



**Craig L. Blomberg, Ph.D.**  
Distinguished Professor of New  
Testament Studies at Denver  
Seminary in Littleton, Colorado

## I. Introduction

In this graduate-level New Testament course, we will cover four major topics in six lessons. The major topics will include: New Testament as Scripture, development of the New Testament text, New Testament settings, and archaeological evidence. In this first lesson, we will introduce the New Testament as Scripture.

## II. New Testament as Scripture

Thinking about scriptural authority, one must start with the fact that Scripture views itself as a message from God. One appeals to Scripture in this matter not for proof, but for information. God calls Himself as “the Lord, the compassionate ... abounding in love (mercy) and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6); the prologue of the fourth gospel says the Word of God is “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Grace is synonymous with merciful love, as truth is with fidelity. The definition is the same.

### A. Grace Explained

The essence of the doctrine of grace is that God is for us. What is more, He is for us who in ourselves are against Him. More still, He is not for us merely in an abstract manner, but has effectively acted toward us. Grace is summed up in the name Jesus Christ. As He is God in Himself, so He will be God toward us, for our benefit. He will assume the responsibility for our past, present, and future. He is the grace of God toward us. He, no longer an enemy, stands with us against our real enemies, and that effectively: “If God is for us, who can be against us” (Ro 8:31)? Grace must be acknowledged for what it is, a free gift, and be accepted with humble and joyful gratitude. This human decision, involving acknowledgment and acceptance, is the faith that corresponds to God’s grace.

GRACE



JESUS  
CHRIST

## NT Scriptures

*All Scripture is God-breathed . . .*

2 Timothy 3:16

*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Peter 1:21



### Hermeneuein =

to explain, interpret, or translate

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Eph 2:8).

### B. God-inspired

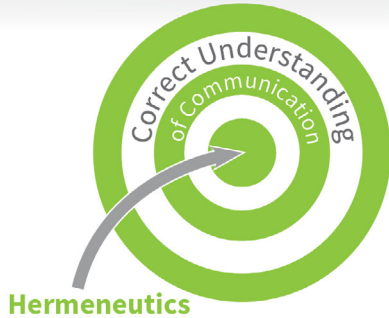
The theological idea of inspiration presupposes a personal mind and will—in Hebrew terminology, the “living God”—acting to communicate with other living beings. The Christian belief in inspiration rests both on explicit biblical assertions and on the pervading mood of the scriptural record. Christians believe both testaments are the inspired Word of God. This doctrine of inspiration has not been superimposed upon Scripture, but is what it claims for itself. Critics may reject that claim, but they cannot deny the claim has been made. Paul confidently states, “All Scripture is God-breathed” in his letter to Timothy (2Ti 3:16), and Peter adds, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2Pe 1:21). The biblical text is, therefore, more than just a great literary work; it is the very Word of God.

## III. Understanding the New Testament

The primary goal of this lesson, therefore, is to help you become a better exegete, that is, a better listener and student of the Word of God. In order not to miss the benefit of your own study, use other study materials after you have done your own work, not before. These are helpful especially in giving information you cannot get from the Bible alone—for example, additional facts about people, places, and events. And they can provide useful comments on passages that may be difficult to understand.

### A. Hermeneutics

Correctly interpreting and understanding the Bible can be an arduous, often puzzling, but ultimately rewarding experience. Deciding to begin to do in-depth Bible study may seem intimidating at first, but a knowledge of the art and science of hermeneutics can prove helpful. *Hermeneuein*, a Greek verb, means “to explain, interpret or translate,” while the noun *hermeneia* means “interpretation” or “translation.” Using the verb form, Luke informs his readers that Jesus “explained” to the two disciples on the Emmaus road what



*A text cannot mean what it never meant.*

**Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart**

**Exegeomai =**  
to lead out of

the Hebrew Bible said about Him (Lk 24:27). Hermeneutics attempts to help us comprehend what a message—written, oral, or visual—is endeavoring to communicate.

