

The Story of Interpretation:
From the First Century to the Twenty First
Part I

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To Avi Snider
who first taught me to interpret the Bible

*The Christian theologian is one who has learned his or her craft through
apprenticeship to biblical literature.*

Kevin Vanhooser

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Introduction

Hermeneutics and the Garden

In the very beginning, as described in Genesis, when the woman (and the man standing next to her) was asked a fairly simple question, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?', a tragic intercourse of ideas and words took place. The mother of all the living made two mistakes that cost her posterity much suffering, pain and destruction. First, the woman¹ engaged in conversation with the creature that came to tempt her. Second, she added to the words of the Almighty by mentioning a prohibition of "not even touching." Even though it was Eve who first ate of the fruit, it was Adam² who was the covenant head responsible for keeping the only commandment God set forth in the Garden of his presence. And if Eve failed by speaking unwisely, Adam failed in silence.

His deadly silence is still felt today, which is why Paul could write in 1 Cor.15:22 that "in Adam all die". Whether someone looks at these first chapters of Genesis as theological fiction (in the best sense of the word) or as a prophetic description of events that actually took place in a way that is somewhat close to that description, one thing is clear: Humanity failed to trust the Creator and the word He spoke. Adam was silent when he needed to speak; Eve was speaking when she should have been silent.

¹ Adam believing God's promise (Gen. 3:15) will later call the woman Hava (derivative of Hebrew for "life").

² Hos.6:7.

Goals and structure

In this paper I will seek to trace hermeneutical theory and practice throughout the history of the New Testament Church. I will not give an extensive evaluation of whether various inters went wrong and if so how. This paper is a historical essay that attempts to simply³ set forth an overview (a big picture) of the development of hermeneutical theory and practice. However, I am fairly confident that the reader will pick up certain similarities between how Adam and Eve dealt with the question posed to them and how interpreters throughout the ages dealt with similar questions.

I will begin with early Hebrew Christianity (Apostolic and otherwise), then slowly walk through the major events, interpreters, schools of thought and other movements that have to do with the art and practice of Scripture interpretation (whether directly or indirectly). In each section I will make a reference and give an example of how a representative/s of each school or movement interpreted the book of Jeremiah in general and then I will seek to illustrate it by using Jer.17:21-27 whenever possible.⁴

I will spend about 20% of this paper introducing the study and talking about hermeneutics during apostolic times. In the following 40% of the paper I will be showing how hermeneutical thought developed through the periods of Early Church and Middle Ages. And finally I will seek to cover the Golden Age of hermeneutics: the last two hundred years that have seen an enormous amount of insight, advance and breakthrough, as well as regrettable setbacks (40%). In the conclusion I will seek to summarize the contributions as well as the failures of each period discussed in this paper.

Definitions and major issues

Hermeneutic is the interpretation of reality that we engage in on a regular basis as we live out our daily lives. As a matter of fact, one could argue that before everything else, before our thoughts, our words and our actions today, there were hermeneutics, simply because everything we say, think or do is conditioned by our hermeneutical process of perceiving reality. A Yale professor of Philosophy Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it this way: "Interpretation is not only pervasive but unavoidable: without interpretation, we human beings could not live

³ I will not be able to present an objective history of interpretation, because there is no such thing as human objective history. The moment history is conceived of or expressed in any way, it becomes subjective. What I mean here is that I will not be elaborating on those views much; this paper is an historical overview.

⁴ I will give other examples from the book of Jeremiah only in those cases, when I was unsuccessful in finding representative of a major hermeneutical school interacting with the Jer.17:19-27.

in this world of ours, given how we experience it. We are consigned to be, or honored with being, interpreting creatures.”⁵ There is no person, whether psychologically healthy or with severe mental disorders, who is not in some way engaged in the process of interpretation of reality. Everyone is an interpreter simply by virtue of living and being an image of God.

Some of the issues that will unavoidably come up in any serious discussion of biblical hermeneutics are: appropriateness of christocentricity, the nature of the text, historicity of the events, role of the audience, world-views, the extent of the application, role of the prophets vs. Torah commandments, as well as many others. I hope to trace the history of interpretation in this short study, in order to see how the Church throughout the centuries wrestled with these and other issues.

