



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS711

COURSE TITLE: BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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CREDIT UNIT: 3

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COURSE GUIDE

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Introduction

CRS711: Biblical Hermeneutics is a one-semester, 2 credit unit course. It will be available to all students as a course in post-graduate diploma in theology.

The course which consists 15 units is a survey of the history, principles and methods of biblical interpretation. Particular attention is given to grammatical-historical principles of interpretation and examination of some selected biblical passages. The material has been especially developed for students in African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory pre-requisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignments is found in the separate file, which will be sent to you later. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What you will learn in this course

The overall aim of CRS711: Biblical Hermeneutics is to introduce you to the history, principles and methods of interpretation of the Bible. You will be exposed to the development of biblical hermeneutics from the period of the church fathers through the middle ages, the Reformation, to modern and contemporary periods. The contribution of some biblical scholars across the ages to the development of biblical interpretation will be highlighted.

Your understanding in this cause will help you to acquire and improve your skills in the use of certain principles for biblical interpretation. This will not only enrich your knowledge, it will also equip you to preach and teach the Word of God. In addition, this course will help you to have a better understanding of theology and related courses.

Course Aims

The aim of this course is to lead you in a survey of the history, principles and methods of biblical interpretation. This will be achieved by aiming to:

Introduce you to the meaning, rationale and importance of biblical hermeneutics;

Lead you to survey the history of biblical hermeneutics at the various periods of the church history: patristic/medieval, Reformation, modern/contemporary;

Assist you to describe the major schools of Bible interpretation;

Highlight the contribution of some scholars in the historical development of biblical hermeneutics;

Expose you to some of the principles and methods of biblical hermeneutics;

Explain to you the interpretation of different literary types on the Bible (Old and New Testaments);

Apply the principles and methods surveyed to interpret some selected Bible passages. .

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, there are set overall objectives. In addition, each unit also has specific objectives. The unit objectives are always included at the beginning of a unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. In this way you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

Define the meaning and state the rationale and importance of biblical hermeneutics;

Discuss the history of how the interpretation of the Bible developed from the patristic to the contemporary periods;
List and describe the major schools of Bible interpretation;
Explain the contributions of some scholars to the development of biblical hermeneutics;

Discuss the principles and methods of biblical hermeneutics;
Identify and analyse different literary types in the Bible (Old and New Testaments);
Apply principles of biblical interpretation to some passages.

Working through this course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignments File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. They are provided by NOUN. Obtain your copy. You may also be required to purchase your own copy from the bookshops. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

Study Units

There are sixteen study units in this course, as follows:

Module 1

Unit 1.	Fundamentals of biblical Hermeneutics
Unit 2.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics I – Patristic/Medieval Period
Unit 3.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics II - Reformation
Unit 4.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics III – Modern/Contemporary Period
Unit 5.	Some Other Hermeneutical Issues and Approaches

Module 2

Unit 1	Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics I - Schools of Bible Interpretation
Unit 2	Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics II – Historical/Grammatical Method
Unit 3	Inductive and Deductive Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics
Unit 4	Special Literary Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics
Unit 5	Methods of Biblical Criticism

Module 3

Unit 1	Interpretation of the Old Testament I – History, Law
Unit 2	Interpretation of the Old Testament II – Poetry and Wisdom Literature
Unit 3	Interpretation of the New Testament I – The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles
Unit 4	Interpretation of the New Testament II – Epistles and Revelation
Unit 5	Application and Correlation

The first five units examine the fundamentals of biblical hermeneutics, survey the history and consider some hermeneutical issues. The next five units discuss the principles, schools and methods of interpretation of the Bible. The last five units investigate the interpretation of specific literary types in the Bible and apply the principles of biblical interpretation to some passages.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor-

marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Set Textbooks

You are required to purchase these textbooks stated below. They are compulsory for you. You need them for this and some other theology courses.

1. *The Holy Bible* (RSV or NIV).
2. Virkler, Henry A. (1981). *Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
3. Nihinlola, Emiola (1997). *The Task of Bible Interpretation*. Ibadan: Sceptre Prints Ltd.

Assignment File

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this *Course Guide* in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The *Presentation Schedule* included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs)

There are fifteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the sixteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment send it, together with TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given to the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot

complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination of CRS711 will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Units	Title of work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of unit)
	Course Guide	1	
Module 1			
Unit	Fundamentals of Biblical Hermeneutics	1	Assignment 1
1.			
2.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics I – Patristic/Medieval Period	2	Assignment 2
3.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics II – Reformation Period	3	Assignment 3
4.	History of Biblical Hermeneutics III – Modern/Contemporary Period	4	Assignment 4
5.	Some Other Hermeneutical Issues and Approaches	5	Assignment 5
Module 2			
Unit			
1.	Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics I – Schools of Interpretation	6	Assignment 6
2.	Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics II – Historical/Grammatical Method	7	Assignment 7
3.	Inductive and Deductive Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics	8	Assignment 8
4.	Special Literary Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics	9	Assignment 9
5	Methods of Biblical Criticism	11	Assignment 11
Module 3			
Unit			
1.	Interpretation of the Old Testament I – History and Law	12	Assignment 12
2.	Interpretation of the Old Testament II – Poetry and Wisdom Literature	13	Assignment 13
3.	Interpretation of the New Testament I – The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles	14	Assignment 14
4.	Interpretation of the New Testament II	15	Assignment

	– Epistles and Revelation		15
5	Application and Correlation	15	Assignment 16
16	Revision and E	16	
17	Examination	17	

Table 2: Course Overview

How to get the most from this course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a *Reading* section.

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this *Course Guide* thoroughly.
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you

choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to *Unit 1* and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this *Course Guide*).

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two

working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,
- you have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

CRS711 intends to lead you in a survey of the history, principles and methods of biblical hermeneutics. Upon the completion of this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What is then meaning, rationale and importance biblical hermeneutics?
- How did the interpretation of the Bible develop historically from the patristic to the cotemporary periods?
- What are the major schools of Bible interpretation?
- How did some scholars contribute to the development of biblical hermeneutics?
- What are the principles and methods of biblical hermeneutics?
- What are the different literary types in the Bible?
- How can you apply principles of biblical interpretation to some passages?

Of course, the questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. The study of Biblical hermeneutics is an academic and spiritual exercise. We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful.

We wish you every success in your programme.



MAIN COURSE

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COURSE**

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MODULE 1

Unit 1	Fundamentals of Biblical Hermeneutics
Unit 2	History of Biblical Hermeneutics I – Patristic/ Medieval Period
Unit 3	History of Biblical Hermeneutics II – Reformation Period
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Unit 5	Some Other Hermeneutical Issues and Approaches

UNIT 1 FUNDAMENTALS OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
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3.1	Origin/Etymology of Hermeneutics
3.1.1	Definition of Hermeneutics
3.1.2	Rationale for Hermeneutics
3.1.3	Meaning of Biblical Hermeneutics
3.1.4	Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis
3.1.5	Importance of Biblical Hermeneutics
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor Marked Assignments
7.0	References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One basic tool that every theologian need is the ability to interpret the Bible with competence. This is because theology involves a critical study of the Bible and some other sources to think about God. This study unit begins by exploring the origin/etymology, definition and rationale for Hermeneutics in general. It will then examine the meaning of Biblical Hermeneutics, relationship of Biblical Hermeneutics to exegesis and the importance of Biblical Hermeneutics in particular.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Explain the etymology/origin of Hermeneutics,
- ii) State the definition and rationale for Hermeneutics,
- iii) Define Biblical Hermeneutics,
- iv) Explain the relationship of Biblical Hermeneutics to exegesis
- v) Discuss the importance of Biblical Hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Origin/Etymology of Hermeneutics

The term Hermeneutics points back to the Greek word *hermeneien* which means “to interpret.” This is a reference to the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods. His task was to explain the decisions of the gods to the humans. *Hermaneia* thus means interpretation or commentary.

In classical literature the verb *hermeneus* (interpret) is used in such senses as “to express aloud,” “to explain,” or “to translate.” It “often appears in contexts which stress the responsibility of human beings rightly to interpret ancient writings thought to contain messages from the gods.’ In view of this root meaning of the word Hermeneutics, one important continuing question of all interpreters is “how can we today understand the sense of the texts, especially of ancient texts whose world view we no longer share?”

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain the etymology/origin of the word Hermeneutics.

3.1.1 Definition of Hermeneutics

While the contemporary use of the term Hermeneutics varies, in a Biblical and Theological context, it refers usually to the theory of text interpretation. Thus, Hermeneutics can be defined as the art and science of the process of interpretation. Interpretation is an art because of the flexibility of interpretation by the individual person involved. It is also a science because it has to follow some rules to prevent “arbitrary” interpretation of individual.

Hermeneutics involves the determination of the original meaning of a text which leads to elucidation of its sense for modern readers.

Hermeneutics is deeply involved in communication because we speak or write to give meaning; we also listen and read to receive meaning.

Two major concerns of Hermeneutics as shall be seen in this course are: One, the development of criteria for text interpretation; Two, the act of interpretation itself. Therefore, in addition to the study of rules or principles for the interpretation of particular texts, Hermeneutics involves philosophical inquiry, calling upon lexical, linguistic, literary and other disciplines.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Define the term Hermeneutics.

3.1.2 Rationale for Hermeneutics

Having considered the meaning of Hermeneutics we will now look at the reasons for the task. According to Benard L. Rahmm (1967, 100) there is a need for Hermeneutics because of the gap that usually “exists between the interpreter and the materials to be interpreted and rules must be set up to bridge the gap.” The gap may be historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical/biological and philosophical.

Historical gap is the separation in time between the author and the reader.

Cultural gap is the difference between the cultures of the writer and the recipient.

There is **linguistic gap** when the text is originally written in a different language.

The gap is **geological/biological** if the document originates in a different geographical region.

There is a **philosophical gap** when there is a difference of attitude toward life and the universe between the writer and the interpreter of the text.

Self-Assessment Exercise

State the rationale for Hermeneutics.

3.1.3 Meaning of Biblical Hermeneutics

Biblical Hermeneutics is a technical kind within the larger comprehension of Hermeneutics. It is also called sacred Hermeneutics. Biblical Hermeneutics can be defined as the study of the rules or “principles which pertain to the interpretation of Holy Scripture.” Many Bible passages illustrate the task of Biblical Hermeneutics. Some examples are Genesis 40:8; Ecc. 8:1; Daniel 2:28; Luke 24:27.

As a theological discipline, the goal of Hermeneutics is the proper interpretation of Scripture. Biblical Hermeneutics can be further divided into Old Testament Hermeneutics and New Testament Hermeneutics. In this course we shall combine both Old and New Testament Hermeneutics.

Theology and Hermeneutics are so close that William J. Hill OP (1988, 293) even asserted: “Theology is thus Hermeneutics insofar as it is an interpretation, or reinterpretation, of the Word of God that always summons every past event or scriptural account.” One way to also define Theology is an interpretative analysis of the revelation of God in nature, Jesus Christ and the Bible. The Bible is the primary and major source of every Christian Theology. Bible Hermeneutics is a Theological task because it involves interpretation of the Word of God directly, primarily and interpretation of God, ultimately, by inference.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Define biblical hermeneutics.

3.1.4 Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Our examination of the meaning of Biblical Hermeneutics above shows that it is related to Biblical exegesis and other fields of Biblical study like Biblical criticism, Biblical and systematic Theologies. This section will consider the connection of Biblical Hermeneutics with exegesis and exposition. Actually Hermeneutical theories are formulated from the issues of exegesis. Hermeneutics begins with exegesis and continues with exposition. Biblical Hermeneutics, exegesis and preaching thus form one continuum.

We can define **exegesis** as “the process of getting out of a text what it actually says in its original setting.” Biblical exegesis is thus a scientific effort to ascertain the meaning of the text; it is the Word of God understood historically. In exegesis the interpreter or preacher concentrates on the meaning of the texts as meant for the original readers.

Exposition is the relevant proclamation of the text to the congregation. It is the Word of God made relevant to present time and place. Exposition grows out of exegesis. In exposition the preacher is concerned with the application and relevance of the text for the contemporary generation. Therefore, every kind of preaching (textual, topical or expository) rests upon sound interpretation of the Word of God.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Explain the connection between Biblical Hermeneutics and exegesis.

3.1.5 Importance of Biblical Hermeneutics

Biblical Hermeneutics is very important not only as a Theological exercise and discipline but also for effective Christian ministry. In Protestantism, the ministry of the Word of God is the central function of the minister whereas in Roman Catholicism the minister is a priest and his primary function is sacramental.

In the Reformation tradition, the minister is an interpreter of the word of God. The Word of God is therefore the center of gravity in his ministry. Bernhard L. Ramm (1967, 100) thus affirmed, “the greatest responsibility of a ministry is the ministry of the Word of God to the congregation. Preaching must be centered in the interpretation and application of Holy Scripture.”

The assertion made above underscores the need for the right use of the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). We must not abuse the Word (2 Cor. 2:17). We should depend on the power of the word for a ministry of salvation (Rom. 10:9-10), for spiritual growth (I Peter 2:2), for healing/comfort (Psalm 107:20) and for deliverance (Prov. 30:5).

Self – Assessment Exercise

Discuss the importance of Biblical Hermeneutics in Christian ministry.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that the first major preoccupation of Biblical Hermeneutics is to seek to discover the original texts to the ancient readers. Of course, that should be followed by the application of the original meaning to the modern, contemporary readers.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined the origin/etymology, definition and rationale for Hermeneutics in general. The following aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics were also discussed: meaning, relationship to exegesis and the importance for Christian ministry.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define Biblical Hermeneutics
2. What is the connection between Biblical Hermeneutics and exegesis?
3. Discuss the importance of Biblical Hermeneutics in Christian ministry.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

The Holy Bible (RSV or NIV).

Virkler, Henry A. (1981) **Hermeneutics**. Grand Rapids: Michigan, pp. 15-20.

Jeanrond, Werner G. (1987). "Hermeneutics" **The New Dictionary of Theology**, p. 462.

Mudge, Lewis S. (1983) "Hermeneutics" **The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology**, p.250.

Rahmm, Bernard L. (1967) "Biblical Interpretation" **Baker's Handbook of Practical Theology** ed. by Ralph G. Turnbull. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, p. 100.

Thiselton, A. C. (1988) "Hermeneutics" **New Dictionary of Theology**, p. 293.

UNIT 2 HISTORY OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS I – PATRISTIC/MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.1.1 Greek and Jewish Thinkers
 - 3.1.2 Alexandrian Scholars
 - 3.1.3 Antiochene Scholars
 - 3.1.4 Aurelius Augustine
 - 3.1.5 Thomas Aquinas
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary need for accurate interpretation of the Bible is not a new desire. Throughout the history of the church, Christian scholars have struggled to interpret the word of God correctly. A knowledge of the history of Biblical interpretation will help us to know the different principles and methods of Biblical interpretation. This unit examines various Hermeneutical practices before the Reformation. The history of interpretation at the Biblical, patristic and medieval times will be studied through the efforts of Jewish thinkers, Greek Philosophers, Alexandrian and Antiochene Scholars, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Discuss the nature of interpretation found in the Bible.
- ii) Explain the style of Biblical interpretation in rabbinic Judaism.
- iii) State how Greek and Jewish thinkers interpreted the Bible.
- iv) Identify the contribution of the following to the development of Biblical Hermeneutics at the patristic and medieval period: Alexandrian Scholars (Philo and Clement of Alexandria, Origen) Antiochene Scholars (like Theodore Mopsuestia), Augustine and Aquinas.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Biblical Period

Biblical Hermeneutics began in the Bible itself. Interpretation is involved anytime that an earlier tradition or writing is reviewed from the standpoint of a later one. During the Ezra – Nehemiah reform, Ezra read the law (referring most likely to the five books of Moses) for about six hours to the Israelites. The entire process involved in trying to help the Israelites to live by the law of God is summarized in verse 8”. They read from the Book of the law of God, making it clear and giving and meaning so that the people could understand what has been read.”

About three steps seem to be involved in the task. The first is reading the law. The second is “making it clear”. This most likely refers to an extempore translation from Hebrew to Aramaic. This was necessary because it appears that some of the Israelites did not understand Hebrew. After reading the original language and translating it to an understandable language of the people, the third step is “giving the meaning” or “sense” (RSV). They needed to give the meaning through explanation so that Israelites could understand what was read.

Jesus Christ also interpreted his life, ministry and death in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures as follows:

Isaiah 7:14 cf. Matt. 1:22-23; The prophecy of the virgin birth was ultimately fulfilled through his incarnation.

Isaiah 61:1-2 cf. Luke 4:16-21; The public declaration of his earthly ministry has been foretold in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 cf. Luke 24:25-27; It has been prophesied that the Messiah would serve and suffer before entering the glory of God. Read the following passages for more understanding; Gen. 3:15; Nu. 21:9; Dt. 18:15; Isa. 9:6; 40:10, 11; Ez. 34:23; Da. 9:24; Mic. 7:20; Mal. 3:1).

In rabbinic Judaism a lot of interpretation involved drawing out logical inferences and comparisons. Traces of this can be seen in the writings of Apostle Paul, e.g. Romans 3:9-12, 13-20; vv. 10-12 (Psalm 14:1-3; 54:102); v. 13 (Psalm 59; 140:3); v. 14 (Psalm 10:7); vv. 15-17 (Isaiah 59:7-8); v. 18 (Psalm 36:1).

The Apostles (Paul, Peter etc) and other New Testament writers thus freely quoted from the Old Testament to explain events or show fulfillment of the promises of God. Sometime that practice may look arbitrary to the modern interpreter but it was an acceptable Hermeneutical method at that time.