If the goal of hermeneutics is the correct understanding of communication, then we need to learn what precepts and methods will be appropriate to the task. Hermeneutics provides various rules and techniques for acquiring a more complete understanding of the biblical text. To avoid interpretation that is arbitrary, erroneous, or that simply suits personal whim, readers need to be aware of the rules or principles for guidance appropriate to biblical interpretation. When one consciously sets out to discover and employ such principles, one investigates hermeneutics. However, hermeneutics is both a science and an art. There are rules, principles, methods, and tactics associated with biblical interpretation, but no mechanical system of rules will ever help a person fully understand all the implications or nuances of any given text; that is where the art of interpretation enters in.

Questions related to biblical hermeneutics can often be difficult to answer and there may be various ways to go about answering them. But there should be agreement on one aspect of biblical hermeneutics according to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart: “A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken” (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, p. 27). In other words, the interpreter must always keep in mind that the text under consideration is more than a piece of literature—it is the Word of God.

## **B. Exegesis**

Exegesis is a normal activity in which all of us engage on a daily basis, even if we have never called it by that name. Whenever we hear an oral statement or read a written one and seek to understand what has been expressed, we are engaging in exegesis. The term “exegesis” itself comes from the Greek word *exegeomai*, which basically means, “to lead out of.” When applied to texts, it denotes the “reading out of the meaning.” The noun, therefore, can refer to

## Exegesis . . .

entering the text

## HERMENEUTICS:

theory guiding exegesis

## EXEGESIS:

discovering the intended meaning

interpretation or explanation. Thus whenever we read a text or hear a statement that we seek to understand and interpret, we are involved in exegesis.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to reach an informed understanding of the text under consideration. The fact is there are various nuances of any text's meaning, and different types of exegesis can address these different aspects. For this reason, the exegete can never hope to present the exegesis of a passage as if it were his or her final understanding. Rather, one does an exegesis of a passage in which a coherent, informed interpretation is presented, based on one's encounter with an investigation of that text at a given point in time. Exegesis does not allow one to master the text so much as it enables one to enter into it.

### C. Relationship of Hermeneutics to Exegesis

According to Walter C. Kaiser in *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis is as follows: "Hermeneutics seeks to describe the general and special principles and rules that are useful in approaching the biblical text; exegesis seeks to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thoughts of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately, entire books. Accordingly, hermeneutics may be regarded as the theory that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood to be the practice of and the set of procedures for uncovering the author's (or editor's) intended meaning (p. 47)."

In other words, hermeneutics stands in the same relationship to exegesis as the rulebook stands to the game. The rulebook is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. Rules are not the game, but the game is meaningless without rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

### IV. Biblical Interpretation

Interpretation is an activity in which the reader or hearer seeks to gain the shareable verbal meanings that an author or speaker has sought to transmit by linguistic signs. Not every meaning in



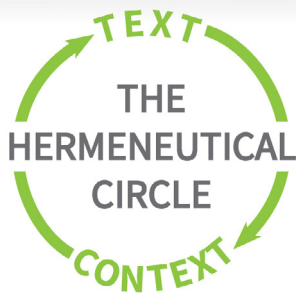
**Linguistic Symbols  
with Identical Meaning**

an author's mind can be conveyed by language. As E. D. Hirsch has put it, "An author's verbal meaning is limited by linguistic possibilities but is determined by his actualizing and specifying some of those possibilities. Correspondingly, the verbal meaning that an interpreter construes is determined by his act of will, limited by those same possibilities" (*Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p 47).

The chance that an interpreter will succeed in grasping an author's verbal meaning is greatly enhanced by the limitations of possible meanings that cultural norms and conventions impose upon words. A linguistic symbol can represent an identical meaning for two persons, because the range of what it can mean has been limited by convention. Of course, words often have several meanings, but the association a word has with other words in its context does much to indicate the unambiguous meaning that the author intended it to have at a certain place in his or her writing. Nevertheless, the interpreter always has to keep in mind there is some degree of speculation associated with the meaning of the communication he or she wants to grasp. In constructing a text whose author cannot be consulted, a claim to validity in interpretation can never have more than a high degree of probability.

Yet the more willing an interpreter is to submit the proposed construction of a text to the scrutiny of others who have also worked hard to understand it, the higher will be the probability of achieving a consensus regarding the meaning its author wanted to transmit. The greatest difficulty to overcome in the interpretation of texts is the famous "hermeneutical circle," which refers to the path a thought takes as it attempts to find meaning.

