventists have taken an official stand against even a modified version of the historical critical method which retains the principle of criticism: "Even a modified use of this [the historical-critical] method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists."[17]

Those who follow the historical-biblical method apply the same study *tools* utilized in historical criticism. There is careful attention given to historical, literary and linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and theological details, as we will outline in the next section of this paper. But while utilizing the gains brought about by the historical-critical method in sharpening various study tools for *analysis* of the biblical text, there is an consistent intent in historical-biblical study to eliminate the element of *criticism* that stands as judge upon the Word.

There is a major recent paradigm shift in critical biblical studies toward various new literary-critical hermeneutical approaches. These critical procedures usually do not deny the results of historical-criticism, nor abandon the central principle of criticism, but rather bracket out the historical questions concerning of the historical development of the biblical text and concentrate upon its final canonical shape.

Many of these literary-critical hermeneutical approaches focus upon the final form of the biblical text

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14. Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 45.

15. Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 23.

16. The word "criticism" is used here in its technical sense of Cartesian "methodological doubt." See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, Fortress Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 56-57.

17. Methods of Bible Study Committee Report, approved at Annual Council, 1986, printed in *Adventist Review*, Jan 22, 1987, p. 5.

as a literary work of art. These synchronic approaches (i.e.,approaches which deal with the final form of the text) include such (overlapping) procedures as rhetorical criticism (James Muilenberg), New Literary criticism (poetic and narrative analysis, Robert Alter), and close reading (Meir Weiss). Common to all of these is the concern for the text as a finished work of art. Adventists welcome this renewed interest upon the synchronic analysis of the received canonical form of the biblical text, and appreciate many of the tools of analysis developed within these approaches. Unfortunately, however, in these approaches as commonly practiced by critical scholars, the literary productions of the Bible are usually divorced from history and regarded as works of fiction or myth, with their own "autonomous imaginative universe" and "imitation of reality." Emphasis is placed upon the various literary conventions utilized (consciously or unconsciously) by the writer as he creatively crafts the fictional biblical "story" into a literary work of art. Such presuppositions that ignore, or go against the historical claims of the biblical texts are rejected by Adventist interpreters.

Another recent synchronic approach is structuralism. Biblical structuralism builds upon modern linguistic theory fathered by the French theorist Claude Levi-Strauss, and has been developed in the USA by such scholars as Daniel Patte. Its main purpose is to "decode" the text to uncover the subconscious "deep-structures" universally inherent in language that deterministically impose themselves upon the writer. The divine absolute in this method is replaced by an absolute from below--the deep structures of language. A related literary approach is semiotics, or "sign-theory", fathered by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Pierce, which focuses upon the linguistic codes that form the framework within which the message of the text is given (much like the musical staff and clef in music where the specific notes may be placed). The concern of these approaches is upon neither the history nor the meaning of the text, but upon the layers of linguistic structures or sign-systems underlying the message. These approaches have limited value in Adventist hermeneutics inasmuch as fundamental presuppositions tend to compromise the *sola Scriptura* principle.

In recent decades there have been developed a number of other approaches to Scripture that retain the critical presuppositions of the historical-critical method, but focus attention upon other goals than hypothet-

ically reconstructing the historical development of the biblical text. Some of these postmodern approaches build upon new trends that have been mentioned in previous paragraphs. Major examples include the following: philosophical hermeneutics (the metacritical hermeneutical theory of Gadamer and the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval of Ricoeur); hermeneutics of socio-critical theory, including sociological criticism (Gottwald), liberation (Gutierrez) and feminist hermeneutic (Trible); reader-response criticism (McKnight), and deconstructionism (Derrida).

In these postmodern methodologies, no longer is there a single objective, normative meaning of Scripture: rather there is a feminist reading, a black reading, an Asian reading, a Lutheran reading, etc. All are seen to have their own validity as the reader's horizon merges with the horizon of the biblical text. These latter approaches have provided some useful insights into the biblical text, and rightfully point out the need for the modern interpreter to recognize his/her individual cultural context, but the common tendency is to have some external norm--be it philosophy, sociology, Marxist political theory, feminism, or the subjectivism of the reader--which replaces the *sola Scriptura* principle and relativizes Scripture.