Self – Assessment Exercise

1. Give one example of Biblical interpretation during the Biblical period in the Old and New Testaments.
2. Explain the style of interpretation in rabbinic Judaism

3.1.1 Greek and Jewish Thinkers

In the early Christian centuries education a lot of emphasis was given to training in grammar, rhetoric and philosophy. In view of the appreciation for the nature and functioning of language as explained by G. R. Evans (1983, p 537) Bible readers did not only look "at the obvious meaning of the words but also at the possibility that they might stand for something other than at first appeared."

Greek and Jewish thinkers developed some Hermeneutical criteria long before Christian theologians began to do critical Biblical Hermeneutics. Greek philosophers tried "to understand the actual meaning of linguistic components of a text (grammatical method) and to appropriate this meaning within the wider spiritual framework of the time (allegorical method)" (Werner G. Jearond, 1987, p.462) Jewish scholars concerned themselves with the interpretation of **Halacha** (directly legal parts of the Torah). They also gave some attention to **Haggada** (the more narrative sections). An allegory is an extended narrative in which each detail has a hidden spiritual equivalent, correlation or meaning.

More generally, during the time of Jesus Christ, Jewish exegesis was of four types: literal, midrashic, peshet and allegorical. The literal Hermeneutics (also called **peshat**) was the basis of other types. Rabbi Hillel, through midrashic interpretation, gave rules of rabbinic exegesis like comparison of ideas, words or phrases. **Peshet** interpretation was practised by the Qumran communities by giving eschatologic emphasis to midrashic interpretation. Allegorical exegesis will be discussed in the next section.

Self – Assessment Exercise

How did Greek and Jewish thinkers interpret the Bible?

3.1.2 Alexandrian Scholars

During the patristic period (100-590) the two centers of Christian scholarship that dominated biblical interpretation in the church were Alexandria (in Egypt) and Antioch (of Syria). Philo and Clement of Alexandria and Origen were the major leaders of the Alexandrian Hermeneutics.

Allegorical methodology flourished among Jews and neo-platonic philosopher in Alexandria. **Philo of Alexandria** attempted to unite the Jewish and Greek Hermeneutical traditions. He developed the thesis that “an interpretation should disclose that spiritual sense on the basis of an explanation of the texts literal sense.” His overall emphasis, however, was allegory.

Clement of Alexandria also taught the twofold meaning of scripture on the basis that the human being is made up of a body (literal) and a soul (spiritual). The spiritual sense is therefore hidden behind the literal sense. For example in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) (Klein and Others, 1993, p.34):

the robe represents immortality
the shoes represent the upward progress of the soul
the fattened call represents Christ as the spiritual nourishment for Christians

Origen (c. 185-254). He was a Biblical critic, theologian and spiritual writer. He wrote an important work on biblical criticism called *Hexapla*. He can be described as the first major Biblical Hermeneut. Origen emphasized the need for more than one way of text interpretation. He reasoned that scripture is essentially allegory based on I Cor. 2:6-7 (KJV). He used allegory to look for a hidden spiritual meaning behind the history of the Old Testament. As man consist of three parts (body, soul and spirit). Origen recognized a triple sense – literal (body), moral (soul) and allegorical (spirit or mystical) which he favoured the most. He believed that only allegory yielded true knowledge.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Highlight the contributions of the following Alexandrian scholars to the development of Biblical Hermeneutics:

- Philo of Alexandria
- Origen

3.1.3 Antiochene Scholars

The Antiochene Scholars rejected the idea of multiple senses of scripture. They emphasized a Christological and exegetical approach in Biblical Hermeneutics. They reacted radically against allegorism and stressed literal and historical interpretation of scripture. Two leaders of the exegetical school were Theodore Mopsuestia (350-428) and John Chrysostom (347-407).

Mopsuestia and others were highly influenced by the Jewish community in Antioch and held that the literal, historical sense corresponded to the spiritual sense. For instance while the allegorical scholars interpreted Song of Solomon to symbolize the love of Christ for the church Theodore argued that it was essentially a poem of Solomon to describe his love for one of his wives (Klein and Others, 1993, p.35).

Self – Assessment Exercise

What is the contribution of Mopsuestia, an Antiochene Scholar, to the development of Biblical Hermeneutics?

3.1.4 Aurelius Augustine

Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354 – 430), he has been described as the greatest of the early Church Fathers. The fourth book of his *De Doctrina Christiana* was developed to stories, images, examples, illustrations, analogies and figurative meanings in an attempt to prove that the Bible was to be respected as fine writing. Through his philosophy of language he provided philosophical support to the hermeneutics of the multiple senses. He also supported a fourfold sense – historical, aetiological, analogical and allegorical, which became predominant during the middle ages. The interpretation of the city of Jerusalem is a good example of this Hermeneutics:

Literally: It was the historical city,
Allegorically: It refers to the church and Christ,
Morally: It indicates the human soul,
Anagogically (that is eschatologically) it points to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Highlight the contribution of Augustine to patristic/medieval Hermeneutics.

3.1.5 Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74). Allegorical interpretation began to decline during the middle ages (590-1500). The scholastic period produced intellectuals like Anselm and Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas. Scholastics employed the use of reason in Biblical Interpretation. Aquinas was a philosopher and theologian. With him and his contemporaries the literal sense was considered to be the bearer of theological truth.

According to him (Jeanrond, 462-463) “appropriate interpretation is the task of dogmatic theology while exegesis concentrates on the purely philological task of preparing the text for theological understanding.”

Self – Assessment Exercise

Highlight the contribution of Aquinas to medieval hermeneutics.

4.0 CONCLUSION

A study of the development of Biblical Hermeneutics at the patristic and medieval period shows that the debate centered on literal, allegorical and other senses of Scripture. Many favoured the allegorical, spiritual and mystical interpretation. It should be stressed that even right from the beginning the multiple senses of Scripture had no universal acceptance. The Antiochene scholars rejected the idea. The Alexandrians also developed higher senses of profound meanings in place of figurative interpretation.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have studied the history of rise of Biblical Hermeneutics from the Biblical period and the Greek and Jewish thinkers. We also considered the efforts of Alexandria and Antiochene Scholars. The unit ended with the contribution of Augustine and Aquinas.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. How did Greek and Jewish contribute to the rise of Biblical Hermeneutics?
2. Highlight the contribution of Augustine to patristic/medieval Hermeneutics.

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UNIT 3 HISTORY OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS II – REFORMATION PERIOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Humanist Hermeneutics
 - 3.1.1 Luther and Melanchton
 - 3.1.2 Knox and Zwingli
 - 3.1.3 John Calvin
 - 3.1.4 Immediate Post-Reformation Hermeneutics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every major development in the history of the church has characteristic biblical interpretation. This is true of the Reformation. The major characteristics of Reformation interpretation are: **Humanist Hermeneutical, Christological exegesis** and the **clarity of Scripture**. These can be discussed in the works of the following scholars: Lorenzo/ Laurentius Valla (c. 1406 – 57), Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1469-1536), Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), Philip Melanchton (1497 – 1560), John Knox (c. 1513 – 72), Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531), and John Calvin (1509 – 64).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Explain the influence of the humanists to the Reformation Hermeneutics,
- ii) Discuss the contribution of the following Reformers to the development of Biblical Hermeneutics: Luther, Melanchton, Knox, Zwingli and Calvin.
- iii) Describe the immediate Post-Reformation Hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Humanist Hermeneutics

Humanism is confidence in system of thought (or philosophy) of the power of human intellect or cultural movement. After the medieval period, there was intellectual renewal during Renaissance. The rising humanism and interest in the study of classical literature encouraged the study of Greek language. This had profound implications on Hermeneutics.

According to Corley and Others (1996, 8) some of the key hermeneutical development as a result of the Renaissance were:

- The use of textual criticism to determine the authorship, dating and quality of texts,
- Emphasis on literal interpretation to find the essential meaning,
- Private Bible translation,
- The study and printing of the Bible in original languages. When **Valla**, an Italian Christian humanist, began to study the Greek text of the New Testament, that decision began a positive reform in Theology.

In **1501 Erasmus** published his *Enchiridion* in which he “sets forth a programme of popular piety based on those Scriptures.” Erasmus published Valla’s notes in 1505. He also published Greek New Testament with fresh Latin Version and critical notes in 1516. Most of the reformers benefited from their efforts. In place of the complex theology by scholastics the humanists emphasized simple explanation of the Christian faith like that of the early Church fathers.

Valla, Erasmus, Martin Bucer and others were the humanists who sparked off a new Reformation Hermeneutic: They returned to and edited the Greek New Testament. They revised the archaic Vulgate Latin text; they rejected the multiple senses in single scriptural passages.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Explain the influence of the Christian humanists to the Reformation Hermeneutics.

3.1.1 Luther and Melancton

A new element on Reformation interpretation is the Christological center of Luther, the founder of the German Reformation. The proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ rendered the fourfold sense of

Bible interpretation obsolete. In Luther's Christology he "found Christ as the law and Gospel in both Old and New Testaments."

Luther argued that only the Bible has divine authority and not the tradition of the Church. He rejected the allegorical method of interpretation and taught that the Scripture could interpret itself, with the help of the Holy Spirit, with the emphasis on *sola fide* (faith alone justifies). Luther proposed and worked with a faith-oriented Hermeneutics. Together with Calvin, he argued that Biblical truth is accessible only to the interpreter that is illumined by the Holy Spirit. He argued that Biblical interpretation is to be done by applying the rules of grammar bearing in mind the history of the text.

Luther was impressed with the authority of Scripture as expounded with the Greek texts by Melanchton over and against the interpretation of Latin Versions and theologians. Melanchthon, another Protestant Reformer, attempted to restore the patristic exegesis. Luther and Melanchton emphasized the Hermeneutic principles of Scriptural grammar with faith alone.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Discuss the contribution of Martin Luther to Biblical interpretation at the Reformation Period.

3.1.2 Knox and Zwingli

In **John Knox**, a Scottish Reformer and Ulrich Zwingli we find an insistence on the clarity and certainty of divine words. According to Marvin W. Anderson (1967, p.124) Knox stated his conviction for the clarity of Scripture thus: The Word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place the Holy Ghost who is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places, so that there can remain no doubt, but to such as obstinately remain ignorant." This argument for the clarity of Scripture sounds like the contemporary principle of harmonization in Biblical interpretation.

For **Zwingli**, a **Swiss Reformer**, and others the clarity of Scripture led to its certainty. He also made the following remark concerning the clarity and divine authority of Scripture: "If it is obscure in any place, it is to be expounded by God's Word from another place."

However, the Protestants realized that their doctrine of priesthood of the believer could lead to private Biblical interpretation that "could become excessive and dangerous." (Bruce Corley and Others, 1996, p.84). They therefore gave rules called "analogy of faith" to guide interpretation:

“Scripture interprets Scripture by explaining obscure passages in light of clearer ones;
Exegesis must remain faithful to the context of all Scripture,
There is an essential, organic Christological unity to the Bible”.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Discuss the contribution of Ulrich Zwingli to Biblical interpretation at the Reformation period.

3.1.3 John Calvin

John Calvin, a French reformer and theologian, along with others emphasized the Christological sense. Christ was considered to be the subject and sovereign of Scripture. Therefore, to be ignorant of Christ was to be ignorant of Scripture.

Like Luther he also believed in the necessity of spiritual illumination for interpretation. He was of the opinion that allegory obscured the sense of scripture. By use of the phrase “Scripture interprets scripture” he interpreted the Bible by studying the context, grammar, words and phrases. He, however, argued that Christ could not be found in some Messianic psalms advocated by Luther.

Reformation Hermeneutics thus formulated four principles to challenge Roman Catholic tradition. According to Bruce Corley and Others (1996, 83) the four principles were:

“the focus of Scripture on Christ; not on the Church and man;
the ultimate purpose of the Bible was salvation, not knowledge;
the basis for Christian doctrine and practice was the Bible, not ecclesiastical tradition;
and the authority for interpreting scripture rests with individuals illumined by the Holy Spirit not in a dogmatic, priestly hierarchy.”

Self – Assessment Exercise

Discuss the contribution of John Calvin to Biblical interpretation at the Reformation Period.

3.1.4 Immediate Post-Reformation Hermeneutics

The clarity and certainty of Scripture emphasized by the reformers provoked a Roman Catholic exegesis. The council of Trent met between 1545 and 1563 and the Roman Catholic Church issued some decrees to

critique Protestantism. One of the resulting arguments was whether Scripture authorizes bishops or bishops authorize Scripture. **The Scots Confession of 1560** was issued to formulate a Protestant answer to that crisis of authority.

One major concern of the Reformers was “to show that the Bible could stand on its own feet, and could actually speak as judge of the validity of Church traditions.” Amidst the arguments and bitterness pietism arose and called for “a return to mutual Christian concern and good works, better Bible knowledge on the part of all Christians and better spiritual training for ministers.”

Self – Assessment Exercise

Describe the immediate Post-Reformation Hermeneutics.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We conclude then that the Protestant Reformation gave a new importance to the Scriptures by emphasizing the need for all individual believers to read and understand the Scripture. The Reformers taught both “Scripture only” and “Scripture for all.” However, they “did not alter the basic scholastic concern for an adequate theological understanding of the literal sense of the Biblical texts.” Biblical interpretation after the Reformation is the concern of the next unit.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined how the Biblical interpretation of the humanists influenced that of the Reformers. It also highlighted the Hermeneutics of Luther, Melancton, Knox, Zwingli and Calvin. The immediate Post-Reformation Biblical hermeneutics was also studied.

6.0 TUTOR –MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss the similarities and the differences in the opinions of Luther and Calvin in their contribution to Reformation Biblical interpretation.

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UNIT 4 HISTORY OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS III – MODERN/CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Friedrich Schleiermacher
 - 3.1.1 Wilhelm Dilthey
 - 3.1.2 Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann
 - 3.1.3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernst Fuchs and Gehard Ebeling
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Christian thought the modern world refers to nineteenth century (1800) onwards. The contemporary world also refers to the period within a century or generation. A new movement that has arisen recently in Hermeneutics is both a philosophy and a theology. The table below will introduce you to some of the modern/contemporary philosophers and theologians who have made significant contributions to Hermeneutics.

Name of Philosopher/Theologian	Characteristics of Hermeneutics
Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) Wilhelm Ditley (1833-1911)	Romantic hermeneutics
Martin Heidegger (1889-1975) Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)	Existential or Phenomenological hermeneutics
Karl Barth (1886-1968)	Kerygmatic Hermeneutics
Hans-George Gudamer (1900-) Ernst Fuchs (1903-1983) Gehard Ebeling	Ontological or new hermeneutics

Table: Modern and Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics and their Major Emphases

The contribution of these scholars to modern and contemporary Hermeneutics will be examined in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Highlight the characteristic of the biblical hermeneutics of the modern/contemporary period through the works of scholars like: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Brudmann, Gadamer, Fuchs, Ricoeur, Barth and Thiselton.
- ii) Analyse and critique modern/contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Friedrich Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher was a German theologian who is regarded as the founding father of liberal Protestantism in particular and modern theology in general. We can describe him as the father of modern Biblical Hermeneutics as well. Hermeneutics got a new philosophical foundation as a result of The Enlightenment.

The work of Schleiermacher began a new era in Hermeneutics. “His work transformed the hermeneutical question “from one of devising adequate ‘rules’ for accurate exegesis to realization that the real issue is how any understanding of another mind or culture through written communication is possible.” He thus understood Hermeneutics as the reconstruction of the mental process of the author as a reality distinct from his/her language.

Schleiermacher saw the circular nature of Hermeneutical enquiry. As the interpreter tries to grasp the meaning of a text as a whole, this depends on the understanding of its parts (component words and phrases). However, the meaning of the parts also “depends equally on their context within the meaning of the text as a whole.”

In other words, a **Hermeneutical circle** (or circulation) is involved in the attempt to grasp **the parts** and **the whole** in interpretation. We therefore “understand the parts of a text first in view of our pre-understanding of the whole which is challenged in the act of understanding.” The concept of Hermeneutical circle will be discussed more in the next unit.

Self – Assessment Exercise

What is the major contribution of Friedrich Schleiermacher to the modern/contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics?

3.1.1 Wilhelm Dilthey

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911) was a Professor of Philosophy at Basel, Kiel, Breslan and Berlin (from 1866 until his death). There is no place for the supernatural in his methodology. He reasoned that knowledge of life comes from understanding the mental processes and worldviews of human beings.

Therefore, over against the Biblical understanding he developed a philosophy of history in which God has no place. His scheme of history provided a basis for the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the historicism of R. G. Colingwood (1889-1943), and the existentialism of Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976).

His approach to the philosophy of history has greatly influenced 20th century historical methodology. Dilthey dealt with the issue of historical understanding. In this system the life experience of the interpreter provides a ‘pre-understanding,’ a point of contact to approach a text.

The hermeneutical concern, issue of trying to recover the consciousness of past cultures and persons as seen in Schleiermacher, Dilthey and especially Emilio Betti (1890 – 1968) is called romantic (or romanticist) hermeneutics. This is because they try to interact (a kind of romance) with the mental processes and thought system of a writer so as to understand the work of the writer.

Self – Assessment Exercise

What is the romantic hermeneutics? Mention the name of three scholars associated with it.

3.1.2 Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann

The Hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann can be described as **existential and phenomenological Hermeneutics**. A cardinal proposition of existentialism is ‘Existence precedes essence.’ Phenomenology deals with the phenomena (things which appear).

Heidegger, a German, was one of the major existential philosophers. His thought and work has influenced and formed existential theology as

seen in the works of Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie and Osadolor Imasogie.

Pre-understanding was a major hermeneutical issue for Heidegger. He taught that we begin enquiry from within given horizons. He urged that “A particular person . . . will interpret what he or she sees in terms of the purposes and practical standpoints around which his or her life is already organized.”

Bultmann was a New Testament Scholar and Theologian. He trained in critical methodology and applied this to biblical text. Convinced that only science can settle matters of fact he incorporated anti-supernaturalism into his Hermeneutics. He gave an existentialist interpretation of the Christian faith. His major contribution is in the demythologization of Biblical writings. In his demythologization “attempt is made to disengage the essential message of the gospel from the mythological and eschatological presentation of reality in which it is clothed.”