Challenges

Should there be a special “biblical hermeneutic” (*hermeneutica sacra*)? For centuries this question has provoked controversy. Some answer in the affirmative, while others are adamantly opposed. These contrasting opinions are not easily relegated to different theological camps.⁶ At the core of this dilemma lies a question: ‘Should the Bible, being a literary creation not only of God, but also of man, be read as any other literature? Or should its reading and therefore interpretation be governed by totally different approaches.

Most of all, interpreting the Bible calls for honesty, openness to the truth of what is found there and humility that must be produced from understanding that the power and influence of individual and communal perspectives are unavoidable in interpretation of any passage. Most of us are oblivious to the culture around us. Like the air that we breathe, it is invisible and we simply take it for granted. It has been said that human culture is much like the relationship between fish and water. One could ask the question of a fish: “Is your nose wet?” You and I, of course, know that the fish’s nose is wet. Yet, we do not actually know what the fish thinks about the water around her. If fish were scientists, probably the last thing they would discover is water! So it is with us. We live and move about in the culture with which we are closely and invisibly enmeshed.⁷ A mature interpreter will come to any discussion of biblical interpretation realizing that there

⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Importance of Hermeneutics for a Christian Worldview” in *Discipling Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* edited by Roger Lundin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Lancaster: Apollos, 1997), 27.

⁶ Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, translated from German by Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 21

⁷ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 21

is no such thing as objective reading of the Bible by human beings. That realization calls for a healthy dose of humility and opens up enormous opportunities for advance in biblical scholarship. Professor Bosman puts it well when he writes: “The reader of a text belongs to a specific church, lives in special community and shares in a specific tradition of Old Testament reading. These factors constitute a context that has a conditioning effect on the reader and that radically effects his understanding of the text...”⁸ When coming to reading, or “linguaging” as it were, there is no such thing as independent and objective reading, divorced from a whole set of theological presuppositions. Views of language presuppose views of God (or his absence).⁹

Apostolic Age

Jewishness

It is essential for our discussion of the Apostolic Age that we begin by noting that early Hebrew Christian interpreters did not view themselves as un-orthodox in their Judaism, i.e. adopting, as it were, a totally different, Christian perspective. That was true simply because they viewed their movement as a truly Jewish movement in every way. For them as for the Old Testament prophets, Israel was always divided into two groups of people: the remnant and the rest.¹⁰ They, early Hebrew Christians, thought of themselves as the faithful remnant of Israel, that had entered the long awaited period of restoration.¹¹

Newness

Once it has been made clear that the early Hebrew-Christian hermeneutical movement was authentically Jewish, according to the standards of its day, it is

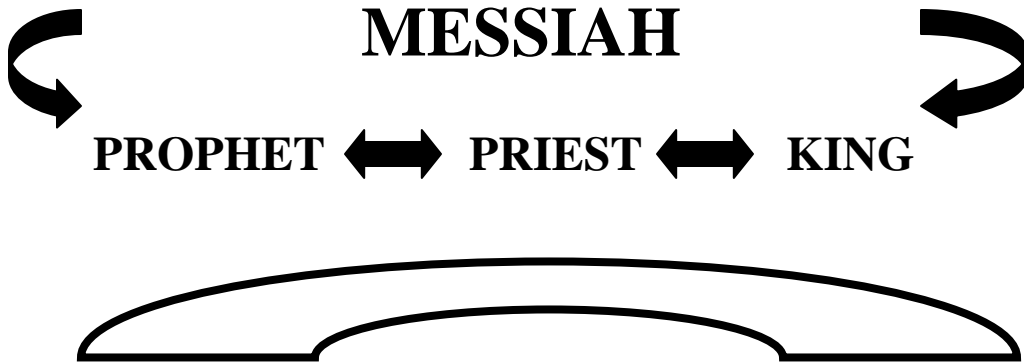
⁸ H. L. Bosman, “The Growth and the Interpretation of the Old Testament” in *Words from Afar: The Literature of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, edited by Ferdinand Deist and Willem Vorster (South Africa: Tafelberg Publishers, 1986), 9

⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Language, Literature, Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology” in: *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol.I. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 27