B. Biblical Interpretative Steps Arising from Scripture

Most Judeo-Christian writers on the proper hermeneutical approach to Scripture simply list the various interpretive steps. But a full commitment to *sola Scriptura* would seem to imply that all these basic guidelines also either explicitly or implicitly arise from Scripture itself.

We may interject here that many modern scholars do not consider the Bible writers' own hermeneutical practice a very helpful place to go for guidance in developing a sound hermeneutic. It is claimed that the NT writers often follow the first-century prevailing Jewish rabbinic methods of exegesis that are often not faithful to the original meaning of the OT text. But the recently published dissertation by David I. Brewer, which may be destined to rock the presuppositions of current critical scholarship regarding first-century Jewish exegetical methods, demonstrates that "the predecessors of the rabbis before 70 CE did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things."[18] Brew-

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18. David I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), p. 1.

er's work calls for a fresh examination of NT exegetical methods in light of these conclusions. This "fresh examination" of the NT has already begun in recent decades, and a number of studies of various NT passages have concluded that NT writers were careful to faithfully represent the original plain meaning of the OT texts for the NT readers.[19]

Let us now consider the basic interpretative guidelines emerging from the Bible writers' own hermeneutic.

1. Text and Translation. Since the focus of the hermeneutical enterprise is upon the written Word, it is of great importance that the original text of the Bible be preserved as far as possible. The Bible itself underscores the vital necessity of preserving the words of sacred Scripture (see Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5, 6; Rev 22:18, 19; cf. Deut 31:9-13, 26). The principles of textual study must be carefully controlled from within Scripture.[20]

The Scriptures also give numerous examples of the need for a faithful translation of the words of Scripture into the target language (Neh 8:8; Matt 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:42; 9:7; Acts 9:36; 13:8; Heb 7:2). The translation of Scripture should remain as faithful as possible to both the form and content of the original.[21]

2. Historical Context/Questions of Introduction. The OT is largely a history book. The accounts of Creation, Fall, Flood, Patriarchs, emergence of Israel, Exodus, Conquest of Canaan, Judges, Kings, and Prophets of the United and divided Monarchy, Exile, Return, rebuilding of the Temple—all the persons, events and institutions of the OT are presented as straightforward history. The later OT prophets, Jesus, and the NT writers continually refer back to the earlier OT accounts, interpreting these as historically reliable descriptions of God's real space-time interrelationships with His people. The historical context of biblical narratives is accepted at face value as true, and there is thus no attempt to reconstruct history in a different way than presented in the biblical record. The NT writers, in their interpretation of the OT, show a remarkably clear acquaintance with the general flow and specific details of OT history (see, e.g., Stephen's

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19. See, e.g., Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982); George B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 49-51; Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), pp. 121-186; idem, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Symposium on Revelation–Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 99-130; idem, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, vol. 1, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), pp. 105-135; Charles H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures; The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Collins, 1952), pp. 59, 60; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament; His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), pp. 38-80; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); Lester J. Kuyper, *The Scripture Unbroken* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978); Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1983); R. M. Moody, "The Habakkuk Quotation in Rom 1:17," *ExpT* 92 (1981): 205-208.

This is not to say that every time a Scripture is referred to in passing, that the NT authors are attempting an exegesis of the passage. Just as we today might say that we escaped "by the skin of our teeth" without exegeting Job 19:20, so the biblical writers are steeped in OT language and imagery, and may use Scriptural language without intending to exegete the passage alluded to. We refer rather to those NT instances where the biblical writer is clearly expounding the meaning of OT passages.

20. For a summary of the basic principles of textual analysis, see, e.g., Bruce K. Waltke, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 211-228; Gordon D. Fee, "The Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 419-433; C. F. Sitterly and J. H. Greenlee, "Text and MSS of the OT," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:798-822.