Bultman reasoned that Biblical writings presented generalizing and descriptive statements about God and man. Their primary purpose was the existential or practical function of calling persons to appropriate attitudes and responses of will. Existential Hermeneutics thus reduce questions of meaning and truth to individual experience.

Unlike the romantic concern, Bultmann and Karl Barth considered the real Biblical Hermeneutic issue to be “the relation between the Biblical text as such and the ‘kerygma’ that God has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ.”

Self – Assessment Exercise

Mention the names of two modern existential and phenomenological Hermeneutics.

3.1.3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling

The Hermeneutical approach of **Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 -)** and **Ernst Fuchs (1083-1083)** can be described as either **Ontological hermeneutics** or “New” Hermeneutic. The singular is derived from Greek and German. Gadamer was a pupil of Heidegger. He proposed a new Hermeneutical theory that “seek to relate language and meaning to the disclosure of truth in a way which transcends and calls attention to the reality of the ‘world’ projected and mediated by a work of art.”

In his work *Truth and Method* (ET, 1979), he speaks of the goal of Hermeneutics as a “fusion of horizons of the interpreter and the text

which occurs within and through language.” Gadamer’s significant contribution to Hermeneutics is the contemporary emphasis of the cultural distance between the Biblical world and our own.

The **new Hermeneutic** accepts and builds on the Hermeneutical principles of Bultmann as seen in the thoughts of his pupils, Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. **Fuchs** worked on the narrative ‘world’ of the parable. The reader enters the world and it is grasped by it. The Hermeneutical focus is “on the text actively addressing and scrutinizing the interpreter.” This implies that the text must first of all translate the reader before the reader can translate the text.

For the new Hermeneutic interpretation is not a matter of simply using the right method. Whereas the traditional Hermeneutics was concerned with the detailed principles of interpretation, the new Hermeneutic looks upon this as merely a special problem within the much wider activity of interpretation.”

The new Hermeneutic asserts that language itself is interpretation. Words and sentences can be used in different ways: pragmatic, existential, factual/scientific and formal. The new hermeneutic thus rejects the neutral, objective, scientific approach to exegesis as done by Oscar Cullman.

Some of the criticisms of the new Hermeneutic are:

1. Its critical methodology, that is in the liberal tradition.
2. Restricted understanding of the supernatural and destruction of prophecy.
3. By stressing the purely existential and kerygmatic elements, it has a limited focus.
4. It is very subjective.
5. The anthropology is narrow and defective.
6. Its concept of the Word of God as existential communication is opaque and empty.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Highlight and evaluate the “New” Hermeneutics.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Modern Theology and Hermeneutics began with Friedrich Schleiermacher. He and some other Biblical Theologians made Biblical studies to be open to scientific, critical methodology, modern,

contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics is this approached more philosophically.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have examined modern, contemporary Hermeneutics. The contributions of the following key scholars were highlighted: Schleiermacher Dilthey, Heidegger, Brultmann, Barth, Gadamer and Fuchs. Their Hermeneutics are variously described as romantic, existential, phenomenological, ontological, kerygmatic and new.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is the contribution of Friedrich Schleiermacher to modern/contemporary Hermeneutics?
2. Write a short note on each of the following topics: Demythologization, New Hermeneutics.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 SOME OTHER HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES AND APPROACHES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 **Sensus Plenior**
 - 3.1.1 Hermeneutical Circle
 - 3.1.2 Socio-Critical Hermeneutics
 - 3.1.3 Reader – Response Hermeneutics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last three units we have surveyed the history of the development of Biblical interpretation. Some key issues during Patristic/Medieval, Reformation, Modern/Contemporary periods were highlighted other works of scholars. What will be done in this unit is to further discuss some of the Hermeneutical issues and other approaches, namely, **Sensus Plenior**, Hermeneutical circle, socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader – response Hermeneutics.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Explain the perennial problem of **Sensus Plenior** in Biblical Hermeneutics,
- ii) Discuss the Hermeneutical circle in modern Biblical interpretation,
- iii) Describe and analyse socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader-response Hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Sensus Plenior

One perennial issue in biblical interpretation is the question of whether a particular text has single meaning or multiple sense. Some scholars are of the opinion that several scriptures (especially Old Testament) do have

a fuller sense (called **Sensus Plenior**). In contemporary study Raymond E. Brown popularized the study and he defined **Sensus Plenior** as “that additional, deeper meaning intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or a group of texts or events or a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation”.

This controversy is based on the understanding that the Bible has double authorship, divine and human. It means that there may be fuller sense of a text meant by the divine author not known to the human author. For example, was Daniel aware that his dream (Daniel 2:31-35) which was interpreted in verses 36-45 would have a later ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ? (Rev. 19:17-21).

Some aspects of **Sensus Plenior** concern interpretation of allegory prophecy as well as typology and it will be done later.

Self – Assessment Exercise

What do you understand by the concept of **Sensus Plenior** in biblical hermeneutics?

3.1.1 Hermeneutical Circle

Hermeneutical circle can be defined as the process involved between the question (and prior understanding) that an interpreter brings into a text and the dialogue with subsequent questions reshaped or raised by the text (along with enlargement of understanding). This definition implies that interpreters do not approach the Bible text “neutrally, rather they move within a Hermeneutical circle.”

David J. Bosch (1997, p.423) explained the same point further: “Interpreting a text is not only a literary exercise, it is also a social, economic and political exercise. Our entire context comes unto play when we interpret a Biblical text.”

The various dimensions, types of Hermeneutical circle are:

- One, between the parts of a text and the whole or context,
- Two, between the past (historical conditions) and the present,
- Three, between the text and the context of worldview/human situation,
- Four, between theory (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxis),

Five, between linguistic level (the scientific consideration of grammar and vocabulary) and psychological experience (the interpreter has to enter into psychological rapport with the author),
Six, between revelation (faith) and reason (logic).

Self – Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the Hermeneutical circle.

3.1.2 Socio-Critical Hermeneutics

In social sciences Hermeneutical explorations have called attention to the role of ‘interest’ in interpreting texts. Those interests have to do with social assumptions and practices. Examples of contemporary socio-cultural Hermeneutics are liberation, feminist and black theologies that interpret Biblical texts about the poor/slavery/oppression, women and the black race, respectively.

Socio-critical Hermeneutics is an integral part of the methodology adopted for liberation theology. Liberation theologians interpret the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Three-part Hermeneutical agenda of liberation theology, according to Klein and Others (1993, 45) are:

Experience taking precedence over theory. The reference is to the experience of injustice, poverty, suffering, etc in the Third-world,
Attempts to analyse or assess the reason for the impoverishment,
Precedence of action over rhetoric.

Feminism, women voices in liberation theology, is concerned with the exploited sex. In some feminist Hermeneutics the Bible is accepted as only one of the sources of authority. Others are experience, tradition and intellectual research. The experience refers to the oppression of women.

It should be clarified, however that there are different and diverse models and agenda within the feminist hermeneutical group. While some are biblical and liberal others are social, radical and reject the biblical, Christian faith and theology for been hopelessly chauvinist.

In black theology the focus of liberation is freedom from racist oppression. Black theology emerged in the late 1960s as “a new reading of the black socio-political condition in the light of God’s revelation in Christ Jesus” (Copeland, 1987, 138). The idea developed in the USA and South Africa from black consciousness and black power due to the experience of racial oppression of black people. Some black theologians like J. H. Core endorse the use of violence to achieve liberation.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Describe and analyse socio-critical Hermeneutics in liberation Theology.

3.1.3 Reader-Response Hermeneutics

The reader-response approach to Hermeneutics has become more prominent in the early 1970s. It “stresses the reciprocal relation between the text and the reader. This is opposed to an earlier emphasis on the autonomy at the text” (Corley and Others, 1996, p.137).

Paul Ricoeur (1913) has explored the role of suspicion in interpretation of dreams, symbols and languages. He has also examined metaphors and theories of signs (called semiotics). The active role of the reader in creating meaning is being investigated in literary and biblical hermeneutic. This is what is called reader-response hermeneutics. The full meaning of the text is to be supplied by the reader. This makes reader-response hermeneutics to be subjective and relativistic.

One issue close to the centre of current hermeneutical debate is what Ricoeur called the ‘career’ of the biblical texts after leaving the hands of the authors. This idea appears to go along with some aspects of biblical criticism.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Discuss Paul Ricoeur’s idea of reader-response hermeneutics.

4.0 CONCLUSION

One recurrent issue in the history of Biblical Hermeneutics is whether a scripture has one or multiple sense or meaning. The issue is studied in contemporary interpretation with the term fuller sense (**Sensus Plenior**). Hermeneutical circle is a modern process that arose from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Two contemporary approaches in the interpretation of biblical texts are socio-critical and reader-response.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit, which concludes this module on the survey of the history of Biblical Hermeneutics, has considered some other Hermeneutical issues and approaches not discussed in the previous units. These are **Sensus Plenior**, Hermeneutical circle, socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader-response Hermeneutics.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

Write short notes on two of the following issues and approaches in contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics.

Sensus Plenior,
Hermeneutical circle,
Socio-critical Hermeneutics,
Reader – response Hermeneutics.

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MODULE 2

- Unit 1 Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics I – Schools of Interpretation
- Unit 2 Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics II – Historical/Grammatical Method
- Unit 3 Inductive and Deductive Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics
- Unit 4 Special Literary Methods of Biblical Hermeneutics
- Unit 5 Methods of Biblical Criticism

UNIT 1 PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS I – SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Literal School
 - 3.1.1 Allegorical/Typological School
 - 3.1.2 Analogical School
 - 3.1.3 Anagogical School
 - 3.1.4 Tropological School
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From the patristic through the medieval periods it was generally accepted that there were literal and several non-literal meanings of Scripture. Some patristic and medieval scholars actually theorized that there were multiple senses to Scripture. For instance, Clement of Alexandria proposed five senses: historical, doctrinal, prophetic, philosophical and mystical. Augustine believed that four levels of meaning exist in every Biblical passage (Virkler, 1981, p.63): “The

letter shows us what God and Our father did; The allegory shows us where our faith hid; The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; The anagogy shows us where we end our strife”. The various senses of Scripture, which can also be described as principles or schools of interpretation which will be discussed in this unit, are: literal, allegorical, analogical, anagogical and tropological.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Name the schools of Bible interpretation that flourished during patristic and medieval periods,
- ii) Explain the literal school of Bible interpretation,
- iii) Describe the allegorical/typological school of Bible interpretation,
- iv) Discuss the analogical school of Bible interpretation,
- v) Define the anagogical school of Bible interpretation,
- vi) Evaluate the tropological school of Bible interpretation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Literal School

According to the literal approach to Bible interpretation, the natural, straight forward sense of a text or passage is taken to be fundamental. A cardinal viewpoint of literal interpretation as explained by De Haan (1971, p.15) is “that every passage must be taken to mean exactly what it says unless context or the expression itself indicates otherwise”. However, the principle needs further qualification. It should not be taken to extreme leading to literalism, ignoring imagery, literary form, metaphor, etc.

Two illustrative examples of Bible sentences that cannot be interpreted literally are:

2 Chr. 16:9: The text does not suggest that God has two giant eyes to see all parts of the world simultaneously. It means that God is able to watch over and keep secure all those who trust in Him;

Matthew 23:14: It is obvious that houses are made of materials that cannot be eaten; the warning is for those who cheat widows.

Some authors prefer to call this approach the original letter or natural sense of Scriptures. Another relevant point to this issue concerns Scriptural injunctions that are peculiar to a particular culture, time or

event and so may not be literally carried out in another cultural context. 2 Cor. 13:12 is a good example: “Greet one another with a holy kiss”.

While not trying to disobey the Bible, this injunction is difficult to carry out in some culture (like Africa) where kissing (especially in public places) is not a way of life. Yet this Scripture can be fulfilled through any other socially acceptable custom that can help to create and deepen Christian fellowship. This exhortation is therefore stated and interpreted in some other Bible versions as:

“Greet each other warmly in the Lord” (**The Living Bible**)

“A handshake all round, please! (**Philips Modern English**)

Another example is 1 Cor. 14:33b-35. This passage expressly forbids women from speaking in church meetings. This may mean they were forbidden from teaching, asking questions, etc. some churches abide literally with this injunction. However, other churches recognize this instruction as a specific solution to a particular problem in the Corinthian congregation. Therefore, they allow women to speak in different ways like speaking in tongues, prophesying, ministering (like teaching a Sunday School class), participating in church business meetings and even serving as church leaders.

It is fitting to conclude the explanation of the literal sense with the opinion of someone (De Haan, 1975, p.15): “If the literal sense makes good sense, seek no other sense, lest it result in nonsense.” As we now begin to discuss the non-literal senses of Scripture it should be stated that these interpenetrate. Sometime a particular bible text can be interpreted in more than one figurative sense.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on “The Literal School of Bible Interpretation”.

3.1.1 Allegorical/Typological School

Allegorical, typological and even analogical senses of Bible interpretation are closely related. Allegorical interpretation goes back to pre-Christian times. Philosophers like Plato spoke of a “meaning” below the surface of the text described as **allegoria**. Allegorical method was thus established in Greek and Jewish circles (e.. Philo) before the growth within the Christian Church, as explained in unit 2 of Module 1.

The allegorical sense of Scripture can involve some form of **translation**, that is, transference of meaning from the literal sense, e.g. Jesus Christ is called the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5). This could mean that we see in a

real lion certain qualities or attributes which (by analogy) we may see as “Christlike.” It is also allegorical to say Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) or shepherd (John 10:11). The same person cannot be both lamb and shepherd.

Examples of allegorical interpretation, some of which are debated, are:

- Joshua 2:18; the red scarlet cord stand for the blood of Jesus Christ,
- I Cor. 10:1-4; that the spiritual food and drink in the wilderness were the bread and cup (wine) of Lord’s Supper, respectively.
- Gal. 4:22-26; Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and represents the Old covenant. Sarah stands for the new covenant and represents the heavenly Jerusalem.

Typology is the study of types in the Bible. A type is a symbol, event or person replaced by reality at a future time. Allegory is a form of parable. While allegory and typology naturally interpenetrate within Scriptures and in post-biblical times the following distinctions have been made by James Barr (1983, 11): **One**, typology is historical as it is a comparison of events or persons along a scale of time e.g. Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21); Allegory is not necessarily historical but it turns the text into an indicator of eternal truths; **Two**, typology is basic to the internal structure of the Bible, whereas allegory is only marginally present; **Three**, typology is more Jewish, allegory is more Greek; **Four**, typology can be fitted in with modern critical understanding better than allegory.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Name four differences between allegory and typology in Biblical hermeneutics.

3.1.2 Analogical School

Analogies has been defined by D. Burrel (1983, p.15) as “proportional similarities which also acknowledge dissimilar features.” To a large extent, religious language is basically analogical concept. For example the Biblical, Christian of God as the heavenly father (Matt. 6:9) is an analogy. The fatherhood of God shows God to be the creator, owner and sustainer of mankind and the entire universe. Some of these attributes do not apply absolutely to the idea of earthly fatherhood. In recent understanding analogy is not so much a metaphysical concept but “a fact about language and the way we use language.”

A basic reasoning of analogy is “that if some principle obtains in one area it may well also obtain in some other, similar area.” For example, since complexity and regularity of a watch imply that it was consciously designed, by analogy, complexity and regularity in the universe also implies that it too was designed. This is a part of the proofs of the existence of God. Two features of analogy which have been underscored in theological use are: One, properly analogous expressions as distinguished from metaphorical ones; Two, analogous terms as between univocal (synonymous) and equivocal (homonymous) terms.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the analogical school of Bible interpretation using one Biblical example.

3.1.3 Anagogical School

The relationship of a Bible passage “to the culmination of God’s purpose in eternity” is the concern of the anagogical sense. This is the predictive prophetic sense, looking forward beyond time to eternity. This sense also provides hints of heaven. When the Old Testament is regarded as prefiguring the New Testament each Old Testament figure had a counterpart in the New Testament. For examples:

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ through Mary (Matt. 1:21),

The appearance of the glory of the Lord in the tabernacle, tent of meeting (e.g. Exodus 40:34) was replaced by the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. God in Jesus Christ dwelt with humanity and showed forth his glory (John 1:14). However, both of these speak of the permanent presence of God with his people in heaven,

Apostle Paul taught that all who have been justified now will be glorified later but it is put in “prophetic past” (Rom. 8:30). It is as if it has already taken place in the mind of God.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on The Anagogical School of Bible interpretation.

3.1.4 Tropological School

This is the moral sense. Bible texts and lessons are “turned” or “ben:” (trope) to make points for practical conduct, the living of a good Christian life. When bible passages are used tropologically, the context is ignored as long as the text is considered appropriate to teach a moral

lesson. It is valid to ask an ethical question, if it is appropriate to use the Bible in this way some examples will be cited:

One, the use of Colossians 2:21 (Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!) to counsel ex-drug addicts and alcoholics;

Two, a person who warn people with “Beware of Dogs” notice and justify his action with Philippians 3:2 (KJV). Is this not amusing!

Three, some Christian converts have been wrongly, morally advised (on the basis of Acts 2:40; 2 Cor. 6:14) to abandon non-Christian parents, jobs in non-Christian settings, or their churches for other ones even when they are not persecuted for their faith.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain and evaluate the tropological school of Bible interpretation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Most scholars argue that the fourfold system of medieval exegesis, which gave multiple insights to the Biblical scholars were: Literal, Allegorical/Typological/Analogical, Anagogical and Tropological. One problem of this approach to Bible interpretation is that, according to Thiselton (1988, 295), the multiple meaning of Scripture “might yield edifying results. But often the primary meaning of a text became buried and lost under layers of pious tradition”.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined the multiple senses of Scriptures especially practised during the medieval period of church history. The schools of Bible interpretation considered are literal, allegorical, typological, analogical, anagogical and tropological.