¹⁰ This idea comes from lecture called “Third Millennium Messianic Judaism,” NY, 2000 by Rabbi Stuart Dauermann who teaches “Messianic Jewish spirituality” at Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹¹ In Acts 15 there is a discussion about the “gentile problem.” James argues that the out pouring of the Spirit, Israel’s long expected covenant-eschatological blessing, upon gentiles, constituted the first phase of Israel’s restoration (Amos 9:11). Quoting Amos, James claims that through the engrafting of the gentiles into the one tree of the people of God, the fallen tabernacle of David is being restored.

also important that we realize that there was a paradigm shift in applying those Jewish and Hellenistic-Jewish principles of interpretation. Namely, the apostles and their hermeneutical followers in the first century were applying already existing Jewish hermeneutical principles to their, now Messiah-centric, grid.



Conviction: Jesus is spoken of in the whole of the developing Canon of HB¹²

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Hermeneutical principles of Hillelian phariseism | Hermeneutical Principles of Shamaian phariseism | All Other Principles (Judaic or Hellenistic) |
|--|---|--|

Lk.24:27-45; Jn 5:39; Act.17:2-3; Acts 18:28; 1 Cor.15:1-4; 2 Tim.3:15

Diagram B

Centuries later the cabbalistic *Zohar* will identify for its readers four major ways in which Jewish interpreters of the past read the sacred text. It was this allegorical commentary upon the Pentateuch that coined the term PaRDeS (פרדס Paradise)

¹² Clearly, then, each Old Testament canon is the product of a historical process of growth, and an understanding of the product requires an understanding of the process. Although the historical data on the process are scanty, it is clear that changes in the historical context had substantial effect both on the way in which canons were formed and on the way in which their authority came to be accepted. The rise of the Old Testament canon involved a transition from “mere” text to authoritative text. It is only in the 1st century BC that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration began to establish itself and that the idea of the divine authority of texts as canons on that basis came to the fore. (H. L. Bosman, “The Growth and the Interpretation of the Old Testament” in *Words from Afar: The Literature of the Old Testament*, Vol.I, edited by Ferdinand Deist and Willem Vorster (South Africa: Tafelberg Publishers, 1986), 7.

for the four species of Biblical interpretation, forming it from their initial letters, thus Peshat (literal meaning), Remez (allegorical), Derush (haggadic or halakic interpretation), and Sod (mystic meaning). As secondary forms of these four, the *Zohar* mentions in a passage (iii. 202a, ed. Amsterdam) the following seven: (1) literal meaning, (2) Midrash, (3) allegory, (4) philosophical allegory, (5) numerical value of the letters, (6) mystic allegory, and (7) higher inspiration. It may be remarked with regard to the last that Philo likewise claims "higher inspiration" for some of his interpretations.¹³ Early Hebrew Christians seem to have used most, if not all, of the above-mentioned forms of Jewish interpretation, but with one overarching principle in mind: the developing HB, alongside other Scriptures of the early Hebrew Christians, were to be read and interpreted with Messiah, as the Prophet, the Priest and the King, being their hermeneutical center.

Eschatology

Another hermeneutical grid within which early Hebrew Christians interpreted the developing canon of the Hebrew Bible was the idea of two worlds (ages): this world (age) and the world (age) to come. Early Hebrew Christians understood that they lived in a very special time during which the "world to come"¹⁴ (*olam habah*) has been inaugurated by the Messiah's first coming, yet "this world" (*olam hazeh*) was still very much in operation.¹⁵ Even though the Latter Days of Israel's Restoration had dawned, this time did not come in the way it was expected by the prophets of HB. Messiah's reign was inaugurated. The Kingdom has come, but not in its fullness. Moses first coined a term "last/latter days" (הַיָּמִים בְּאַחֲרֵיתָא)¹⁶ in Deut.4:30-31. Not only does this term become a technical term with regards to Israel's restoration among the prophets of HB (Is.2:2, Mic.4:1; Hos.3:5), it also makes its way into the NT world as ἐν ταῖς ἑσχαταῖς ἡμέραις" (Act.2:17; Heb.1:2; Jam.5:3).¹⁷

¹³ De Cherubim," i. 9, 144; *De Somniis*, i. 8, 627 *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Available on line www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

¹⁴ Rabbi Jacob's... second-century teacher ... famous teaching reads: "Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life of the World to Come; and better is one hour of blissfulness of spirit in the World to Come than the whole life of this world. (Louis Jacobs, *The World to Come* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995). Available www.myjewishlearning.com)

¹⁵ Same as the standard "Already, but not yet" concept.