21. For a discussion of the basic principles in translation method, see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God, With Scripture and Topical Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974); Sakae Kubo and Walter F. Specht, *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible, rev.* and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983); and Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation,* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991).

speech in Acts 7; Paul's discussion of the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10). The typological arguments of the NT writers assumed the historical veracity of the persons, events, and institutions that were types; in fact, the whole force of their typological argument depended upon the historicity of these historical realities.[22]

In the inner-Scriptural hermeneutic of biblical writers, mention is often made of various questions of introduction, and these questions sometimes become crucial to the Bible author's argument. In each case, the plain declaration of the text is accepted as accurately portraying the authorship, chronology, and life setting for the text. For example, the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 (as stated in the superscription of the psalm) is crucial to Jesus' final clinching, unanswerable argument concerning His Messiahship (Matt 22:41-46). Again, Davidic authorship of Psalm 16 is also crucial to Peter in his Pentecost sermon to convince the Jews of the predicted resurrection of the Messiah (Acts 2:25-35).

The life setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of Abraham's justification by faith in the Genesis account is very significant in Paul's argument to the Romans, to show that it was before Abraham had been circumcised that this had happened (Rom 4:1-12). For Paul there is no question of a hypothetically reconstructed life setting that gave rise to the account, but the apostle—and all the other biblical writers consistently throughout Scripture—accept the life setting that is set forth in the biblical text.

Thus by precept and example Scripture underscores the importance of interpreting the biblical material in its literal, historical sense, including details of chronology, geography, and miraculous divine interventions in history.

3. Literary context/analysis. For the biblical writers the literary context of the Scriptures was no less important than the historical context. Scripture is not only a history book, but a literary work of art. Recent study is giving increasing attention to the literary characteristics and conventions of Scripture.[23]

Scripture itself gives us countless explicit and implicit indicators of the presence of its literary qualities and the importance of recognizing these as part of the hermeneutical task.

One of the first tasks in interpreting a given passage in its immediate literary context is to determine the limits of the passage, in terms of paragraphs, pericopae, or stanzas. Even though the paragraph and chapter divisions of our modern versions of the Bible have been added much later than biblical times, the Bible writers often provided indicators of passage limits and in their interpretation of antecedent Scripture show awareness of the discreet units of Scripture. In the book of Genesis, for example, the book is divided neatly into ten sections, each identified by the phrase "the generations [*toledôth*] of . . . ." In the Psalms, along with the superscriptions introducing individual psalms, a number of psalms contain (a) stanzas that naturally divide the sections of the psalm (see, e.g., Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5), or (b) the word "selah" (71 times in Psalms: e.g., Ps 46:3, 7, 11), or (c) an acrostic (e.g., Psalm 119, with every succeeding eight verses starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet).

The Bible writers repeatedly identify their written materials in terms of specific genres or literary types. A few samples include: "history" or "account" (Hebrew *toledôth*, Gen 2:4, plus 12 more times throughout Genesis), legal material (Exod 21:1; Deut 4:44, 45; and throughout the Pentateuch), covenant making and renewal (e.g., the whole book of Deuteronomy; see Deut 29:1, 14, 15), riddles (Judg 14:10-18), court chronicles (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:1), psalms (with various subdivisions of types of psalms, indicated in the superscriptions) or songs (Cant 1:1), proverbs (e.g., Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), prophetic oracles or "burdens" (Hebrew *massā*, e.g., Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Mal 1:1), visions (e.g., Dan 8:1, 2; Obadiah 1), covenant lawsuit (Hebrew *rîb*, e.g., Isa 3:13; Hos 4:1; Mic 6:1), lamentation (Hebrew *qîn āh*, Ezek 27:32; Amos 5:1; Lamentations), gospels (e.g., Mark 1:1), parables (e.g., Mark 4:2), "figures" (Greek *paraoimia*; John 10:6; 16:25), epistles (e.g., Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Pet 3:1, 16; including Pauline, Petrine, Johannine, James, and Jude), and apocalyptic (the *apokalypsis* or Revelation of John; Rev 1:1). Each of these genres has special char-

22. Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures,* Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

23. Unfortunately, however, this frequently comes at the cost of ignoring the historical nature of the material; Scripture is often treated in the same way as a modern work of fiction, with its own fictive story world. See, e.g., Robert Alter, T*he Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); idem, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 471-514; Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1984).

acteristics that emerge from a careful study, and these characteristics are often significant in interpreting the message that is transmitted through the particular literary type. Literary form and interpretation of content go hand in hand.