6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments

1. Write a short note on the literal school of Bible Interpretation.
2. Explain allegorical/typological approaches to Bible Interpretation. Name two differences between the two schools.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS II – HISTORICAL/GRAMMATICAL METHOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Need for the Historical Method
 - 3.1.1 The Life and Times of the Author
 - 3.1.2 Knowledge of the Original Recipients
 - 3.1.3 The Role of Historical Geography
 - 3.1.4 The Need for the Grammatical Method
 - 3.1.5 The Use of the Grammatical Method
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 References and Recommended Books
- 7.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The sixty- six books of the Bible were written between over two thousand to four thousand years ago. The three original languages were Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. There is a gap between the reader of the Bible in the 21st century in Africa and the authors of the Bible. This point was explained under Rationale for Hermeneutics (Refer to and revise Study Unit 1, Section 3.1.3). Since the authors wrote in certain historical and linguistic contexts it is imperative for the contemporary interpreter to know the history and grammar of the Bible. This is why the historical/grammatical method of Bible interpretation is basic and important as stated by Corley and Others (1996, p.217): “Without an honest, careful, intelligent use of grammatical and historical knowledge, there is little or no hope for a correct interpretation of documents written in foreign languages within several different ancient historical contexts”. This unit will elaborate on this point

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) State the need for the historical and grammatical methods of Biblical Hermeneutics,
- ii) Explain the importance of knowing the history of the author of a Bible text,

- iii) Discuss the value of the knowledge of original recipients for biblical interpretation,
- iv) Explain the role of geography in the historical and grammatical interpretation of the Bible,
- v) Describe how to use the grammatical method of biblical hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Need for the Historical Method

Christianity is an historical faith based on certain concrete historical events in human experience. The Bible is also an historical document a record of definite events of the past. However, the authors are not just historians. They were people who encountered God and put down their experience and testimonies for the benefit of other persons. This is why it is necessary to know about the Biblical authors, the original recipients of their messages, the characteristics of their societies and the geography of their lands.

In order to interpret the Scriptures accurately we must bear in mind the history, customs, circumstances and thought forms of the people God used to write the Bible. This is important because the individuals used concrete terms from their daily life experiences. The Historical Principle argues “that unless the historical circumstances of a passage is unveiled the accurate meaning might not be known and that the style and manner of expression with the circumstances under which the author wrote all have a role to bare open the mind of the author” (Adewale, 1996, p.18).

The meaning of a Bible passage thus becomes clearer when we know the politics, custom, geography of the Biblical world and times. This will give us an understanding of its original meaning to the first, earliest readers. An important aspect of Bible interpretation is the discovery of the original meaning of a text, as Bruce Milne (1998, p.60) explained: “God’s word is almost always immediately relevant to the situation to which it was addressed; we need, therefore to uncover as fully as possible the original setting and meaning before attempting to relate it to ourselves”.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on “The Need for the Historical Method in Biblical Interpretation.”

3.1.1 The Life and Times of the Author

Knowledge of the life of an author will help us to interpret the writing in line with the historical reality of his/her times. For instance it is reasonable to believe that Moses is the author of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) because he grew up in the Egyptian palace (Exodus 2:10) and he must have been exposed to Egyptian civilization. Most likely, however, his writings were updated to include the story of his death (Deut. 32-33).

Apostle Paul wrote 13 out of the 27 books of the New Testament. We cannot understand or appreciate his doctrine of the grace of God unless we know his backgrounds (birth and upbringing), persecution of the church, dramatic conversion and commission to preach the Gospel (Acts 9:1-19), his missionary journeys and experiences. These constitute the historical background of his writings and it is of crucial importance to use them to interpret his teachings.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Is it necessary for us to know the history of the author to interpret a Bible passage?
2. Explain with an Old Testament example?

3.1.2 Knowledge of the Original Recipients

Who were the original audiences of the messages of God that have been compiled as the Bible? Most of the epistles in the New Testament indicate the original readers of the letters. It is of significant value if we know what the messages meant to them. Corley and Others (1996, 226) explain: "Valid interpretation demands that before we try to understand what a writer is saying to us, we must do our very best to understand what he said and meant to that original group. "

Let us corroborate the explanation above with some illustrative examples. Many Old Testament prophets delivered God's judgement concerning the sin, evil and wickedness of people. Amos denounced the injustice and unrighteousness of Israelites around 760-750 B.C. We can then apply the pronouncements to many 21st century African societies characterized by idolatory, oppression of the poor, misgovernment, moral and religious corruption. Also knowledge of the city of Corinth and the founding and composition of the church (Acts 18:1-7) help to understand the numerous problems and issues confronting the church which include: division/disunity, incest, court-case, marital relationships

(like incest), idolatry conduct in public worship and the doctrine of resurrection.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Is it helpful to know the original recipient(s) of a text for biblical interpretation? Explain with a New Testament example.

3.1.3 The Role of Historical Geography

The physical features and climate of Palestine exercises a very powerful influence on the history found in the Bible. Many Biblical events can be understood only in their geographical settings. For instance a knowledge of the physical feature of Palestine will help us to understand David's experience in Shepherding (Psalm 23) and the security he found in God as reflected in his reference to God as "my rock" (Psalm 18). You are advised at this point to obtain a good Bible Atlas for this lesson and Bible interpretation generally.

Some specific examples will now be given to explain the role of historical geography in Biblical Hermeneutics. The student should study the following in an atlas:

The movements of the Patriarch Abraham in Ur (Gen. 11:31), Haran (Gen. 11:37) Shechem (Gen. 12:6) and Hebron (Gen. 13:18),
The route of the journey from Egypt to the promised land,
The missionary campaigns of Apostle Paul: First Journey (Acts 13:4-14:28), Second Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22), Third Journey (Acts 18:23-21:17).

A knowledge of historical geography will also help the Bible interpreter to understand: why people are always going up to or down from Jerusalem (Psalm 125:2; Luke 19:28; Luke 10:30), and why the Sea of Galilee is susceptible to sudden storms and waves (Matt. 8:23-24).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain how the knowledge of the geography of Bible lands help in the interpretation of a particular selected text.

3.1.4 The Need for the Grammatical Method

In an attempt to interpret the Bible grammatically we need to recognize the literary form of the passage. Is it poetry (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs), prose (e.g. the epistles), parable (e.g. Matt. 13:1-23), allegory (e.g. Ezekiel 16; Gal. 4:21-31), apocalyptic (e.g. Revelation), or fable (e.g.

Judges 9:8-15)? For instance while a poetic Scripture can contain factual material it should not be interpreted the same way as historical/narrative or doctrinal passages.

Some of the features to observe in an attempt to interpret a Bible passage are: etymology of words, punctuation, tenses, verbs, idioms, etc. We should endeavour to determine the correct meaning of each word and phrase in a text. According to Colson (1959, 15) we cannot know what a whole passage means “until we know what each separate word and phrase exactly means.”

The task of trying to discover the original meaning of text is called **exegesis**. Exegesis means “to bring out.” Through exegesis the interpreter seeks to bring out accurately the meaning of the words. The opposite is **esegesis** which means to “bring out,” that is, to bring or read ideas into a passage. In an attempt to eagerly apply the Scriptures while preaching or teaching many Bible interpreters do not put in a great deal of efforts at exegesis before they apply the scriptures to contemporary life situations.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on “The Need for the Grammatical Method in Biblical Interpretation.”

3.1.5 The Use of the Grammatical Method

Theoretically, the starting point to the grammatical study of the Bible is to examine a passage in the original languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. However, most Bible interpreters in the African context are not familiar with the use of lexicons and grammars which are considered to be the primary tools for biblical interpretation.

For accurate biblical interpretation the basic text should be a good, literal translation. Various Bible versions available today has been classified by Fee and Stuart (1981, pp.34-39) as follows:

Literal versions e.g. KJV, NKJV, RSV,

Dynamic equivalence e.g. GNB, NIV,

Free/paraphrase e.g. LB, NLT.

In case you are not familiar with these acronyms they mean the following:

KJV	-	King James (Authorized) Version,
NKJV	-	New KJV,

RSV	-	Revised Standard Version,
GNB	-	Good New's Bible (Today's English Version),
NIV	-	New International Version,
LB	-	The Living Bible,
NTL	-	New Living Translation,
Philips	-	Philips Modern English,
NEB	-	New English Bible.

Words and sentences can be identified as found in literal version e.g. faith, grace and repentance. It will be of interest to the interpreter to also see how the word is rendered in some other versions. For instance “study” (2 Tim. 2:15; KJV) is rendered as “Do your best” in RSV, “concentrate” in Philips, “try hard” in NEB. Every Bible interpreter should remember to constantly refer to the Amplified Bible which gives shades of meaning of Bible words. A word can also be studied using a Bible dictionary which may give the etymology and history of the use of the word.

Apart from word study interpreters will find study Bibles to be very helpful to study Bible books. One good example that is readily available today for the interpretation of Bible books is **The NIV Study Bible**. It provides information about the following to aid the interpreter: the author, date/historical situation/date of writing, recipients, purpose, structure/outline, literary features and theme/message. Bible commentaries are also good for biblical interpretation. However, most scholars counsel that they should be consulted last.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Describe briefly how you can guide a new Christian to use the grammatical method to interpret the Bible.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Bible is full of both literal and figurative languages. The meaning of literal languages can be discovered by the historical and grammatical method explained in this unit. A knowledge of the life, times and culture of the writer help to discover the literal meaning a passage. However, such study will also indicate the texts that are not meant to be interpreted literally. Special literal principles required to interpret figurative Bible texts will be considered later on.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the historical/grammatical method as a basic principle of Biblical Hermeneutics. It has been explained that the knowledge of the life and times of the author, of the original recipients and of the role of historical geography is indispensable. The need for and how to use the grammatical method are also explained briefly.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Write short notes on:

1. The Need for the Historical Method in Biblical Interpretation.
2. The Use of the Grammatical Method to Interpret the Bible.

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UNIT 3 INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE METHODS OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Meaning of Inductive and Deductive Methods
 - 3.1.1 Synthetic and Analytical Methods
 - 3.1.2 Topical and Theological Methods
 - 3.1.3 Biographical and Devotional Methods
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Bible contains so much information and ideas to guide human life and enrich Christian service. Fortunately, the treasures can be discovered through a variety of methods. Two major approaches are either detailed study of some minute parts or bird's eye view of a wide range of book or event. Inductive and deductive methods have been employed in Biblical Hermeneutics and these will be considered in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that, by the end of this unit you should be able to:

- i) Explain the meaning of inductive and deductive methods of Bible interpretation,
- ii) Identify the synthetic and analytic methods of Biblical Hermeneutics,
- iii) Discuss how the Bible can be interpreted through topical and theological approaches,
- iv) Describe the use of biographical and devotional methods in Biblical hermeneutics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Meaning of Inductive and Deductive Methods

The essence of Bible interpretation is to explain and give understanding of meaning of the word of God. This involves a reasoning process that

may be either inductive or deductive. For the inductive method general meaning will be obtained from particular facts. The starting point of study is thus specific words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters and books of the Bible. The deductive method is the opposite, when general meaning have been derived from our study and knowledge of the various dimensions of a concept, these will be applied to particular cases.

It should be clarified that in actual practice the Bible interpreter may have to oscillate between examination of general and particular facts. Let us illustrate with an example. In a study of John 3:16 the interpreter may be interested in the study of eternal life, with emphasis on the life that Jesus promises and gives. Reading through the whole book he will discover that John actually wrote the gospel so that people may believe in Jesus and have life in his name (20:31). Going through the twenty-one chapters of the Gospel he cannot but notice the frequency of the use of the word “life” (actually the word life is found 36 times using the NIV). The interpreter will also discover that Jesus is also portrayed as the source of life: bread of life (6:35, 48), the light of life (8:12), the resurrection and the life (20:31).

Therefore through a combination of inductive and deductive means the interpretation of the Gospel according to John can be interpreted and used to present Jesus as the author of life the giver of life, and the sustainer of life. Jesus gives life, good life, satisfying life, abundant life. Exegesis and hermeneutics lead to preaching and teaching.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Define inductive and deductive methods of Bible interpretation.

3.1.1 Synthetic and Analytical Method

According to Corley and Others (1996, p.236) the three steps that constitute the foundation of inductive Bible study are observation, interpretation and application. They also explained that the inductive method can be used to carry out the following types of Bible investigation: synthetic study, analytical study, topical study, theological study, biographical study and devotional study. Each of these types will now be explained and illustrated.

Synthetic Method. The interpreter has to read the whole of a Bible book repeatedly. He will develop his own outline without consulting any aid like study Bible, Bible Dictionary or Bible Commentary. From the reading he will be able to discover the overall intention, emphasis, purpose and message of the author.

Illustrative Example: A holistic reading of Ephesians will show that the Apostle was concerned with the nature of redemption (salvation) and how Christians should experience it in fullness and manifest it in various form of Christian relationships at home, in places of work and in the church.

Analytical Method. In analytical Biblical Hermeneutics the interest is to study the parts of a text in detail. The study may involve the use and frequency of a word, part of speech, phrase or even idea. An outline will be developed from the use of the study.

Illustrative Example: In Ephesians 3:14-19 Apostle Paul prayed for Ephesians and other Christians to understand the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ. He started each request with the conjunction “that” (RSV):

- **that** (v.16); prayer for inner power,
- **that** (v.17a); prayer for Christ to indwell believers (Christians),
- **that** (v.17b-19a); prayer for comprehension of God’s love,
- **that** (v.19b); prayer for fullness of God.

Take time to study the Bible passage and the prayer points.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the difference between Synthetic and Analytical methods of Biblical Hermeneutics.

3.1.2 Topical and Theological Methods

A popular and spiritually enriching method of Bible interpretation is to study a chosen topic of interest in Christian faith and life. Examples of such topical studies are sin, obedience and heaven.

Illustrative Example: Sin can be studied in different ways topically:

- Word study of sin such as: debt, transgression, trespass, lawlessness, iniquity and failure,
- The cause of sin, nature of sin, effects of sin and remedy for sin,
- Sin in the life of a particular bible character like David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for the death of Uriah, her husband (2 Sam. 11:1-27).

A special and advanced kind of topical method of Biblical investigation is Theological or doctrinal study. For this kind of study the interpreter

will study a particular Christian doctrine from the perspective of the entire Biblical revelation, both Old and New Testaments.

Illustrative Example: To do a study of the Biblical Theology of Jesus Christ, the interpreter may use sub-topics with some particular Bible passages as the focus, primary texts. These basic texts will then be supported with some other relevant passages.

The person of Jesus Christ:

- His unique birth (Matt. 1:18-25)
- His humanity (Matt. 1:1-17)
- His divinity (John 1:1-3; 14; 20:24-28)

The work of Jesus Christ: Atonement (Rom. 3:21-26)

The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ: Preaching/Teaching/Healing (Matt. 9:35)

The death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-11)

The second coming of Jesus Christ: The Importance, Nature and Purpose (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 2:1-12).

At the end of this kind of indepth and rigorous study, the interpreter can make a doctrinal statement about Jesus Christ like this part of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in... Jesus Christ... Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried... He shall come to judge the quick and the death" (Philip, 1990, p.10).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Use one example to explain how the Bible can be interpreted through topical study.

3.1.3 Biographical/Devotional Methods

Biographical Method

Another very rewarding method of Biblical Hermeneutics is character study. To do a biographical study the interpreter needs to collect detailed facts (as much as available) about the person: the birth, upbringing, life, strengths (virtues) to be emulated, negative aspects (faults) to be avoided. The interpreter will have to decide the basis for the organization of the information obtained about the person.

Illustrative Example: A Character Study of Timothy

His background: Son of a mixed marriage. Native/inhabitant of Lystra (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5)

His upbringing/conversion: Instructed in sacred writings (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15)

His conservation/ordination: Circumcised, ordained (Acts 16:3; 1 Tim. 4:18; 4:14)

His character: Timid disposition and stomach ailment but affectionate, reliable, amiable and faithful (2 Tim. 1:7; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philip 2:19-22)

His ministry: Leader of the Church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3)

Lessons/Challenges: In spite of certain weakness/disposition (physically, socially and spiritually) every Christian can serve God faithfully as Timothy did.

Devotional Method

The particular concern of the devotional study of the Bible is to apply the word of God. Bruce Corley and Others (1996, p.243) comment with justification: “The potential for practical, moral and theological error is great among the Christians who have little knowledge of applying the Bible personally.” While it is good to discover the meaning of the Bible it is more important to be influenced and guided by the fact for a holy, godly living.

A devotional use of the Scripture should be based on sound principles of biblical hermeneutics discussed earlier with special reference to historical and grammatical principles. There are some Bible study aids that are particularly developed to help readers and interpreters to apply God’s word. One of these aids is **The Life Application Bible**. There are many devotional materials that are also widely circulated today to promote devotional study of the Bible. Two examples are **Our Daily Bread** and **Every Day with Jesus**. These materials provide a selected passage to be read each day and give some appropriate devotional comments.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the Biographical method of Biblical Hermeneutics using one example.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Several methods of study can be used to interpret the Bible. A good bible interpreter will employ will not stick to a particular method all the

time. We can see from the discussion of this unit that Biblical hermeneutics required hard work. Interpretation is involved in biblical preaching and teaching and it is described as labour (1 Tim. 5:17, RSV). However, as you diligently and prayerfully use the various methods the Lord will give you understanding (2 Tim. 2:7, 15).

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have studied the inductive and deductive approaches to Bible interpretation. The unit began with the explanation of the meaning of inductive and deductive methods. This was followed with discussion and illustrative examples of the following methods: Synthetic, Analytic, Topical, Theological, Biographical and Devotional.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define inductive and deductive methods of Bible Interpretation.
2. Use one example to explain how the Bible can be interpreted through topical study.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Corley, Bruce and Others (1996). **Biblical Hermeneutics**, pp. 235-249.
Life Application Bible, 1988.