¹⁶ Richard Pratt, He Gave Us Prophets video series (Part.7), Third Millennium Ministries: Orlando, 2001.

¹⁷ The LXX version had enormous influence on the formulation of Christian faith and on the language and literature of the Fathers, an aspect generally ignored by Biblical scholars. (Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An introduction to the history of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 438).

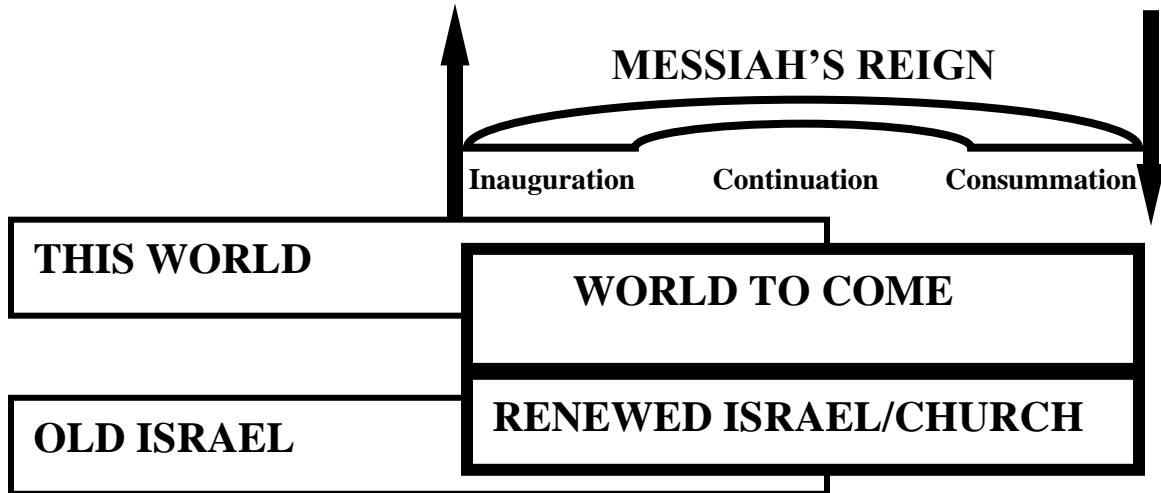


Diagram C¹⁸

Use of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah was heavily used by the authors of the New Testament as well as by other representatives of the early Hebrew Christian hermeneutical community. There are more than forty semi-direct quotations from Jeremiah, mostly in the book of Revelation as it deals with themes of judgment and blessing. Here are but few examples of Jeremiah's use in the book of Revelation: Jer. 50:8 in Rev.18:4; Jer. 50:32 in Rev. 18:8; Jer. 51:49-50 in Rev.18:24.

In the Gospel's accounts, Jesus' ministry is presented as similar to that of Jeremiah. The fact that some people of Jesus' day saw the connection may in some way support the previous assertion (Matt. 16:13-14). Such themes as the Temple, i.e. its cleansing, judgment, absence of God (Matt.23:37-24:1), as well as the crowd's role, i.e. rescue of Jeremiah, but condemnation of Jesus connect NT writings with the book of Jeremiah and show us some ways in which it was interpreted during the apostolic age.

Later in this paper I will discuss in more detail how one text could be interpreted by different readers in what seem to be totally different ways. A prime example would be the way Paul understands and applies Jeremiah 18:1-6. Jeremiah is shown a picture of a potter remaking a pot out of clay after it fell apart in his

¹⁸ This diagram is my original. However, the triple stage of the "World to Come" is derived from Richard Pratt's lectures at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL.

hands. Of course the interpretation of this metaphor is given in the same chapter. Jer.18:7-10 has to do with the personal and corporate responsibility of a nation (s) and its leaders to obey God's law in order for the promises of God's blessing to be fulfilled, as well as their responsibility to turn away from sin, which will change God's intention of bringing disciplinary devastation on a nation(s). Paul, however, derives a totally different interpretation from the same metaphor. He builds his monumental election-predestination doctrine (Rom.9:10-23) from the same umbrella idea of the Sovereignty of God. God is shown as sovereign in both interpretations: given by God Himself in Jeremiah and given by His apostle in Romans.