In more general depiction of literary genre, the Biblical materials separate themselves into poetry and prose. The poetic sections of Scripture (some 40% of the OT) are characterized particularly by various kinds of parallelism ("thought rhyme") and to a lesser degree by meter and stanzas (or strophes). The prose may be of various kinds, such as narrative, legal and cultic material.

The literary structure, both on the macro-structural and micro-structural levels, is a crucial part of the analysis of a passage, often providing a key to the flow of thought or central theological themes. Bible writers have structured their material by such devices as matching parallelism (see the book of Jonah[24]), reverse parallelism (or chiasm, e.g., the books of Leviticus[25] and Revelation[26]), inclusio or "envelope construction" (e.g., Ps 8:1, 9; 103:1, 22), acrostic (Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), qinah (3+2 meter, e.g., the book of Lamentations[27]), and suzerainty treaty components (e.g., the book of Deuteronomy[28]).

Many other literary techniques and conventions, and stylistic elements are utilized by the biblical writers. We find the employment of irony, metonymy, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, assonance, paronomasia (pun/play on words), etc. All of these literary features are important for the biblical writer as they contribute to the framing and forming of the message, and they are essential for the interpreter to examine as he/she seeks to understand the meaning of a given passage.

4. Grammatical/Syntactical/SemanticAnalysis
Scripture, and in particular the NT interpretation of the OT, provides evidence for engaging in the analysis of the grammatical forms and syntactical relationships, with attention to the meaning of various words in context, in order to arrive at the plain, straightforward meaning of the passage being interpreted.

A classic example of grammatical sensitivity on the part of the NT writers is in Paul's interpretation of the word "seed" in Galatians 3. Citing Gen 12:7, 22:17-18 and 24:7, Paul recognizes (Gal 3:16) that the singular form of "seed" narrows in meaning to single "Seed"—the Messiah—while a few verses later (Gal 3:29) he correctly points to the collective plural aspect of this same term in its wider context.[29]

A vivid example of the apostle's syntactical sensitivity is in the citation of Ps 45:6, 7 in Heb 1:8, 9: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." The syntax of the Hebrew original points to One who is God, who is also anointed by God, thus implying the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead.

There are numerous examples in Scripture where the NT writers are careful to represent faithfully the meaning of crucial words in the original OT passage. Note, e.g., Paul's use of "the just shall live by *faith*" (Rom 1:17 citing Hab 2:4[30]); Matthew's selection of the LXX *parthenos* "virgin" to best represent the He-

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24. Gerhard F. Hasel, *Jonah, Messenger of the Eleventh Hour* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1976), p. 101.
25. William Shea, "Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus," in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), p. 149.
26. Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions," in *Symposium on Revelation–Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 36, 37.
27. William H. Shea, "The *qinah* Structure of the Book of Lamentations," *Biblica* 60/1 (1979): 103-107.
28. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963).
29. Note in particular the usage of *zera>* in Gen 22:17, where the first occurrence of the word in the verse clearly has a plural idea in the context of "the stars of the heaven" and "the sand which is on the seashore," whereas the second occurrence of *zera>* in vs. 17b narrows to a singular "Seed" in the context of "his [singular] enemies." This usage parallels Gen 3:15, where in a similar way the word *zera>* moves from collective/plural to singular in meaning. See O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 93-103.
30. See Moody, pp. 205-208.

brew *almāh* of Isa 7:14 ("A virgin shall conceive . . . ," Matt 1:22, 23[31] NIV); and Christ's use of the word "gods" in John 10:34, citing Ps 82:6.[32]