Philip, George M. (1990). **The Apostle's Creed**, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

UNIT 4 SPECIAL LITERARY METHODS OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Similes and Metaphors
 - 3.1.1 Parables
 - 3.1.2 Prophecy
 - 3.1.3 Apocalypse
 - 3.1.4 Symbols
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The principle and methods which have been considered thus far apply to Bible passages that are literal. However, substantial portions of the Bible are figurative and their interpretation will be studied in this unit.

Similes and metaphors are the brief figures of speech that are important in Biblical interpretation. Some other brief poetic devices that are less significant are personification, apostrophe, hyperbole, metonymy, synecdoche and euphemism. Examples of long figures of speech, some of which will be considered in this unit, are parable, allegory, riddle, fable, and “dark”/”hard” sayings.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Identify bible texts that are similes and metaphors,
- ii) Discuss how to interpret parables especially in the New Testament,
- iii) Explain the special methods being used for the interpretation of prophetic scriptures,
- iv) Describe the nature and approach of the interpretation of Biblical apocalypses,

- v) State the literary methods for the interpretation of symbolic scriptures.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Similes and Metaphors

Similes and metaphors are brief figures of speech that communicate by comparing two things. The essential difference between the two is that similes use the word “like” or “as”, whereas metaphors do not. The comparison is thus explicit in simile while it is implicit in metaphor.

William W. Klein and Others (1993, pp.242-251) have given various examples of similes in the Old Testament. In a simple simile there is a “single correspondence between two items in a single sentence”. Examples are Amos 2:13 and Song 2:2. The parables of the Kingdom used by Jesus are extended similes (e.g. Matt. 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47). Please read these and other Bible references to understand this unit.

It is easier to recognize a Biblical simile because of the words “like” or “as”. However, a metaphor is more likely to be taken literally but it is also “more direct and forceful.” Examples are Psalm 119:105; Zeph. 3:3 Anthropomorphic languages, picturing God as a human being with eyes, ears/voice, face, nostrils, a mouth, feet, are also metaphoric (Psalm 34:15-16; 18:8, 9, 13, 15, 16). Less popular special kind of metaphor are the anthropopathic languages which describe God as expressing human emotions like feelings and passions delight, joy, hatred, anger and jealousy (Jer. 9:24; Zeph. 3:13; Deut. 12:31; Jer. 7:18; Ex. 20:5). Examples of metaphors in the New Testament are description of Jesus as lamb and shepherd (John 1:29; 10:11) and Christians described as salt and light of the earth and world respectively (Matt. 5:13, 14).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain the differences between similes and metaphors using specific Biblical examples.

3.1.1 Parables

A parable, according to David H. Wallace (1967, p.107) is “an extended metaphor or simile which compares a religious truth with a common experience or circumstance in life.” stories told as parables usually keep within the limits of human experience.

Parables abound both in the Old Testament (especially Proverbs) and in the New Testament. A good example of parables in the Old Testament is

the story of the poor man's little lamb told by the Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-4). In the New Testament the greatest numbers of parables are found in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Parable was a very common feature of the teaching ministry of Jesus.

As a specific illustration of a spiritual truth, a parable is usually likened to an arrow with one point, one area of impact. As a rule, a parable generally has one point, one overall lesson. It is generally not necessary to try to find a special meaning in every detail of a parable, unless the context so indicates. It will be helpful to look at some examples:

Matthew 13:33: The Parable of the Yeast. The literal meaning makes sense which is that the growth of the Kingdom of God comes steadily through a positive influence. It is of no use to try to explain the spiritual meaning of the yeast and the woman. Some interpreters have proposed without justification that the woman stands for the church.

Matthew 25:1-13: The Parable of the Ten Virgins. The overall lesson is the need for wisdom and adequate preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom. It is wrong to look for the detailed meaning of the virgins, the lamps, oil, etc.

Luke 10:25-37: The Story of the Good Samaritan. The main lesson of this parable is that we should care for and love others as we ourselves.

However, Jesus Himself sometimes put meaning into the specific details of parables:

Matthew 13:3-9: The Parable of the Sower. The detail explanation is given in verses 18:23.

Matthew 13:24-30: The Parable of the Weeds. The interpretation is found in verses 30-43.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Mention some of the principles guiding interpretation of parables using one New Testament example.

3.1.2 Prophecy

Throughout the Bible, God reveals Himself, His ways, His purposes and what He intends to do to His people (Gen. 18:17; Amos 3:7). Prophecy is the Word of God concerning the present and future. Therefore, the whole Bible is prophecy (2 Peter 1:20-21). All Bible passages are prophetic, whether they are forth telling (speaking about contemporary situation) or foretelling (speaking about the future). The word of God

concerning the future, sometimes called predictive prophecy, is the concern of this section.

However, when Biblical prophets spoke to their generation things which related to their own immediate, particular historical circumstances, such words often have second, further or ultimate significance. In an attempt to interpret prophetic Scriptures we must allow for its future (even possible multiple) fulfillment. This idea is sometime called the “gap principle” or the “law of double reference.”

Some examples will help to clarify how to interpret prophetic Scriptures:

- Isaiah 7:14: This prophecy applies immediately to the situation of the King of Judah, Ahaz. God gave him this sign to reassure him of His presence and victory over his enemies. However, beyond this first purpose this prophecy also has a second fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ through a virgin (Matt. 1:22-23).
- Joel 2:28-32: According to Apostle Peter, what happened on the day of Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. However, we must note that Joel’s prophecy contains other parts that were not fulfilled that day. There is thus a “gap” between the fulfillment of verses 28-29 and verses 30-31. The Holy Spirit poured out that day (verses 28-29) but there were no wonders in the heavens as predicted. Verses 30-31 will be fulfilled at the end of the age (Rev. 6:12). The “moon turned to blood” is a figurative expression meaning that the colour of the moon shall turn blood-red.

Prophetic Scriptures are often beyond complete human description so they usually employ figures, symbols and poetic languages. This observation calls for warning in interpretation of prophecies. Both prophetic utterance and interpretation should be done in proportion to revelation given by God (Deut. 18:22; Rom. 12:6b). A prophecy, which lacks fulfillment or a false interpretation qualifies a speaker/interpreter to be a false prophet.

Self-Assessment Exercise

How should prophetic scriptures be interpreted? Illustrate with one Old Testament example.

3.1.3 Apocalypse

The average Bible reader finds apocalyptic portions of the Bible to be strange and even puzzling. This is quite understandable because the language of apocalypse is not usually plain. It involves the use of symbols and codes. Apocalypse actually means “an uncovering” or “revelation”.

Apocalyptic writings in the Bible can be found in Ezekiel, Zechariah, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and 1 & 2 Peter. The books of Daniel and Revelation are the greatest Biblical apocalypses. Some Bible prophecies are also in form of apocalypse. While there are no universal symbols (of numbers, materials, colours) there is a high degree of regularity in the symbolic use of certain numbers (like 7, 12, 40) and colours (like white, red, black) in the Bible. To interpret apocalyptic symbols there is a need for knowledge of “the historical significance of those symbols at the time and place of the writing.” Let us illustrate with two examples:

- Daniel 2:31-35: This text contains a record of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the interpretation given it by Daniel. The king saw a statue of enormous size with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron. Daniel also interpreted this to be four successive empires: Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. However, this prophecy will be fulfilled ultimately when Jesus Christ comes to establish His everlasting Kingdom to replace all these and other earthly powers (verses 36-45; Rev. 19:17-21).
- Matthew 24:14: In the prophecy of Jesus concerning the signs of the end of the age, “the abomination that causes desolation” is mentioned recalling the earlier prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:25-27). This prophecy is generally understood to have been primarily fulfilled in “168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanies erected a pagan altar to Zeus on the sacred altar in the temple of Jerusalem.” However, other stages are identified as the progressive, subsequent fulfillment of this same prediction: The destruction of the temple by Roman soldiers in A.D. 70, and the rise of the Antichrist before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15).

Biblical apocalypses should not be interpreted arbitrarily. The interpreter needs to benefit from the insights of informed scholars as found in Bible commentaries. (Perhaps commentaries are most useful for the interpretation of apocalyptic Scriptures).

Self-Assessment Exercise

“Biblical apocalypses should not be interpreted arbitrarily.” Discuss.

3.1.4 Symbols

It is difficult to avoid symbolic language in religion. How do we speak about God except through the use of symbolic and anthropomorphic language? Let's cite two instances:

We refer to God as our Heavenly Father who hears our cries (Matt. 6:9; 2 Cor. 7:14). **Father** and **hears** in this usage are symbolic.

Description of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God (John 1:36; Rev. 5:5) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) are valid and good symbols.

As we interpret symbolic Scriptures we must observe again that symbolism is not the same as spiritualizing Scriptures. Usually in symbolism the text or context will provide the meaning of the symbols.

Daniel 2: The dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. The text provides the interpretation of the various parts to mean four real nations of history.

Isaiah 11:6-9: It is wrong to make the Wolf, Lion and Bear to represent three nations. Neither the text nor the context suggests so. This must be taken to be literal.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on “The Interpretation of Symbolic Bible Passages.”

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is safe to draw some conclusions from the discussion of the various principles and methods considered above: many Bible passages are not to be understood literally but figuratively; we need to determine the particular type of a figurative scripture and treat it accordingly. It is recognized, however, that some figurative texts may be categorized into two or more types. Since figures of speech sometime blend, a scripture may be interpreted as a parable or allegory, as both prophecy and apocalypse. For example, the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23) is also an allegory.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined special literary methods being used to interpret Biblical texts that are figurative. Such figures of speech are similes, metaphors, parables, prophecy, apocalypse and symbols. Some specific

passages of the Old and New Testaments are selected and explained to illustrate the principles stated. You are encouraged to consult some of the references and recommended books stated below for additional information.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Explain the similarities and differences between similes and metaphors using two Bible passages.
2. With the aid of one Old Testament example explain how prophetic Scriptures should be interpreted.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Klein, William W. and Others (1993) **Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics**. London: Word Publishing, 242-251.

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UNIT 5 METHODS OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 Textual Criticism
 - 3.1.1 Literary/Source Criticisms
 - 3.1.2 Historical Criticism
 - 3.1.3 Tradition/Form Criticisms
 - 3.1.4 Redaction/Canon Criticisms
 - 3.1.5 Content Criticism/Structuralism
 - 3.1.6 Responses to Biblical Criticism
 - 3.1.7 A Critique of Biblical Criticism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 References and Recommended Books
- 7.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term biblical criticism is a description of a modern complex field of study, which involves a variety of principles, techniques and methods. In biblical criticism, according to Harrington (1987, 115), biblical writings are studied “in order to establish their text, understand their context and style, and determine their origin and authenticity.” The goal of biblical criticism is thus “to enable the reader to know as much as possible about the meaning of the text in its original setting.” The major tasks, methods or sub-divisions of Biblical criticism are: Textual Criticism, Literary and Source Criticisms, Historical Criticism, Tradition and Form Criticisms, and Redaction Criticism. Some others are Canon Criticism, Grammatical Criticism, Content Criticism and Structuralism.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Explain the relationship and the difference between literary and source criticisms,
- ii) Evaluate historical criticism,
- iii) Discuss tradition and form criticisms,
- iv) Describe redaction and canon criticisms,
- v) Define content criticism and structuralism,
- vi) Mention the various responses to Biblical criticism,
- vii) Critique biblical criticism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is used to be called “lower Criticism” and the aim is to construct a text as close to the original text written by its author (i.e. autograph) as possible. This discipline “endeavours to restore the original text of documents which have been exposed to the hazards of successive copying and recopying” (Bruce, 1988, p.93). Usually, earlier copies have suffered less from alterations than latter ones. Three of the rules that help to determine the original reading are: **One**, the older text; **Two**, the more difficult text, **Three**, the shorter text.

Illustrative Examples:

One of the things that led scholars to conclude that Mark is the earliest of the synoptic gospels is because it is the shortest.

The **NIV Study Bible**, 1995 ed, pp.15-28 states that “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witness do not have Mark 16:9-20”. This is a textual critical comment.

Self-Assessment Exercise

What is the aim of textual criticism?

3.1.1 Literary/Source Criticisms

Literary and Source Criticism attempts to answer questions like: “Who wrote the document? When and where was it written under what circumstances and with what purpose? Harrington also explain (1987, 116), that literary criticism “refers to the systematic analysis of a text with regard to its words and images, characters, progress of thought or structure, form and meaning.” This means that the concern of literary criticism is to understand the context and style of the biblical context. The literary form is related to the message of the writer. Biblical writers appear “to convey their truth in artistically appealing and memorable literary forms.”

Source criticism is part of literary criticism and it tries to discern the oral or written sources on which a literary work has drawn.” Therefore, it “seeks to establish where already existing material has been incorporated, either by following explicit statements that a source has been used or by arguing on the basis of literary style and content.”

Examples:

The author of Chronicles used Samuel and Kings,
Matthew and Luke used Mark to compose their own gospels.
The Pentateuch consists of four major sources (Yahwist, Elohist,
Priestly and Deuteronomist).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain the relationship and difference between literary and source criticisms.

3.1.2 Historical Criticism

Historical criticism relates documents to their historical context. That is to say it “concerns the origins and authenticity of the Biblical documents.” It approaches all data with an initial skepticism with the use of hermeneutic of suspicion.

Historical criticism can be “used in a narrow sense to refer to the event behind the text” in which case “the goal is to describe the event exactly as it happened.” Literary and historical criticisms were at one time called “higher criticism” as they are concerned with the issues of literary structure, date and authorship.

One problem of historical criticism is that it “often proceeds on the basis of philosophical assumptions that rule out divine intervention and the miraculous, and holds negative views about the faith-communities that transmitted the Biblical sources.” (Harrington, 1987, 117) Unlike this liberal, critical approach some other scholars argue that the Bible should be studied with hermeneutics of faith.

Example: Feminist critical hermeneutics. They have argued that historical records of Christian origins has sexist bias that oppress women and put them at a disadvantage in church life (e.g. 1 Cor. 14:33b-38; 1Tim. 2:11-15).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Evaluate historical criticism using the feminist critical hermeneutics as example.

3.1.3 Tradition/Form Criticism

Tradition history answers the question “By what processes have various written and oral traditions come to be formed into the Biblical document?” Form criticism is an important aspect of tradition criticism.

It is “the study of the ‘forms’ which the material took in the course of being handed down.” The concern of form criticism is: “How do the distinct forms of literary expression reveal something of the origins, history and meaning of the text?”

Therefore, “Form criticism deals with the range of literary devices used in communicating the message and tries to determine the historical settings in which the forms were employed before they became part of the Biblical books.” The task of form criticism thus “suggests that some biblical writers had at their disposal already existing sources in written or oral form.”

Illustrative Example

Why did Matthew and Luke differ in the order of the second and third temptations of Jesus? The temptation to jump down from the Jerusalem temple was placed second by Matthew but third by Luke (Luke 4:1-13, Matt. 4:1-11cf). This is a tradition critical concern.

Self-Assessment Exercise

What do you understand by tradition/form criticisms?

3.1.4 Redaction/Canon Criticisms

This is a theological criticism which complements tradition, historical criticism. “It studies the use which an author makes of the material at his disposal whether received by tradition or otherwise.” The relevant question of interest to redaction criticism is “How has the author shown his own creativeness in reshaping older traditions to serve his particular theological purpose?” Therefore, it is concerned with “how the final author or editor used the sources to address the concerns and problems facing his audience in their historical setting.”

Canon criticism is an extension of redaction criticism. It is a theological study of the completed canon of Scripture. The emphasis is not on the original form of the text as it is done in some other critical approaches.

Illustrative Example

How do we account for the difference between the gospel written by John and the three Synoptic Gospels? His primary intention evidently was to evangelise non-Christians and to teach new Christians (John 20:31).

Self-Assessment Exercise

Write short notes on redaction and canon criticisms.

3.1.5 Content Criticism/Structuralism

Content Criticism is a special form of criticism that is characteristic of the new Hermeneutic. It holds that mythological elements of Bible accounts are foreign materials to the real existential communication of the Word of God in the Bible texts. Content criticism came into sharp focus in the demythologization controversy, especially as proposed by Bultmann.

Structuralism is the study of “the operation and interaction of signs within a structured system controlled by an underlying ‘code.’” The concern of structuralism “is the final form of the text as a linguistic or semantic phenomenon.”

Self-Assessment Exercise

Define content criticism and structuralism as they relate to Biblical Hermeneutics.

3.1.6 Responses to Biblical Criticism

The four main responses to biblical criticism in general and historical criticism in particular can be called outright denial, total acceptance, partial acceptance and compromise as discussed Nineham (1983, pp. 256-257):

1. **Outright Denial** of the relevance of historical criticism to the Bible and story of Christian origins. This is the response of some evangelicals/fundamentalists.
2. **Total Acceptance.** The modern historical methods are applied to the Bible critically like any other historical source, e.g. liberal and feminist Hermeneutics.
3. **Partial Acceptance.** These apply historical criticisms to the Bible but hold that the Bible contains unique events.
4. **Compromise.** Some Lutheran scholars like Barth, Bultman and Tillich proposed that we hold on to the Christ of faith and proclamation while we may not be able to arrive at a full historical account of Jesus.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Mention the major responses to Biblical Criticism.

3.1.7 A Critique of Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism challenges the traditional authority of the Bible and it has both negative and positive elements.

Weaknesses

1. Biblical criticism is often speculative and pastorally disturbing.
2. It reflects on and applies to only a small part of the Bible, especially the historical portions.
3. It reflects the assumptions and concerns of the Enlightenment. It is thus secular and liberal.

Strengths

1. It has a positive value because it “enables the reader to view Biblical texts in a new light.”
2. The efforts to understand the intention of Bible authors are fruitful for Biblical study.
3. As a valid academic discipline, biblical criticism can help us to “gain a deepened understanding of the Bible and its cultural setting.”
4. The various methods of biblical criticism remain fundamental tools for “any serious contemporary treatment of Scripture.”