Methodologically, it refers to the procedure that an interpreter follows as he or she turns from the parts of a sentence to the sentence as a whole and then, quite literally, from the whole back to the parts. Descriptively, the circle refers to that profound interrelationship that the words of a sentence have with the paragraph as a whole, and so on outward to the work as a unity, and then finally expanding to include all the elements contingent upon an adequate understanding of the text at hand—in short, the interrelationship of text and context, context and text.



*Understanding is difficult, but not impossible.*

Hirsch

To be sure, if all facets of a text were equally capable of being made into evidence to support several different ways of construing a text, then the hermeneutical circle could never be broken, and interpreters would waste their time discussing which view was correct. But as Hirsch points out, "... not all traits are genre-dependent ... and not everything in verbal understanding is variable. Understanding is difficult, but not impossible" (*Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p 77). So discussion with a fellow interpreter about how a text should be construed is indispensable, precisely because another mind is able to bring one to see some of those relatively few invariable traits in a text that will fit only one interpretation of it. Therefore, validity in interpretation is possible as a matter of high probability, albeit not absolute certainty, and this makes the interpretation of biblical texts as worthy a pursuit of knowledge as that of any other field where only high probability rather than absolute certainty is attainable.

## V. Critical Methodologies

In the balance of this lesson, we will examine the various ways of addressing the questions and problems modern students and interpreters encounter when exegeting the biblical text. The variety of methods to be discussed merely attests to the richness and diversity of the biblical documents, and these methods should be seen as complementary. No single way of approaching a text should be seen as exhausting the meaning of a passage, but rather as a way of dealing with one particular facet of a passage.

Each of these approaches is treated as a type of criticism. Criticism is a comprehensive term, embodying a number of techniques employed in the study of (among other things) written documents in order to establish, as far as possible, their original text, the literary categories to which they pertain, style, authorship, date, purpose, and so forth. Biblical criticism embraces various critical disciplines, notably textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, historical criticism, and canonical criticism.

### A. Textual Criticism

Because the biblical autographs (original copies) have

## | Critical Methodologies

- Textual Criticism
- Source Criticism
- Form Criticism
- Redaction Criticism
- Historical Criticism
- Canonical Criticism



**ERRORS:**

- of Eye (Homoioleuton)
- of Speech
- of Mind

**CORRECTIONS:**

- Linguistic
- Historical
- Harmonistic
- Doctrinal
- Liturgical

**CLASSIFICATION OF****TEXT-TYPES:**

- Alexandrian
- Caesarean
- Byzantine
- Western

all been lost, it is important to carefully evaluate the manuscripts that we do have. Although this is usually the job of specialists, all believers should have some familiarity with textual criticism. The function and purpose of textual criticism is of a dual nature to (1) reconstruct the original wording of the biblical text, and (2) to establish the history of the transmission of the text through the centuries. Over the course of time, two kinds of errors have crept into the text: unintentional and intentional.

Unintentional errors include (1) errors of the eye. The copyist sometimes confused similar appearing uncial letters. Homoioteleuton is an error in which the scribe's eye skips from the first to the second nearby occurrence of an identical word or group of letters, thereby omitting all the intervening text. Errors of the eye also include the transposition of letters, producing a different word. (2) Errors of speech arise from similarities of pronunciation. (3) Errors of the mind result from misunderstanding or forgetfulness, which include changes in word order and the substitution of synonyms.

Intentional changes include (1) linguistic or rhetorical corrections, which were undoubtedly made in good faith. (2) Historical corrections include changes introduced to correct an apparent error of fact. (3) Harmonistic corrections include the apparent intentional assimilation of parallel passages (for example, the assimilation of the Lord's Prayer in many manuscripts of Luke 11:2-4 to the fuller form of Matthew 6:9-13). (4) Doctrinal corrections are among the less frequent deliberate changes. (5) Liturgical corrections might have been introduced into the text because of the use of the passage in the liturgy.

