

ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The word ερμηνευω means "interpreter" as was first applied to Hermes as a messenger of the gods and to interpretation of "foreign tongues." The concept is doubly applicable to scripture because it contains a "message" or series of such and it was originally written in Hebrew and in Greek for the main part with some Aramaic sections.

A host of thinkers and scholars who have thrown their hats in the ring to suggest that their manner of interpretation should be adopted or at least push the "hermeneutic bandwagon" in a slightly different direction. It is good to know of what these guys were going on about before we come back to what I would call the **fundamental Reformation hermeneutic** and couple with it what I would call **fundamental contextualisation**.

1. Let's start with Rabbi Hillel. Hillel had seven golden rules the gist of which was that inferences from biblical text must be sound logic and should bear comparison with other scripture. This second principle enters into the best of received learning on the topic.

2. Philo developed "allegorical" interpretation of the books of the law where the anthropomorphic references to God were "re-interpreted" to suit the reader's preconceptions

3. Origen saw the literal or grammatical sense as only a start and sought to breathe a soul into the text by adducing a "spiritual" meaning. His was a classic departure from facts to enigmatic or secret meanings more eisegetical than exegetical. He so re-interpreted the accepted facts of biblical eschatology as to lay the groundwork for Augustine whose massive allegory "The city of God" effectively drew a line under the promises and purposes of God for Israel-whose history and purpose was counted at an end and so all the blessings of the Old Testament must needs accrue to the Church

4. Medieval thinkers added to the "literal" and "allegorical" the "moral" and the "anagogic".

The last third concept heightened application of scripture to Christian practice leading to the development of humility for example and the fourth brought the golden days of the kingdom into view after the heady days of Constantine passed and the church looked again beyond the little man had on earth.

5. The Reformation led by Luther and Calvin led back to the primary grammatical meaning.

Luther made strenuous attempts to master Greek with the help of Melancthon. Calvin rather slavishly insisted on a single meaning for each passage but in deference to the value of his method he looked at history context and language together whilst viewing biblical text.

6. Spinoza brought date purpose and authorship into the area of interpretation. This in time through the opportunity it presented within the enlightenment methodology shaded into historical and critical documentary research which departed wholly from "the story" or narrative of scripture in many instances and plunged into theories of Redaction like the Graf-Wellhausen JEDP hypothesis which took biblical interpretation up the garden path for the best part of a century.

7. Don Carson more recently brought us back to "words in context" and though his thoroughgoing insistence on context as predictive of the colour and choice of word signification governing our understanding of what is written is theoretically good I would make a plea in favour of wide exploration of words and meaning and caution against unnecessary departure from root meaning.

8. My personal stance is the Given Prophetic Contextual framework of scripture built on a fundamental literal understanding of scripture and illuminated by consideration of the **grammatical** sense coloured by the use of verbally inspired revelation or words chosen as the Spirit speaks expressly.

PROPHETICAL CONTEXTUAL HERMENEUTIC

DOCTRINE OF GOD & HERMENEUTICS

Let us begin with the holy name by which God revealed or "interpreted" HIMSELF to Moses. He said $\text{H\ddot{u}ha rva h\ddot{u}ha}$ "I am that I am" (Exodus 3.14). What the LORD actually said was "I will be what I will be". The LORD is telling Moses to convey to Israel that the "One who knows the future" and who "holds the future" and can "give his people a future" has sent him as a Prophet. The first writer of scripture has been primed to being the writing of scripture with the glorious future of God's salvation story and God's peoples' redemption and a finer and greater theocracy over the obedient than ever Egypt or this world's leaders could offer.

HOLY MEN SPOKE AS THEY WERE MOVED AHEAD

Moving on from this initial consideration look next at the men God chose to carry on His business. He chose people of faith "who sought a city" whose builder and maker is God. These men (and women) of faith would walk with God and believe that God was leading them to a great future. Peter says of them "Holy men spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit". He is telling us that God the Holy Ghost who indwelt the saints of old took them out of their setting and showed them again and again "things to come". Enoch is a very fine example. He foresaw the latter day coming again of Christ in company with a myriad of angels.

THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

This leads automatically to the understanding that the LORD the Spirit-the "Spirit of prophecy" is the true author of scripture and the men and women God chose to write the story of his providence and on-going prophetic developments towards the coming of Shiloh as Jacob foresaw the Christ were inspired and carried along in vision to speak "wiser than they knew." The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit upon the Church and its prophetic preachers and men and women of mission. The Holy Ghost "fills" the body and guarantees the inheritance we are taught to anticipate and promulgate amongst men.

WHERE IS PROPHETIC SCRIPTURE LEADING?

The canon of scripture consists of **the Torah**-which in all its 50 or more sections points forward to Christ and presents many intimations of Kingly Priesthood. Then emerge the **Former Prophets** during whose ministry Israel's Theocracy is established and the Davidic throne of which Christ shall be the final occupant. The Hebrew bible proceeds to introduce the **Major Prophets** and the **Minor Prophets** with the **Psalms of David**-many of which are prophetic set at the beginning of **The Writings**. The Hebrew Scriptures conclude with the book of Chronicles and mention of Cyrus who was predicted by Isaiah. A directive for the building of the temple concludes the Old Testament. This is significant because the Torah sets out with the story of Melchizadek whom Jews expect to fill His holy temple as the prophet Malachi predicted. Christians too expect our great High Priest Jesus Christ-who is none other than the Messiah that the Jewish people did not recognise. So JESUS CHRIST is born in Bethlehem in accordance with the prophets and dies and rises again according to the prophets. The gospels proclaim his salvation which must be carried to the whole world. Then will the purpose of God's revelation be complete-the Church (seen in cameo within Revelation 1-3 and taught in the epistles of Peter and Paul and other of the apostles) will be raptured and enter the city long quested. The golden age of the 70th week of Daniel will come at last but not before a Heptad of bitter judgments. Then will follow the great moment when this world will pass away like a scroll and the earth will be burned up and Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father when God Father Son and Spirit will be all in all in the New Heaven and Earth whose centre is the New Jerusalem where the throne of God remains in the permanent home of Righteousness. Towards this all of Revelation moves. Prophecy is the unvarying context of the whole bible. Multiple examples are written for our learning upon whom the ends of the world or the fulfillment of the ages has come!

APPLIED HERMENEUTICS

When you or I come to study any passage of scripture we need

- (a) To read it carefully- the lion share of scripture is to be received simply and literally as written
- (b) To look at the context in order to be informed of the matter and vein of which the prophet speaks and what the Spirit of prophecy is revealing?
- (c) To study the words by which revelation comes to us. Hermeneutics cannot be divorced from language. Behind each book there are stories or narratives-a manifest vision-behind each vision particular concepts which convey it to us-and behind the concepts words which can bring us joy or sorrow assurance or rebuke and many other effects. We need to watch our words & do drill to ensure that nothing in the verbal landscape has evaded us.
- (d) To compare scripture with scripture so that the more opaque readings may be illumined by the clearer passages.
- (e) To make sensible and logical deductions as Hillel taught and avoid wide allegory & contradictions.

Bob Coffey L'shuvkha Marya To the glory of the Lord Aramaic Bible Companion