Self-Assessment Exercise

Outline some strengths and weaknesses of Biblical Criticism.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Biblical criticism “involves textual, literary and historical methods.” Thus, the biblical critic is concerned with the historical setting of the document itself (redaction criticism) and of the small units (form criticism) or sources (source criticism) contained in the document.”

It is not yet possible to combine traditional Christianity “with a thoroughgoing application of modern criticism method.” The relationship of biblical criticism “to understand the role of the Bible in the theology, ethics and worship of the Christian Church” is also yet to be adequately defined.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have examined the meaning and various methods of Biblical criticism. The methods considered are textual, literary, source,

historical, tradition, form, redaction, canon, content criticisms and structuralism. Some illustrative examples were given for explanatory purpose. Also, the responses of scholars to the critical biblical hermeneutics are also highlighted as well as a brief critique. The Unit ends the module on principles and methods of biblical hermeneutics.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is biblical Criticism? Explain with historical critical method.
2. Mention two strengths and two weaknesses of biblical criticisms.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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MODULE 3

- Unit 1 Interpretation of the Old Testament I – History and Law
- Unit 2 Interpretation of the Old Testament II – Poetry and Wisdom Literature
- Unit 3 Interpretation of the New Testament I – The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles
- Unit 4 Interpretation of the New Testament II – Epistles and Revelation
- Unit 5 Application and Correlation

UNIT 1 INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT I – HISTORY AND LAW

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Identity of Old Testament Narratives
 - 3.1.1 The Nature of Old Testament Narratives
 - 3.1.2 The Interpretation of Old Testament Narratives
 - 3.1.3 Identity of Old Testament Law
 - 3.1.4 The Nature of Old Testament Law
 - 3.1.5 The Interpretation of Old Testament Law
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins this module which is chiefly concerned with the study of the major genres of the Bible. The literary types that will be examined in the Old Testament are Narratives, Law, Poetry, Prophecy and Wisdom Literature. Prophecy will no longer be considered because discussion of prophecy as a literary type done in the last module applies to the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures as well. The literary forms of the New Testament are Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles and Revelation. The module will end in Unit 15 with application and correlation of the entire course on Biblical Hermeneutics.

2.0 Objectives

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Describe the identity of Old Testament narratives,
- ii) Discuss the nature of narratives in the Old Testament,
- iii) Explain the interpretation of Old Testament narratives,
- iv) Describe the major types of Old Testament laws,
- v) Discuss the nature of laws in the Old Testament,
- vi) Explain how to interpret Old Testament law.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Identity of Old Testament Narratives

The most common literary type in the Old Testament is the narrative. The following Bible books consist mostly of history: Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah and Haggai. It has been said that narratives constitute about 40% of the Old Testament. Klein and Other (1993, pp.261-274) have also identified many kinds of narratives in the Old Testament including the following major ones:

Reports: e.g. tribal settlements in Canaan (Judges 1:16-17), royal construction projects (1 Kings 7:2-8; 12:25), and military campaigns (1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Kings 24:20b-25:7).

Heroic narrative and prophet stories: e.g. the lives of Moses, Deborah, Gideon, Samson; Prophets Elijah, Elisha and Daniel.

Comedy (narrative with a happy ending) e.g. Joseph and Esther.

Farewell speech e.g. Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy.

Self - Assessment Exercise

Discuss the kinds of narratives in the Old Testament.

3.1.1 The Nature of Old Testament Narratives

We believe that as records of historical events, the Old Testament narratives are historically accurate. However, several scholars have explained that the interest of the authors is not just to record detailed histories of the events. The biblical authors were not pure historians. They wrote more as storytellers not just to present historical facts for the sake of facts but to inform and to teach.

According to Adewale (1996, p.50) “the narratives we have in the Bible are to be seen as historical events that have been interpreted from the

religious perspective.” This means that for the purpose of interpretation, Old Testament narratives should not be treated like scientific documentary histories but as religious stories crafted to promote godly lifestyle.

Self - Assessment Exercise

Are Old Testament narratives to be interpreted as pure histories?
Discuss.

3.1.2 The Interpretation of Old Testament Narratives

What will be done in this section is to provide some hints that apply generally to the interpretation of the various types of narratives in the Old Testament.

- The interpreter needs to make a distinction between the narrative itself and the lesson(s) that the narrative is meant to teach. While all Scripture is inspired and profitable for teaching (2 Tim. 3:16) a narrative is not doctrine in itself. We have to derive doctrine from it.
- For instance, while several Old Testaments saints like Abraham, David and Solomon were polygamists the narratives not justify that form of inadequate marriage. Instead the accounts as written show the problems associated with polygamy. In the Old Testament narratives we can learn positive lessons to emulate and negative lessons to avoid (Read 1 Cor. 10:6-13).
- Old Testament narratives are not necessarily allegories of Christian faith and church life. However, Christians can learn many spiritual lessons from the accounts.
- For instance, the journey of the Israelites after deliverance from Egyptian bondage to Canaan, the Promised Land, is not necessarily a picture of the Christian life salvation from sin, spiritual growth and entering into glory. However we can learn lessons for spiritual pilgrimage from their experience: faith, trust, dependence on God to care and provide for us, to lead and guide us, to help us to fight and overcome enemies of Christian life.

Illustrative Example: King David and Bathsheba

Focus Text: 2 Samuel 11 and 12

Literary Character of 1 and 2 Samuel: the two were originally one book. The books were most likely compiled with some independent sources.

Author: It has been suggested that Zabud, son of Nathan the prophet, wrote the book. He served as a “personal adviser” to King Solomon (1 Kings 4:5).

Key Characters: David, Bathsheba, and Uriah.

The Story:

- Covetousness of David (11:1-3)
- David and Bathsheba in the act of adultery (11:4-7)
- Futile attempts of David to cover up (11:6-13)
- David arranged for the death of Uriah (11: 14-24).
- Mourning of Bathsheba and marriage with the King (11:26-27)
- Nathan used a parable to confront and rebuke David (12:1-6)
- The judgment of God: sword (12:10), calamity, shame and evil in the family (12:1); the death of the child (12:14-23).
- The repentance and confession of David (12:13 also Psalm 51:1-19).

Lessons of the Narrative

David was a man after God’s heart. A man of God can possess weaknesses and even commit sin.

When a person who is God’s elect commits sin or does evil he/she will be punished accordingly. God is a God of justice and righteousness.

When we genuinely repent and confess sin, evil and weakness God forgives.

God is loving and gracious. The LORD loved the other children of the union (Solomon, the next child became king after David).

David misused his position and power as king to do wrong. People in leadership positions should not misuse their opportunities.

The reign of David on the whole was successful. It was the standard used to measure other kings (2 Kings 18:3; 22:2).

The disappointment and failures of human beings will not thwart the plan and purpose of God. David was the progenitor of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 21:9). This is a lesson on the providence of God.

Self - Assessment Exercise

Explain how Old Testament narratives should be interpreted, using one example.

3.1.3 Identity of Old Testament Law

What is the “law” in the Old Testament? It could stand for the Dialogue, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) or the expanded commentary, “the book of the Covenant” (Exodus 20:22 – 23:33; 24:7), or the first five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) or even the entire Old Testament. Technically speaking, the “law” refers to four major collections of laws: the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22 – 23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 12-26), the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), and the Priestly Code (Exodus 25-31; 34:29 – Leviticus 16; parts of Numbers).

The two main types of legal forms of Moses are the casuistic law (or “case law”) and the apodictic (or “absolute law”). The common structure of the **Casuistic Law** is “If a man does so-and-so” or “if . . . then.” The “if” describes the case and “so-and-so” or “then” describes the penalty for violation. Read the following examples: Exodus 21:18-19; 21:14.

It has been observed that while the Casuistic style is found in extra-Biblical Cuneiform law the **apodictic type** is a unique feature of the Mosaic legislation. The apodictic laws are also usually simpler and shorter compared with casuistic form. The apodictic formula is “You shall/shall not” (Exodus 20:12, 13). Also, while most Casuistic laws treat civil or criminal cases most apodictic types concern moral and religious issues.

Self - Assessment Exercise

State the two major types of Old Testament laws. Describe the differences between the two.

3.1.4 The Nature of Old Testament Law

When we hear the word ‘law’ today it conveys legal idea but it is not so historically for the Israelites who were the first recipients of the laws. The law is first of all God’s revelation and then it is an instruction. The Israelites first entered into a covenant relationship with Yahweh (Exodus 19:1-8). The laws were then given them as moral implications and requirements of that covenant relationship. The primary purpose for the giving of the law is not judicial but instructional, to teach personal and societal values.

In the next section we will consider some principles to interpret the Old Testament as ethical principles, not as legal code. The five sub-divisions

of the laws are: Criminal law (e.g. Exodus 21:16; 22:18), civil law (e.g. Exodus 21:33-36), family law (e.g. Deut. 25:5-10), cultic law (e.g. Deut. 5:12-15) and charitable law (e.g. Deut. 14:28-29).

Self - Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the nature of Old Testament laws.

3.1.5 The Interpretation of Old Testament Law

As it was stated in the last section the law was given as part of the revelation of the transcendence, sovereignty and love of God. The law is not a burden. However, we know that the law was meant to prepare people for salvation by grace in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:24). Jesus stated categorically that he has not come to abolish the laws but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). Klein and others (1993, 280) have suggested the following Hermeneutical principles to apply the Old Testament in the New Testament age: “All of Old Testament should apply to Christians but none of it applies apart from its fulfillment in Christ.” This means that the laws as fulfilled in Jesus Christ apply to Christians today. This principle requires further elaboration.

Some Old Testament laws are culturally conditioned and so may not have universal, timeless application (e.g. Read Deut. 21:18 – 2:22; 14:1-21).

Some Old Testament laws are ethical, moral and theological instructions that are relevant in all places, at all times (e.g. The Ten Commandments).

Illustrative Example: Interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:5. Does it forbid the wearing of dress styles of the opposite sex today?

Book: The word “Deuteronomy” means “repetition of the law.” **Author:**

Moses, by internal evidence of the book (1:5; 31:9, 22, 24). **Historical**

Setting: Moses wrote and gave the speeches in the process of transferring leadership to Joshua.

Theme: He called the Israelites to renew their covenant with the Lord.

Context/Text: Deuteronomy 22 is part of the various laws given to sanctify the Israelite community. We believe that these laws addressed particular special concerns of Israelites. The entire context (Read 21:22 – 21:12) does not stand on the same level with the Ten Commandments.

- Read the following laws which are no longer binding even in Israel today and in other societies: Not to plant two kinds of seed in a vineyard (v. 9); Not to wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together (v. 11); To put to death a newly married lady who is discovered not to be a virgin (vv. 21-22).
- The intention of this particular text is to prohibit social vices and perversions like homosexuality. It is a call for us to have a high regard for the differences between male and female as created by God (Lev. 18:22; 20:13).
- The intention and the context in which a dress is worn determines whether it is right or wrong.
- We also note that the New Testament does not teach the normative authority of this text.

Self - Assessment Exercise

Does the Old Testament law apply to Christians today? Explain with one example.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the discussion of this unit, we can conclude that two crucial requirements to interpret narratives and laws in the Old Testament are: Knowledge of the nature and peculiarities of the literary forms and, Application of the historical and grammatical principles presented in the last module.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined how to interpret narratives and laws in the Old Testament. The identity, type and nature of narratives and the laws were also explained. Some particular illustrative examples were used for explanatory purpose.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Explain how Old Testament narratives should be interpreted, using an example.
2. What do you understand by casuistic and apodictic laws? State three differences between the two.

7.0 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, New Edition.

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UNIT 2 INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT II – POETRY AND WISDOM LITERATURE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Types of Old Testament Poetry
 - 3.1.1 Interpretation of Old Testament Poetry
 - 3.1.2 The Nature of Old Testament Wisdom Literature
 - 3.1.3 Interpretation of Proverbs
 - 3.1.4 Interpretation of Job
 - 3.1.5 Interpretation of Ecclesiastes
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will continue with the study of how to interpret the specific literary types found in the Old Testament. The genres that will be considered are Poetry (in Psalms) and Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes). Interpretation of prophecy will not be examined because of lack of space. (Moreover, discussion of prophecy under special literary methods in the last module applies to the Old Testament prophetic books as well).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Describe the various types of poetry in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms;
- ii) Explain how to interpret Old Testament poetry;
- iii) Discuss the nature of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament;
- iv) Explain how to interpret Old Testament proverbs;
- v) Describe some of the principles for the interpretation of the book of Job;
- vi) Discuss the contribution of Ecclesiastes to Wisdom thoughts in the Old Testament literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Types of Old Testament Poetry

As a literary style, poetry is also very common in the Bible. While most of the poems are found in Psalms, some poetry are found in almost every book of the Old Testament. A poem can be defined as “a piece of writing, arranged in patterns of lines and of sounds expressing some thought, feeling, or human experience in imaginative language.” (**Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English**, New Edition, 793).

Types of poetry in the Old Testament, according to Klein and Others (1993, pp.285-290), are prayers, songs, liturgies and wisdom psalms. These will now be highlighted with examples from Psalms.

A very common genre of prayer in the Psalms is **complaint**, an individual or a community calling for God’s intervention in a situation of illness, misfortune, false accusation, drought, plaques, attack by enemies, etc. (e.g. Psalms 22, 89, 144). In **imprecatory Psalms** the petitioners express emotional exaggeration “to persuade Yahweh to act” (e.g. Psalm 59). The Old Testament also contains **dirges** that lament the destruction of Jerusalem in 58 B.C. (Lamentations 1-2, 4).

Through poems of **thanksgiving songs** people expressed gratitude to God (e.g. Psalms 18, 21, 30). **Hymns** were used by individuals or the entire community to praise Yahweh (e.g. Psalms 8, 77, 93, 103-104). The “**royal psalms**” (or “**messianic psalms**”) were used during ceremonies that either involved the King or celebrated the uniqueness of Jerusalem (e.g. Psalms 2 and 110).

We also have **love songs** like wedding song (e.g. Psalm 45) and love poetry found in the Song of Songs (e.g. 3:6-11). **Liturgy psalms** were used when the Israelites came to the temple in Jerusalem to worship Yahweh (e.g. Psalm 15, 24, 95, 118). **Wisdom psalms** look so much like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in their language, style and themes (e.g. Psalms 1, 19 and 33). They seemed to belong more to the private educational sphere of the wisdom teachers of Israel rather than to the public worship life. According to Klein and Others (1993, 290) many wisdom psalms “focus on ethnical issues such as the justice of human suffering and God’s apparent injustice in tolerating it.” Wisdom psalms recognized by many scholars include 37, 49, 112, 127 and 133.

Self - Assessment Exercise

Mention four types of poetry in the Old Testament. Give one example of each type in Psalms.

3.1.1 Interpretation of Old Testament Poetry

The knowledge of the historical context of a psalm will determine the purpose and use, e.g. for worship, wedding or funeral service. If the poem is corporate it should be applied to the Christian community. If it is an individual text it is applicable to individual persons. Royal Psalms are appropriate for use in leadership contexts. Poems in the Old Testament should not be interpreted as isolated verses but as complete units.

Illustrative Example: Psalm 23:1-6

Author: King David

Theme: The author sees God as the heavenly Shepherd- King.

Occasion: It is a psalm of testimony, confessing and confidence in the Lord as a caring shepherd and dependable guide. It was perhaps used in a festival of praise (v. 6).

Poetic Analysis: The NIV Study Bible (1995, 800): Stanza one: vv. 1 – 4c;
Centering line: vv. 4d – f; Stanza two: vv. 5a – 6d.

Explanation:

The shepherd provides food and drink (vv. 1, 2a, 5, 6). Understanding of nomadic practice (vv. 2a, b) and hosting in the ancient Near East (v. 5) will help to interpret the provision of the Shepherd-King.

The shepherd gives rest (vv. 2a, 2b, 3a). Lying down and restoration are also nomadic images/expressions.

The shepherd leads and guides (vv. 2b, 3a). Those who follow the King in the paths of righteousness will experience security and prosperity.

The Shepherd gives courage and comfort (vv. 4a, 6). In the midst of fear the rod and staff of the shepherd reassures the sheep.

Overall Lesson: Life Application Bible (1988, 925): “We must follow God and obey his commands. He is our only hope for eternal life and security.”

Self - Assessment Exercise

Explain how to interpret Old Testament poetry giving one example in Psalms.

3.1.2 The Nature of Old Testament Wisdom Literature

The main Wisdom books of the Old Testament which will be considered in this unit, are Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom thoughts are also found in some portions of Genesis, Psalms, Song of songs and prophetic books. The wisdom statements are based on observations of creation and conclusions about what will work or fail in daily life. They have been described as “probable truth” that applies most of (but not all) the time. They are not necessarily “absolute truth.”

Why are these books called wisdom literature? Life is full of many possible choices. One way to define wisdom, according to Fee and Stuart (1993, p.206), “is the ability to make godly choices in life.” Israel’s wisdom sages have observed and reflected on life. They have also written and compiled catchy concise sayings that are meant to teach, lead and guide people (especially the youth) in choices that will determine a good quality life. The collection covers almost every aspect of life. Wisdom sayings in the Old Testament have been classified by Hubbard (1962, 1258) as follows: family wisdom, courtly wisdom, scribal wisdom, nature wisdom, juridicial wisdom and theological wisdom.

The Wisdom statements are not merely theoretical and abstract. While they are philosophical they are also eminently practical and life-related. It is folly indeed to reject these tested and wise insights.

Self-assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the nature of Old Testament Wisdom Literature.

3.1.3 Interpretation of Proverbs

In everyday use a proverb is “a short well-known supposedly wise saying usually in simple language.” (**Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English**, New Edition, 834). This definition is very appropriate for the collection called “Proverbs” in the Old Testament. Old Testament proverbs consist of two major types – the indicative and the imperative mood. The indicative mood proverbs simply declare life as it is based on observations (e.g. Read Prov. 11:24; 14:17). Sometimes it may also prescribe what is to be done for good life (e.g. Read Prov. 14:31; 15:31).