Textual criticism has gradually evolved certain principles, which are based upon patient classification and weighing of all the documentary evidence available, both external (that is, the value of the manuscript) and internal (that is, intrinsic probability). External evidence seeks to determine which reading is supported by the most-reliable witnesses—Greek manuscripts, versions, and patristic citations. Many of the witnesses can be put into one of four groups or text-types: Alexandrian, Caesarean, Byzantine, and Western. By examining a large number of textual variants, scholars can determine the relative reliability of these text-types.

1. The Alexandrian Text is one of the geographical place names given to manuscripts of the New Testament bearing the same textual characteristics and thought to have come from a common ancestor originating in Alexandria, Egypt. Also called the Egyptian Text or, more commonly and preferably perhaps, the Neutral Text so called by F. J. A. Hort (1882) on the theory that it was an essentially pure representative of the New Testament autographs. The principal witness to the Neutral Text is the fourth-century manuscript Codex Vaticanus.
2. The theory of the Caesarean Text as a distinct text-type was proposed by B. H. Streeter (1924). It is based on the knowledge that in the two halves of his commentary on John, Origen quoted from different manuscripts of the New Testament, the former available while he was in Alexandria, the latter while in Caesarea. Streeter deduced from this that a distinct Caesarean text-type existed, which he identified with Codex Koridethi and two families of minuscules (Families 1 and 13). Recent text-critical studies seem to indicate, however, that the witnesses purportedly with the Caesarean text-type do not represent a text-type sufficiently distinct from the two major strains, the Alexandrian and the Western, to warrant a separate designation.
3. The Byzantine, or Antiochian, text-type is found in many of the later uncial manuscripts, almost all of the minuscule manuscripts, and most of the later church fathers and versions. It formed the basis of the Textus Receptus and therefore of the King James Version. It is characterized by clarifying the harmonizing interpolations, and a general smoothing of dictation.
4. The Western Text is another one of the geographical place names given to manuscripts of the New Testament bearing similar textual characteristics. They are mainly in the bilingual Graeco-Latin manuscripts, Old Latin manuscripts, and quotations from the Latin Fathers, all associated with Italy, Gaul, and Africa. The term Western Text is only partly accurate (since some Old Syriac and Coptic manuscripts show the same textual characteristics) and is replaced by some scholars with the letter D, after its central witness, Codex Bezae



## Principles of Internal Evidence:

1. The more difficult reading is preferred
2. The reading would more likely to have given rise to the other
3. The shortest reading is preferred
4. The reading characteristic of the author is preferred



Cantabrigiensis.

The basic principle of internal evidence is that the reading from which the other readings could most easily have risen is probably the original reading. The following are the traditional formulations, according to Richard Soulen in his *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*: (1) the more difficult reading is often preferred, (2) the reading would be more likely to have given rise to the other, (3) the shorter reading is generally preferred, (4) the reading characteristic of the author is generally preferable (p. 195).

## B. Source Criticism

Source criticism can be pursued most easily when a documentary source has survived alongside the latter work that has drawn upon it. In the Old Testament the most obvious example of this is seen in 1 and 2 Chronicles. The books of Samuel and Kings were the Chronicler's principal sources, and as they have survived we can make rather definitive statements about his use of them. In the New Testament, the gospel of Mark is generally recognized to have been a major source of the other two Synoptic Gospels; and since the source survives alongside the works that drew upon it, we can, without difficulty, study the use Matthew and Luke made of Mark.

When there are parallel traditions, the procedures for analysis are (1) note the evidence internal to the documents themselves (that is, the areas of overlap and the points of difference in the different traditions), (2) note any relevant external evidence (that is, the statements of early church fathers about the writing of the Gospels), and (3) propose and test different possible explanations of the evidence for comprehensiveness and simplicity. Of course, when the sources have not survived, source criticism becomes a much more speculative business.

## C. Form Criticism

Form criticism of the New Testament has two aims: (1) To classify the various New Testament books according to their literary genre (German *Gattungsgeschichte*), and (2) to

- **Structure**
  - **Genre**
  - **Setting**
  - **Intention**

analyze the smaller units of traditional material according to the “form” or “shape” they have assumed during the oral, preliterate period. Form criticism has been intensively applied to the Gospels from the early twentieth century on.