Numerous other examples may be cited, where the NT quotation of an OT passage involves the NT writer's recognition of the wider context of the OT citation. This larger OT context is frequently the key to understanding the interpretation drawn by the NT writer. For example, C. H. Dodd has shown how Peter alludes to the larger context of Joel 2 in his Pentecost sermon, and again, how that Matthew's interpretation of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15 is not taking the OT passage out of context, but rather seeing it in the larger context of the eschatological/Messianic New Exodus motif in Hosea and the other eighth-century prophets.[33]

The grammatical-syntactical and semantic-contextual analysis often becomes more involved for us today than for those whose native tongue was the living biblical Hebrew/Aramaic or *koine* Greek languages. It is necessary now to make use of appropriate grammars, lexicons, concordances, theological wordbooks, and commentaries.

5. Theological Context/Analysis. The Biblical writers provide abundant evidence for the need to ascertain the theological message of a passage as part of the hermeneutical enterprise.

For examples, Jesus lays bare the far-reaching theological implications of the Decalogue in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-28). The Jerusalem Council sets forth the theological import of Amos 9:11, 12–that Gentiles need not become Jews in order to become Christians (Acts 15:13-21). Paul captures the theological essence of sin in various OT passages (Rom 3:8-20) and of righteousness by faith in his ex-

position of Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:1, 2 (Romans 4). Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) delineates the theology of inaugurated eschatology found in Joel 2, and his first epistle explores the theological dimensions of the Messiah's atoning work as set forth in Isaiah 53 (1 Pet 2:21-25).

The theological messages of the NT writers presuppose, build upon, and stand in continuity with, the major OT theological themes such as God, Man, Creation-Fall, Sin, Covenant, Sabbath, Law, Promise, Remnant, Salvation, Sanctuary, and Eschatology.

The NT writers also place their theological analyses of specific passages within the larger context of the multiplex "grand central theme" or metanarrative of Scripture as set forth in the opening and closing pages of the Bible (Genesis 1-3; Revelation 20-22[34]): creation and the original divine design for this world, the character of God, the rise of the cosmic moral conflict (Great Controversy) in the setting of the sanctuary, the plan of redemption-restoration centering in Christ and His atoning work, and the eschatological judgment and end of sin at the climax of history.[35]

The theological thought-patterns of NT writers, though expressed in Greek, stay within the trajectory of biblical Hebrew thought, and do not imbibe alien thought-forms of the prevailing surrounding culture such as gnosticism and platonic dualism.[36]

6. The Deeper Meaning of Scripture. In their exploration of the "deeper" meaning of Scripture, in particular with regard to the typological fulfillment of OT persons, events, and institutions, the NT writers do not read back into the OT what is not already there ("inspired *eisegesis*), or what is not apparent to the human researcher (*sensus plenior*), or an arbitrary

31. See Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 266-268.
32. See ibid, pp. 373, 374.
33. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, pp. 59, 60; cf. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 43-53.
34. Cf. Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 125, 190.
35. See Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 102-119.
36. For analysis of Hebrew thought, see, e.g., Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael F. Gibson (New York, NY: Desclee Company, 1960); Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians*, *A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993); and Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960) (whose basic thesis has not been overturned despite criticisms of some lines of argumentation by James Barr, *A Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961]). See also G. E. Ladd, whose *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) has shown the consistent biblical salvation-historical, inaugurated-consummated eschatological pattern throughout the NT. This is also true with regard to the book of Hebrews, despite numerous claims for Platonic dualism in the book. See Ronald Williamson's decisive refutation of these claims in *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

assigning of meaning that strips away the historical "husk" (*allegory*). Rather they remain faithful to the OT Scriptures, which have already indicated which persons, events, and institutions God has divinely designed to serve as prefigurations of Jesus Christ and the Gospel realities brought about by Him.[37] The NT writers simply announce the antitypical fulfillment of what had already been verbally indicated by the OT prophets.