The wisdom teachers of Israel also spoke in the imperative mood to give instruction (e.g. Read Prov. 8:33; 22:17 –24:22). Some proverbs use comparisons (e.g. Read Prov. 15:17). There are also numerical proverbs (like Prov. 30:18-19), example story and reflection (e.g. Prov. 24:30-34).

Two principles to guide interpretation of proverbs in the Old Testament are:

- It is wrong to treat proverbs like absolute promises of God to claim provision, blessing and protection (e. g. Prov. 14:23).
- Many proverbs point to only one aspect of the truth. Therefore, proverbs need to be balanced with other proverbs and understood in comparison with the rest of biblical revelation (e.g. Prov. 10:2 cf. 17:8; 26:4 cf. 5).

Self - Assessment Exercise

How should proverbs found in the Old Testament be interpreted?

3.1.4 Interpretation of Job

The book of Job constitutes an integral part of Old Testament Wisdom Literature. The book is as enigmatic as it is revealing and it is a literary masterpiece. The book has many genres; It is a narrative; The speeches are largely poetic; It is also a wisdom literature.

Job made a good choice, he lived in uprightness (Job 1:1, 8), which should have guaranteed peace, health, prosperity by traditional understanding and expectation. However, he was afflicted with the death of his children and servants, loss of his wealth and health. This tragedy was followed by disputation speeches for almost the rest of the book.

In the dialogues of Job's friends and comforters (Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz and Elihu) we see many wrong pieces of advice and incorrect conclusions about life. These friends reasoned that when people experience calamities it shows that they have sinned against God. On the other hand, Job rightly maintained his innocence in the face of his affliction. While scholars reason that the book of Job is an example of speculative wisdom it is nonetheless true to contemporary human life experience.

Some ideas for the interpretation of the book and the lessons therein are:

According to Fee and Stuart (1993, p.215) the goal of the dialogue is "to establish convincingly in the mind of the reader that what

happens in life does not always happen because God desires it or because it is fair.”

Job did not know that Satan is the source of his affliction. He thought it was from God (Job 2:2). This is a part of the problem of the philosophical and theological nature of evil, pain and suffering (called theodicy). Today, like Job we do not understand why evil happens to good, righteous people but we leave it to God.

Interpretation of any aspect of the book of Job should be done from the perspective of the major lesson of the book, namely, the patience of Job in his suffering (James 5:10-11). Klein and Others (1996, p. 322) have proposed justifiably that the lesson of the book “is that the ultimate root of some human suffering lies in the mysterious hidden plans of God for his people.”

Self - Assessment Exercise

Describe three ideas that can guide the interpretation of the book of Job as a wisdom literature.

3.1.5 Interpretation of Ecclesiastes

If proverbs are parabolic and Job is enigmatic then Ecclesiastes is puzzling. The author appears to hold a pessimistic view of life and the message and wisdom conveyed appear to be negative and even cynical. Again and again he asserted that human life is vanity, meaningless (Read 1:2, 14; 2:15; 11:8). According to Fee and Stuart (1993, 213) Ecclesiastes’ “consistent message (until the very last verses) is that the reality and finality of death meant that life has no ultimate value.”

A critical reading through the book shows that the meaning of human life cannot be found in knowledge and wisdom (1:12-18; 2:12-16), in pleasures (2:1-11), in toil and possessions (2:17-26, 5:8 – 6:12). This means that a godless life is a mistake, a tragedy. The conclusion of the author (Hebrew, **qoheleth**, usually called preacher, which is better translated as teacher or even philosopher) is treated in Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. Here he promoted the fear of God, which is the foundation of wisdom in the Old Testament (Read Psalm 111:10; Prov. 1:7). Life not centered on God is truly without meaning, purpose and fulfillment. However, in God life and the good things offered are to be received, used and fully enjoyed (Eccl. 2:26; 11:8). This is consistent with the entire Biblical revelation (James 1:17).

Self - Assessment Exercise

What is the contribution of Ecclesiastes to the wisdom thoughts in the Old Testament?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The principles and illustrative examples given for the interpretation of poetry and wisdom literature in the Old Testament in this unit is only good for introductory purpose. You are advised to read more about this interesting aspect of biblical hermeneutics in the references and recommended books stated below.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit started with the explanation and interpretation of poetry in the Old Testament with concentration on Psalms. After explaining the nature of Old Testament Wisdom literature the interpretations of the following books were specifically considered: Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Mention four types of poetry in the Old Testament. Give one example of each type in Psalms.
2. Write a short note on the nature of Old Testament Wisdom Literature.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Longman Dictionary of English, New Edition, 1987.

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UNIT 3 INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT I – THE GOSPEL AND ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 The Nature of the Gospels
 - 3.1.1 Interpretation of the Gospels (Generally)
 - 3.1.2 Interpretation of the Gospels (Individually)
 - 3.1.3 The Importance of Acts of the Apostles
 - 3.1.4 Interpretation of Acts of the Apostles
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 References and Further Readings
- 7.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The four major genres of the Bible in the New Testament are the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles and Revelation. The first two will be examined in this unit. Out of the four canonical gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John) the first three are called synoptic gospels because they exhibit many similarities. Interpretation of the four gospel accounts will be considered both generally and individually. Acts will be studied as a narrative that calls for a particular caution, the issue of historical precedent.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) Explain the nature of the four canonical Gospel books,
- ii) Highlight principles of interpretation that apply to the Gospels generally,
- iii) State the peculiarities of the Gospels and the corresponding ideas for hermeneutics,
- iv) Discuss the importance of the Acts of the Apostles,
- v) Describe how to interpret the Acts of the Apostles with particular emphasis on the issue of historical precedent.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Nature of the Gospels

The term gospel is derived from the Greek word **euangelion** and it means “good news”. In the New Testament the gospel, good news, is the message proclaimed by Jesus. It is also used to describe the accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. The four **Canonical Gospels** are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three are remarkably similar and are called **Synoptic Gospels**.

Traditionally, the Gospels used to be considered to be biographies of Jesus. However, in modern scholarship it has been observed that while the narratives say something about the birth, childhood and adult years of Jesus they gave particular attention to his death. For instance, out of 16 chapters, Mark devoted 6 chapters to report the last week of Jesus. The gospels therefore constitute a special kind of biography. In contemporary biblical interpretation the gospel writers are not regarded as mere compiler or historians but as evangelists. Klein and Others (1993, p.325) have prospered that the gospels should therefore be called **theological biographies**.

Self – Assessment Exercise

“The Canonical Gospels can be called theological biographies.” Explain.

3.1.1 Interpretation of the Gospels (Generally)

The gospels are made up of two important components: One, the sayings and teachings of Jesus; Two, the story of the life and ministry of Jesus. In view of this composition, the principles for the interpretation of other narrative and didactic portions of the Bible apply to the gospels as well. One important unique element of the sayings of Jesus is the use of parables. Take this time to revise the ideas presented in the last module about the interpretation of parables as a special literary type. The discussions of the interpretation of narratives in the Old Testament are also relevant to the gospel narratives.

However, the gospels constitute a distinct literary form and some comments will now be made about their unique features and how to interpret them generally.

Try to think of both the historical setting of the life and ministry of Jesus as well as the historical setting of the authors (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John). A knowledge of the Jewish culture and religion (Judaism) will help to appreciate why Jesus extensively used

parables (Matt. 13:3, 34) hyperboles (e.g. Mark 9:43-48) and proverbs (e.g. Matt. 6:21)

Many scholars agree with Fee and Stuart (1993, pp.120-129) that interpretation of the gospels requires both horizontal and vertical thinking. Horizontal interpretation is to interpret a periscope (individual story and saying) with the awareness of the parallels in other gospels (e.g. Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). Vertical interpretation is to be aware of the historical context of Jesus, of the author and of the text as well (e.g. The call of Jesus for discipleship in Mark 8:31-38).

Self – Assessment Exercise

Highlight the principles of horizontal and vertical interpretation of the Gospels with one example of each.

3.1.2 Interpretation of the Gospels (Individually)

Whereas the four gospel writers all bore testimony to the saving life and ministry of Jesus, each of them did it in a peculiar way with a peculiar purpose. In view of this observation each has a particular emphasis that is helpful for its interpretation. This section is based on John Stott, **Men With a Message** (1994, pp.12-85).

Mark presented Jesus as the suffering Servant. He is particularly concerned with discipleship, perhaps because of his own personal experience (Read Mark 14:51-52 and Acts 13:13). He also emphasized the preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God (1:14-15; 2:18-22; 4:26, 30; 9:47; 10:15, 21, 24). Mark reported more of the actions and less of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Matthew is the Gospel of Christ as the King. He focused on the Kingdom of Heaven (the same concept as the Kingdom of God). Because he was a Jew he presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. In addition to the actions of Jesus Matthew added five main sermons, sayings or teachings of Jesus (5:3-7:27; 10:5-42; 13:3-52; 18:2-35; 23:1-25:46).

Luke sees Jesus as the universal Saviour. The Gospel and Acts of the Apostles is his two-part work. As an educated gentile (a medical doctor) he took special interest in some themes like the Holy Spirit, marginalized people (women, the sick, the unclean, the rich and the poor) and prayer.

John's Gospel is different from the three synoptics. Apparently his interest was not just to tell the story of Jesus, but to explain it as the source of faith and life. In John 20:30-31 he stated his purpose expressly in writing the gospel. He focused on Jesus as the source

and giver of life (e.g. 1:4; 6:35; 11:25). John is regarded as one of the formative theologians of the New Testament.

Self-Assessment Exercise

State the peculiarities of a particular Gospel account. What hints do these provide to interpret the Gospel?

3.1.3 The Importance of Acts of the Apostles

The book of Acts is important for some reasons: as an historical document, as a missionary book and to teach about the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts of the Apostles is to be regarded and treated basically as an historical document. Its primary importance lies in the fact that it is the only historical account of the beginning and development of the early church in the Bible. Acts is the only bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. The Acts recount the post-resurrection activities of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

If we take Acts 1:8 as the one sentence summary of the whole book it gives us some clues to interpret the book. The natural division of the book is:

The coming of the Holy Spirit (1:1-24),
Church witness in Jerusalem (3:1-81a)
Church witness in all Judea and Samaria (8:1b – 12:25),
Church witness to the end of the earth (13:1-28:31)

This division deals with Acts as the account of the geographical expansion of the Gospel. It treats Acts as a record of the description of the missionary work of the church. In the last section it was stated that Luke appears to be particularly interested in documenting the activities of the Holy Spirit. It has therefore been suggested that the book of Acts is better recognized as the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. In view of this observation Acts provide a rich source for the study of the person and work of the Spirit. This is a particularly important point to note for the study of the 20th century Pentecostal, charismatic awakening.

Self-Assessment Exercise

What is the importance of the Book of Acts in the New Testament?

3.1.4 Interpretation of Acts of the Apostles

One important issue to consider for the interpretation of Acts is the issue of normative authority of the record. You will recall that when we considered how to interpret the Old Testament law in the last module we also asked if the laws are binding on Christians today. Is Acts only giving us information about the history of the church? Or is the account meant to be understood as a model for the church now and all times? In view of the nature of the book and the questions raised above the following should be considered as we try to interpret Acts:

It is an historical book and it is historically accurate and reliable with regard to the birth and growth of the Apostolic Church.

It is also a missionary book. The evangelistic theme and a possible outline of the book was explained and highlighted respectively above.

It is also a book of devotion or doctrine. While the historical accounts are not doctrines in themselves they provide some data for doctrines (e.g. of the Holy Spirit, church) in the book. This is an important point and it needs a little elaboration. One major hermeneutical difficulty of Acts is the issue of biblical precedent for our lives. There are people who study and interpret Acts as if it was written as a pattern for the church at all times to copy. An important principle of hermeneutics is to make a distinction between historical and instructive portions of the Bible. Description of events are not necessarily doctrines themselves but teachings can be derived from them. Fee and Stuart (1993, 106) thus state: “unless scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative way – unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.” Let us consider some examples to corroborate and illustrate the point.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit can be experienced in a Christian gathering today without the physical manifestations of wind and fire (Acts 2:1-4). To what extent is Acts Chapter Two normative?

The fellowship, caring and sharing of possessions and goods in the Apostolic Church does not suggest Christian communism (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37) and it does not forbid private ownership of properties. Is that practice a historical or biblical precedent?

Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss three examples of the practices of the early church (recorded in Acts of the Apostles) that may not be normative for today.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the study of the nature and the interpretation of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles done in this unit we can make some conclusions. The first is that certain aspects of the Gospels and the whole of the Acts are narratives. General principles for the interpretation of Biblical narratives apply to them. The second is that both the historical settings of Jesus and the gospel writers should be considered to interpret the gospel pericopes. The third is that grammatical and other literary methods can be used to interpret the sayings of Jesus. The fourth is that we should seek to derive and determine doctrines from the narratives of the Acts. We need to exercise caution in dealing with every part of Acts as an historical or Biblical precedent.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have studied the nature of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Portions that can be interpreted with general principles of Hermeneutics were identified (narratives and parables). The parts that call for distinct Hermeneutics were also highlighted (double historical settings of the gospel stories and the issue of Biblical precedent in Acts).

6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments

1. What do you understand by horizontal and vertical interpretation of the Gospels? Give one example each.
2. What is the importance of the book of Acts in the New Testament?

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Klein, William W. and Others (1993) **Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics**, pp. 323-351.

Fee, Gordon D & Douglas Stuart (1993) **How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth**, pp. 94-134.

Stott, John (1994) **Men With a Message**. England: Evangelical Literature Trust, pp. 12-85.

UNIT 4 INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT II – EPISTLES AND REVELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Form of New Testament Epistles
 - 3.1.1 The Nature of New Testament Epistles
 - 3.1.2 Interpretation of New Testament Epistles
 - 3.1.3 The Nature of Revelation
 - 3.1.4 Interpretation of Revelation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Having considered the interpretation of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles in the last unit, we will now study how to interpret the Epistles and the book of Revelation. The Epistle is the dominant literary type in the New Testament. Out of the 27 books 21 are Epistles. There are 13 Pauline Epistles, 7 General Epistles and Hebrews. The non-epistolary New Testament books are the Gospels, Acts and Revelation. Revelation is the last and concluding canonical book of the Bible and it has three literary forms: Epistles, Prophecy and Apocalypse. The emphasis of the presentation will be on the apocalyptic parts.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) List the main parts of New Testament epistles,
- ii) Explain the nature of New Testament epistles,
- iii) Discuss the principles for the interpretation of New Testament epistles,
- iv) Describe the nature of the book of Revelation in the New Testament,
- v) State the various approaches for the interpretation of the book of Revelation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Form of New Testament Epistles

From linguistic viewpoint an epistle is a letter-personal, private or official. However, there is a technical difference between a letter and an epistle. A letter appears to be a personal kind of communication addressing a specific issue(s) on the basis of a relationship between the writer and the reader.

Two good examples of New Testament letters are Philemon and 3 John. On the other hand an epistle seems to be more impersonal and addressed to a wider public e.g. Romans and Ephesians. Examples of New Testament writings that lie between letter and epistles are James and 2 Peter. They share some of the characteristics of both letters as well as epistles as outlined above.

The literary form of letters and epistles in the New Testament follow the form of first century letter. The parts using the example of Philippians are:

Address which includes name of writer and recipient (e.g. “Paul and Timothy” “To the Saints of Christ Jesus at Philippi” - Phil. 1:1).

Salutation (e.g. “Grace and Peace to you...” (1:1). This is a distinct Christian greeting.

Thanksgiving and/or Prayer (e.g. “I thank my God...”(1:3).” And this is my prayer” (1:9). Most Pauline letters contain either or both of these.

Body. As it is expected this is always the largest part of an epistle (e.g. Philippians 1:12-4:20). The body may consist of exposition and application in different parts or these may be woven together.

Closing which may include greetings and farewell e.g. Greet all the Saints” (4:21) and “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” (4:23).

It should be noted, however, that not every letter or epistle conforms, exactly to this pattern.

Self-Assessment Exercise

List the six main parts of an epistle in the New Testament.

3.1.1 The Nature of New Testament Epistles

One important aspect of the nature of epistles is that they are regarded as “occasional documents.” This means that they arose out of specific occasions. Each epistle was thus called forth by a particular circumstance, which may be from the side of the reader or that of the author.

For the purpose of interpretation we will do well to remember that epistles were written in the first century to speak to particular situations in Christian/church life. As explained by Fee and Stuart (1993, 48): “Usually the occasion was some kind of behaviour that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light. Most of our problems in interpreting Epistles are due to this fact of their being occasional.”

In view of this explanation the documents should not be treated as full Christian Theology. Most of the time when Theology is implied the intention of the author was to speak to the particular situation at hand. Whereas the epistles provide a lot of Biblical data for us to formulate Theology, the writings are not theological treatises in themselves.

Self-Assessment Exercises

Write a short note on “The Occasional Nature of the New Testament Epistles.”

3.1.2 Interpretation of New Testament Epistles

Based on the occasional nature of the epistles the following major steps/principles will help to interpret an epistle in part or whole:

Seek information about the **historical background** of the particular Epistle. The historical context may apply to a word or phrase or an idea or even a whole letter.

Study the **literary context** of the text you wish to interpret. You need to read through the whole epistle. You can read through the whole of most New Testament epistles in about 1 hour. One does not read a letter in parts. Apart from this point, scholars also stress the importance of thinking paragraphs. You will find in a paragraph a unit of thought. With the above historical, literary and contextual explorations you should seek to determine the meaning of the epistle to the original recipient(s).

Next consider if you share **specific life situations** (called “comparable particulars”) with the first-century cultural context. If you do then God’s word to them is the same as God’s word to you.