The four more or less traditional steps of the form-critical method have been conveniently outlined by Gene M. Tucker as follows. (1) Structure: An analysis of the outline, pattern, or schema of a given genre; its opening and closing (inclusio), conventional patterns (for example, parallelism, chiasm), etc. (2) Genre: A definition and description of the unit according to its type. (3) Setting: A determination of the social situation or language that gave rise to the genre, to other typicalities of the text, or to the individual text at hand. (4) Intention: A statement of the purpose and function, the mood and content, of the genre in general and specifically of the example under study (*Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

#### **D. Redaction Criticism**

What is redaction criticism? The term “redaction” in gospel criticism describes the editorial work carried out by the evangelists on their sources when they composed the Gospels. Redaction criticism is the study of the observable changes introduced by the gospel writers into the traditional material they received and used. As used in biblical exegesis, redaction criticism refers to that stage of interpretation whose primary focus is the final written form or composition of a passage. More specifically, it pertains to the final stage of the tradition, as it were, that has become crystallized in written form, and asks what the author or final editor intended to say through the passage in its final form. Redaction criticism presupposes the insights and perspectives of textual criticism and form criticism.

The redaction critic asks, for example: Why does Luke alter the Markan tradition concerning John the Baptist as Elijah (Compare Mk 6:14-16 with Lk 9:7-9; Mk 6:17-29 and 9:9-13 are absent from Luke)? Why does Luke have Satan present at the beginning and end of Jesus’ ministry and not during it (Lk 4:1-13; 22:3, but compare Mk 8:31-33 with Lk 9:21-22)? In answering these questions and countless others like them, redaction critics have effectively restored the



## A Chronological Narrative of Events

Jesus is Baptized      Jesus Preaches      Jesus is Crucified



## Significance of “CANONICAL SHAPE”

- Full history of revelation
- Critical judgment
- Hermeneutical key

Synoptic writers to their rightful place as theologians of the early church. They were, in one scholar’s words, the “earliest exegetes” of the Christian tradition, not merely its first editors.

### E. Historical Criticism

Historical criticism means the study of any narrative that purports to convey historical information in order to determine what actually happened. The phrase “what actually happened” is by no means free from difficulties of interpretation, but a common-sense view of it will suffice for us in the present discussion.

The goal of historical criticism is the writing of a chronological narrative of pertinent events to reveal where the possible nature and interconnection of the events themselves are. The historical criticism of documents proceeds on the basis of two related assumptions or perspectives. These may be designated in the internal and external historical aspects of a document. The internal historical aspects of a document are related to the historical and cultural dimensions described or depicted in the texts. The external historical aspects of a document are related to the historical, cultural, and biographical context in which the document was produced.

### F. Canonical Criticism

Canonical criticism regards biblical books as canonical; that is, as the authoritative writings of the Jewish and Christian communities. It also presumes that theological convictions guided those who compiled these books. Hence, it seeks to find their theological meaning by analyzing their canonical shape: the editorial design of their present form.

Initially, due to the extensive writings of Yale professor Brevard Childs, canon criticism seeks to move beyond standard source, form, and redaction criticism and to interpret the biblical texts in their “canonical shape”—that is, their present form (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). According to Childs, this final shape is of special significance because (1) it alone displays the full history of revelation witnessed

to by Scripture; (2) in it the community has exercised its critical judgment on the received traditions and modified them accordingly; and (3) by showing how the texts were actualized by generations removed from the original event and composition of the writings, the canonical shape may provide a hermeneutical key as to how we may actualize the text in our day.

## VI. Conclusion: Analysis and Synthesis

The exegetical task may be said to fall into two fairly well-defined stages: analysis and synthesis. As the interpreter begins the task of exegesis, examining different aspects of the passage, whether they are textual, historical, or whatever, will serve as a way of breaking down the passage into its component parts and problems and examining them as discrete units and issues. These separate analytic tasks will normally overlap, for each will inform the other.

As analysis takes place, the interpreter's understanding of the passage will gradually increase and the groundwork will be laid for synthesis. Synthesis, here, means the process by which the interpreter again "puts together" the text. The task is now to relate the preliminary analytical investigations to each other, weighing the significance of each, and deciding how each one will contribute to the overall interpretation of the text at hand.



## Piecing Together the New Testament