The NT writers do not give an exhaustive list of OT types, but show the hermeneutical procedure, controlled by the OT indicators, of identifying biblical types. Furthermore, the NT writers provide a theological (salvation-historical) substructure for interpreting the eschatological fulfillment of OT types. Based upon a clear theological understanding of the theocratic kingdom of Israel and the kingdom prophecies within the context of covenant blessings and curses, the NT reveals a three-stage fulfillment of the OT types and kingdom prophecies—in Christ, in the church, and in the apocalyptic wind-up of salvation history. Each stage has a different modality of fulfillment based upon the nature of Christ's presence and reign.[38] Thus the NT writers have worked out a sound hermeneutic for interpreting the types and kingdom prophecies of the OT, built upon solid controls arising from the OT scriptures.

7. Contemporary Application. For the NT biblical writers, the contemporary application arises naturally out of their theological interpretation of OT passages. We have just noted how the application of the types and kingdom prophecies of the OT arises from understanding the three-stage fulfillment within salvation history. All the promises of God have their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:20), and all the OT types find their basic fulfillment in Him; and if we are spiritually part of the body of Christ, we therefore share in the fulfillment of those prophetic and typological promises, and yet await sharing in their final glorious literal apocalyptic fulfillment. These basic hermeneutical

principles dealing with the fulfillment of Israel-centered prophecies in the NT provide a Christo-centric approach which safeguards against dispensationalism and literalism.

The biblical writers insist that the message of Scripture is not culture-bound, applicable only for a certain people and a certain time, but permanent and universally applicable. Peter, citing Isa 40:6-8, forcefully states, "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:23-25).

Most of the ethical instruction in the NT gospels and epistles may be seen as the practical homiletical application of OT passages: for example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-32) applying the principles of the Decalogue; James' application of the principles of Leviticus 19 throughout his epistle;[39] and Peter's ethical instruction building on "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16; citing Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7).

Of course, it is true that certain parts of the OT, in particular the ceremonial/sanctuary ritual laws and the enforcement of Israel's civil/theocratic laws, are no longer binding upon Christians. The NT writers do not arbitrarily (by a casebook approach to Scripture) decide what laws are still relevant, but they consistently recognize the criteria within the OT itself indicating which laws are universally binding.[40]

The general principle, then, articulated and illustrated by the NT writers in their homiletical application of Scripture, is to assume the transcultural and transtemporal relevancy of biblical instruction unless Scripture itself gives us criteria limiting this relevancy. As William Larkin states it, "all Scripture, including both form and meaning, is binding unless Scripture itself indicates otherwise."[41]

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37. See Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," pp. 106, 128.
38. See ibid, pp. 106-108, 129, 130, and Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation,* Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983).
39. See Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 221-224.
40. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament," pp. 119-125.
41. See William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 316, who lists various possible criteria for nonnormativeness within Scripture: "limited recipient, limited cultural conditions for fulfillment, limited cultural rationale, or a limiting larger context." Even these cases, Larkin argues, involve only the form, and not the meaning of Scripture, and call for the reduction of the cultural-specific form to a principle, and the substitution of a contemporary form compatible with it. See Larkin, pp. 316-318, for illustrations drawn from the way the NT writers used the OT.

The final goal of interpreting Scripture is to make practical application of each passage to the individual life. Christ and the NT apostles repeatedly drove home the message of the gospel contained in the Scriptures in order to bring the hearers or readers to salvation and an ever closer personal relationship with God.

At the Exodus God articulated a principle in which each succeeding generation of Israelite should consider that he/she personally came out of Egypt (Exod 12:26, 27; 13:8, 9), and this principle of personalization was repeated many times, both to OT Israel (Deut 5:2-4; 6:20, 21; Josh 24:6-8) and to spiritual Israel (Gal 3:29; Rev 15:1, 2; 2 Cor 5:14, 15, 21; Rom 6:3-6; Eph 1:20; 2:6; Heb 4:3, 16; 6:19; 7:9, 10; 10:19, 20; 12:22-24). The Scripture should ultimately be read, and accepted as if I am the participant in the mighty saving acts of God—"I am there!"—as if God's messages are personally addressed to me. They are God's living and active Word to my soul. ❮

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