This is the issue and problem of **cultural relativity**, which is so important in the interpretation of epistles. Fee and Stuart (1993, 71) thus argued and proposed, “we suggest that the recognition of a degree of cultural relativity is a valid Hermeneutical procedure and is an inevitable corollary of the occasional nature of the Epistles.”

Illustrative Exercise

Read the following bible passages (in the Epistles) and determine if you share comparable particulars with the original setting and so if the instructions are binding on you:

1 Cor. 11:2-6; Head covering in public worship,
2 Tim. 5:23; Taking wine for the sake of stomach illness;
1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; Women to learn in quietness in public worship, not to teach men;
1 Cor. 1:16; The practice of infant baptism;
Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; Greetings with a holy kiss.

Explanatory Notes:

Please note that:

Cultural items and issues of right and wrong on cultural practices are to be determined in every culture (e.g. Holy kiss, feet washing),

Lists of sins in the Bible do not usually contain cultural items because they are to be condemned in every culture (e.g. adultery, homosexuality, idolatry, drunkenness, stealing, greed, 1 Cor. 6:9-10),

The principle of cultural relativity needs to be applied to several parts of the Epistles. Solution to whatever was a local cultural problem does not apply to a different culture in a different time.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the problem of cultural relativity with the interpretation of one New Testament epistolary text.

3.1.3 The Nature of Revelation

Revelation is not just the last book of the Bible it is one of the most difficult to interpret and understand. Indeed some Bible readers and interpreters are skeptical if we can understand and claim to be able to

correctly interpret the seals, trumpets, angels, beasts, plagues and bowls in the book.

However, if we affirm the previous Hermeneutical lessons we can approach the book with the conviction that God gave the human author (John) a message to communicate. It is possible to know that message to the original recipients and apply it to contemporary Christian faith and church life.

How then are we to approach the rich and diverse symbolism, earthquakes, dragons and bottomless pits in Revelation? We should do so with the understanding that since the book does not interpret itself we should not be dogmatic in our assertions and conclusions. The starting point is to recognize that, as a matter of fact, some of the hermeneutical questions, issues and principles of other parts of the Bible are also relevant to Revelation. This is because, viewed critically, the book has three literary forms: epistle, prophecy and apocalypse.

Revelation is an **epistle** because it is a type of letter written by John to the seven churches (1:4-7). Indeed the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) can be approached as occasional documents. Revelation is also a **prophecy** (1:3; 22:18-19) both in terms of foretelling and forthtelling. Chapter 6 and some others contain predictive prophetic parts. The book is definitely an **apocalypse**, a revelation (1:1) and it shares many apocalyptic features with Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Mention three distinct literary forms found in the book of Revelation.

3.1.4 Interpretation of Revelation

In an attempt to interpret Revelation in part or whole the reader should recognize four major approaches being used by scholars (Klein and Others, 1993, 369):

The preterist approach which emphasizes that the book was written eventually for the first, original readers;

The historicist approach which traces the development of the church age. It is believed that the seven churches of Asia stand for different ages of the history of the church.

The futurist approach that the entire description is for the future. Beyond chapters 1-3 it is believed that the book is eschatological, conceived with the end of the age.

The idealist considers the book to be a symbolic presentation of the struggle between good and evil.

I am of the opinion that these different approaches are applicable to different sections of the book. Therefore epistolary and prophetic portions of Revelation should be interpreted with the principles discussed earlier for epistles and prophecies respectively. What will now be done is to consider how to interpret Revelation as an apocalyptic literature.

The book of Revelation shares the following characteristics of apocalypse, according to Fee and Stuart (1993, 232-234): It is concerned with coming judgement and salvation; It is a literary work, John was told to write what he saw (1:19); It is full of visions, dreams, symbols and hidden language; The images are often forms of fantasy (e.g. 9:10; 12:1; 13:1). It has a formalized style with symbolic use of numbers. The only apocalyptic quality not shared by Revelation is that it is not pseudonymous. John identified himself as the author (1:4).

If the principles of exegesis, literary and historical contextuality are applied to Revelation it would be seen that the larger concern of John is that while the church will experience persecution she will triumph ultimately because “God is in control of history and the church”. This hermeneutical key should be used to interpret the book in parts or whole.

Self-Assessment Exercise

State the four approaches for the interpretation of the book of revelation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In view of the occasional nature of the Epistles, and based on the principle of cultural relativity discussed in this unit, New Testament letters are to be interpreted from the perspective of the entire biblical revelation and worldview. On the other hand, any Hermeneutical approach to Revelation should give comfort and encouragement to Christians suffering persecution and tribulation now or in the future.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have examined the interpretation of two genres of the New Testament – Epistles and Revelation. After considering the form and nature of the Epistles their interpretation was studied through historical background, literary context and cultural relativity. The nature of revelation as an epistle, prophecy and apocalypse were highlighted as well as various Hermeneutical approaches.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. List the six main parts of an epistle in the New Testament.
2. State the four approaches for the interpretation of the book of Revelation.

7.0 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Fee & Stuart (1993), **How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth**, pp. 45-77, 231-245.

Klein & Others (1996) **Introduction to Biblical Interpretation**, pp. 352-374.

Adewale, 'Biyi (1996) **The Praxis of Biblical Interpretation**, pp. 135-158.

UNIT 5 APPLICATION AND CORRELATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Rationale for Application and Correlation
 - 3.1.1 Methods of Application and Correlation
 - 3.1.2 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation I
 - 3.1.3 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation II
 - 3.1.4 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation III
 - 3.1.5 Some Essentials for Application and Correlation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

I believe that your study of Biblical Hermeneutics in the past units has inspired, provoked, challenged, enlarged, and enriched your thoughts. What I want to do in this concluding unit is to try, through application and correlation, to tie together all that you have studied thus far. Application will deal with how to put the theory of Biblical Hermeneutics into practice. The concern of correlation is how to integrate the principles and methods as you handle the word of God. In this unit I will try to be very practical.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i) State the rationale for application and correlation of the Bible,
- ii) Explain three methods of application and correlation of the Bible,
- iii) Apply the principles of biblical precedent and cultural relativity to contemporary Christian life,
- iv) Discuss the essential requirements for application and correlation of the Bible.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Rationale for Application and Correlation

Why do we have to apply and correlate Scriptures? Why did we take the pain to survey the history and principles of Biblical interpretation? How do we bring the lessons learnt unto practical use and operation? What is the connection between the historic and contemporary methods of Biblical Hermeneutics? It should be stated at the onset that the value of this exercise is not only academic but it is profoundly practical. It is meant to give us practical benefits in Christian life and ministry.

We need to apply and correlate the Biblical information for some reasons which include the following:

The Bible should be applied because it is **inspired and authoritative** (Read 2 Tim. 3:16a). It is God-breathed means that it is God-inspired, God-given. Since the Bible is the breath and word of God it is no ordinary but divine book. To obey the Bible is to obey God. The Bible thus reveals to us who God is, and what God requires of us. There is a sense in which our knowledge of the Bible will determine our knowledge of God.

Application of the Bible will give us some benefits that can be described generally as **spiritual blessing** (Deut. 30:11-20). It is good to find truth but the more important thing is what we do with the truth. Obedience to the Bible gives spiritual knowledge, meaning and satisfaction in life. It also regulates human conduct (Psalm 1:1-3) without application Biblical interpretation is a scholarly exercise in futility.

There is a need for correlation because God has revealed (unveiled) the truth recorded over a long period through diverse human experiences. Since the **revelation** of God is **progressive**, we need to correlate and harmonise what God has said in different situations through different persons in different ages. We need to correlate the revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments, in the narratives and instructions as well as in the poetry and prose.

Self-Assessment Exercise

State three reasons why we need to apply and correlate bible truths.

3.1.1 Methods of Application and Correlation

How should we apply and correlate the Bible? To ask the same question more practically, what is the purpose or value of the Bible? How shall we benefit from Bible reading, study and interpretation? The first three

methods in this section concern application while the last two concern correlation.

Apply for Spiritual education (2 Tim. 3:14-15): The Bible talks about the holiness of God, creation, sin and redemption of human beings. This knowledge can help to transform the reader. It can also enrich the spiritual life of the interpreter (John 6:63).

Apply for Spiritual maturity (2 Tim. 3:16b): The Bible is milk and meat for spiritual life (1 Peter 2:2; Jer. 15:16). It is valuable for doctrine (teaching and rebuking) and conduct (correcting and training). The Bible should help us to formulate and live by Godly principles. It rebukes us when we do wrong, when we commit sin and evil. It also ought to correct us when we are set on the path of indiscipline and error. It trains us to live in righteousness, Holiness and Godliness. This leads to a life of maturity.

Apply for Christian service (2 Tim. 3:17): The Bible gives instructions on how to serve the Lord. It is full of examples of people who helped others. In the Bible we find encouragement to be faithful in the use of our life, possessions, time, talents and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 4:2).

Apply appropriate Hermeneutical principles and methods as described in the previous units: Klein and Others (1993, 406) summarize the point succinctly: “legitimate application requires the use of both the general Hermeneutical principles (establishing an accurate text, the correct meaning of words, the historical – cultural background, the larger literary contexts and the like) and, also, special Hermeneutics or genre criticism.”

Apply the peculiar principles of Biblical precedent and cultural relativity: These methods are especially applicable to narratives and epistles respectively.

At this juncture it is appropriate to warn you of some misapplication of the Bible like using it: to swear, to catch a thief, to put it under a pillow to ward off evil spirits, to wash with water and drink. These magical, fetish and pagan uses of the Bible are wrong.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Explain three values of Bible study and interpretation.

3.1.2 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation I

In this unit section and the next two are consider some specific texts and issues for application and correlation. I will also give you some passages and issues to interpret, apply and correlate yourself. You can use Study Bible and Commentaries to answer the questions.

The Bible is full of records of the lives of people. Some are good examples for us to emulate. Others are bad examples to be avoided. What lessons can we learn from the following stories?

God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Read Genesis 22:1-2; Heb. 11:17-19). Is this a justification for ritual sacrifice today? Explain (Lev. 18:21, 20:25).

God asked prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, a harlot (Hos. 1:2). Does that justifies an evangelist to be involved with a prostitute today? (Lev. 19:29; 1 Cor. 6:15). How do we reconcile that with the idea of divorcing a spouse on the basis of adultery? (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:8-9).

In the creation of Adam and Eve we see an example of monogamy (Gen. 2:18-25). However, several Old Testament Saints were polygamous including Abraham, David and Solomon. On the other hand the Lord Jesus Christ did not marry. Search the scriptures to explain the ideal marital status (celibacy, monogamy or polygamy) for Christians in general and priests (gospel ministers) in particular.

The New Testament specifically instructs that persons who would be consecrated/ordained for ministries (Missionaries, Evangelists, Pastors, Deacons, etc) should be monogamous (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Is there a Biblical justification today to deny polygamists church membership and opportunities to serve God in other areas of church life?

These examples illustrate the principle of Biblical precedent discussed in the interpretation of Acts of the Apostles. It shows the need for us to reconcile description of events and lives of people with instructions. The lifestyles of some people are not necessarily building on us. We are to evaluate the conduct of others on the basis of requirements of the word of God. We are to base our conduct on Biblical practices that conform with God's commandments.

Self – Assessment Exercise

On the basis of the principle of Biblical precedent how should we interpret and apply the following bible passages today? (Acts 2:2-3; 2:45cf. 4:32; 5:5-10)

3.1.3 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation II

Now consider some bible passages and practical issues that relate to Christian worship. These are not just for you to read. Study the texts. Consider the issues. Write down your conclusions.

Do you think practices like holy kiss and feet washing be observed literally in places where it is not their culture? (1 Thess. 5:26; John 13:1-17). Please explain on the basis of the principle of cultural relativity.

Is head covering the same as putting on the veil? (1 Cor. 11:3-9; 13-15). Is the emphasis on covering the head/hair or the eyes? Is the hair to be accepted as a covering? (1 Cor. 11:13-15cf. Num. 6:1-21). Should it be made compulsory for African women to cover their heads “because of the angels”? (v.10).

Should women be allowed to talk in the church? (1 Cor. 14:33b-38; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Can they ask questions, teach, lead and pastor a church? How would women who have gifts of pastoring and teachings use them?

A pair of trousers is considered to be a male dress in most traditional African societies. Is it right now for African ladies to put it on in view of the global culture that Africa has imbibed? (Deut 22:5).

In many of these cases the issue of limited application of culturally conditioned bible passages cannot be ignored. The truth is that culture is the total way of life of a society. Today’s Christian practices should be judged not only from the traditional African culture, but from contemporary culture. Culture is not static. Culture is growing and dynamic. Let us note that most of the issues above are not just issues of what is universally right and wrong, but what is acceptable and permissible or otherwise in a particular local church and society.

Self – Assessment Exercise

Apostle Paul claimed to “have become all things to all men.” Study 1 Cor. 9:19-23 and discuss how to put this example of cultural relativity into practice today.

3.1.4 Examples and Exercises of Application and Correlation III

In this last section we will examine some other issues that pertain to Christian faith and life.

When Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples he asked them not to take a purse or bag or sandals (Luke 10:4). Why? Later on he asked them take them and even buy sword (Luke 10:36-38). Why? However, when Peter used the sword to defend Jesus, Jesus objected (Luke 10:47-50). Why? Can Christians use the sword and other Africa weapons to defend themselves today when attacked by non-Christians? How does this relate to the principle of non-retaliation? (Matt. 5:38-42).

Homosexuality in form of lesbianism and gay is gaining ground today. Some of the people involved claim that it is their genetic being. Should the church recognize homosexual marital relationships today? (Gen. 19:4-5, Rom. 1:18-32, 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Paul exhorted Timothy to use a little wine for the sake of his ailment (specifically stomachache (1 Tim. 5:23 cf. Ps. 104:15). The Bible severally consistently condemns drunkenness (1 Cor. 6:10; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 5:18). Should the church teach moderation of or complete abstinence from wine?

What is your interpretation of Paul's instruction about meat offered to idols? (1 Cor. 8:1-13, 10:23-11:1). Is it wrong for a Christian to receive or partake of rams that Muslims sacrifice during festivals? What of the meat offered as sacrifices in African Traditional Religion Worship?

Explanatory Notes

As a matter of principle sometime a Christian may have to forgo his/her right for the sake of modeling the Gospel to non-Christians or to young (or weak) Christians.

Sins are not to be treated the same way we treat cultural items. Homosexuality should not be treated as a mere social or cultural behaviour. It is consistently condemned in the Bible as a sexual sin along with fornication and adultery.

We must admit that there are no explicit Biblical examples or instructions about some aspects of contemporary life. In such cases we should be guided by the principles in the entire Biblical revelation as well as the laws of society to determine Christian conduct.

Self – Assessment Exercise

The list of sins in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 are universal absolutes. How can we apply them in a context where some of these are approved by the culture?

3.1.5 Some Essentials for Application and Correlation

Biblical Hermeneutics is both an academic as well as a spiritual activity. It has both objective and dimensions. It is both theory as well as practice. I believe that you appreciate these statements in view of all you have studied in this course. However in view of this nature of the task I will like to state some essentials required for sound biblical interpretation in this section. The arrangement of the requirements is not necessarily in order of importance.

Since **the Holy Spirit** is the author of the Bible (Read 1 Peter 19-21) the interpreter needs to seek the leading of the Spirit. To receive God's word from the Holy Spirit, a life of holiness is thus crucially important (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The interpreter can receive so much spiritual insight and understanding from the word of God through **prayer and meditation** (Psalm 119:9-104). These spiritual habits are essentials to interpret the word of God. I believe that if we approach Bible study with humility and dependence on God we have a disposition to receive truth.

In addition to these spiritual requirements, however, we also need academic efforts.

Truth, even Biblical truth, is often multifaceted and complex. It is necessary for the interpreter of the Bible to have **wide study exposure**. A good starting point is to use more than one version of the Bible. Every serious Bible interpreter (Preacher, Teacher, Counselor) needs to constantly use the following sources:

- One Bible literal version e.g. RSV
- One dynamic equivalence e.g. GNB
- One paraphrase e.g. LB
- One study Bible e.g. **The NIV Study Bible**
- One commentary e.g. Matthew Henry Commentary

Without this exposure a bible interpreter stands the risk of being myopic and parochial.

Competent Biblical Hermeneutics always require **hard work** (1 Tim. 5:17). The help of the Holy Spirit is not a substitute for **intelligent diligent study**. As a matter of fact the person who does more prayerful study is a better instrument in the hand of the Holy Spirit to do correct Bible interpretation more than the lazy, causal inquirer.

I will like to summarise the essential requirements for effective interpretation, application and correlation of the Bible thus:

- Search diligently and sincerely (John 5:39)
- Depend on God for insights (2 Tim. 2:15)
- Pray for understanding (2 Tim. 2:7)

Self – Assessment Exercise

List four important requirements for effective interpretation, application and correlation of the Bible.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The principles and methods of Biblical Hermeneutics were discussed in the previous units. Bible interpretation is not complete if we are only interested in or able to determine the meaning of Biblical texts to the original first recipients. This concluding unit shows that the significance of Bible texts for today ought to be equally important to the interpreter. This is the question of application and correlation dealt with in this unit.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have considered the rationale for application and application of the Bible. We also considered the methods to be employed for that exercise. Furthermore, we studied some specific examples and suggested some exercise in biblical application and correlation. The unit ended with an highlight of some requirements for application and correlation. Having introduced you to biblical hermeneutics in this course, I encourage you to try to put what you have learnt into practice. I also encourage you to continue to study this very important subject the more.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Mention three reasons why we need application and correlation of bible lessons.
2. How does the principle of cultural relativity apply to the statement of Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 9:19-23?
3. List four essentials for effective interpretation application and correlation of the Bible.

7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Klein, William W. (1993) **Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics**, pp. 401-426.

Fee, Gordon D & Douglas Stuart (1993) **How to Read the Bible for all its Worth**, pp. 61-77, 94-112.