Jeremiah 17:19-27 is discussed and interpreted by the apostolic authors only in the context of Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 20. The use of related passages in the Gospel mostly centers on the conflict of Jesus as the true Rabbi-Messiah with many who constituted the rabbinical authority of His day.

First, Jesus comes in conflict with the rabbinical authorities by actually violating their legal rulings as to what Ex.20:8-11, Deut.5:12-15 and Lev.23:3 actually refer to. This is clearly seen in Matt.12 when Jesus condones his disciples picking up grain to satisfy their hunger. Jesus, however appeals to the Scripture as authority instead (Matt.12:1-8).

Later in the same chapter Jesus heals at the synagogue, as he did on several other occasions, which in turn provokes conflict with the rabbinical authorities (Matt.12:9-14). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus also commands the healed person to rejoice by carrying, that which carried him for decades of his miserable life – his mat (John 5:9-18).

Early Church

The perceived Evil of Allegory

Louis Berkhof wrote that: "Clement of Alexandria was the first one to apply the allegorical method to the interpretation of the New Testament as well as to the Old. He propounded the principle that all scripture must be understood allegorically".¹⁹ To some degree Berkhof and many others who criticize the allegorical method are right, but it should be mentioned that it is inaccurate to speak of those interpreters as pure allegorists.

¹⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), 20.

Hermeneutical methods using allegorical interpretation are not altogether devoid of logic or scriptural mandate and did not in their time appear as scandalous as they do now. It would be fair to say that throughout the history of the church, interpretive communities opted for various levels of allegory and various levels of literalistic reading in their hermeneutical activities.²⁰ At all times, be it today or back in the time of the apostolic fathers, both allegorical interpretations and literal meanings were taken into account in some way.

There is no question, however, that Clement²¹ preferred allegory over the simple meaning of the text. "...according to Clement, the bishop of Rome, the scarlet color of the cloth that Rehab hang in Jericho to signal Joshua's spies foreshadowed the blood of Jesus".²² Another writing of that period illustrates the allegorical interpretations that ruled the day: "...epistle of Barnabas (12:1-7) sees two OT passages as types of the cross of Christ – the outstretched arms of Moses, which gave Israel victory of Amalek (Ex.17), and the bronze serpent, which Moses lifted up in the wilderness (Num.21; Jn.3:14)."²³

Alexandrian and Antiochian Schools

There were two schools of interpretation dominating the hermeneutical field during this time. The Alexandrian school of interpretation that emphasized

²⁰ Use of allegory was present already in the Hebrew Bible. HB Passages interpreting other HB passages. Not to mention many NT passages that allegorized the passages found in the NT. In short allegory is not same as hermeneutical sin... although, sometimes, it does come dangerously close.

²¹ Jean Danielou argues that there was a Christian targumic activity going in the early Hebrew Christian movement, once again proving the assertion that the movement was essentially Jewish in nature. He writes: side by side with the *midrash of II Esdras* Justin quotes as coming from Jeremiah a passage which is not in the canonical Jeremiah, and is certainly a Christian midrash: From the words of the same Jeremiah have they likewise excised the following: And the Lord God remembered his dead which were of Israel (απο 'Ισραηλ των νεκρων αυτου), those that had fallen asleep (κεκοιμημενων) in the earth of the tomb, and he went down (κατεβη) unto them to preach to them the good news (ευαγγελισσασθαι) of his salvation (Dial. LXXII, 4). The same text is quoted five times by Iranaeus who attributes it once to Isaiah (Adv.haer.III, 20:4), once to Jeremiah (IV, 22:1), and three times to scripture in general (IV, 33:1,22:12, V, 31:1)²¹. (Jean Danielou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea: The Theology of Jewish Christianity* translated by John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 102).

²² William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 32.

²³ Ibid., 32.

allegorical (deeper meanings)²⁴ was in many ways influenced by Philo who was in turn heavily impacted by the ancient philosopher Plato. It was Middle Platonism that provided Philo and the Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen²⁵ with what they considered to be the best available instrument for understanding and defending the teachings of Scripture and Church tradition... like Philo, they did not believe that truth could conflict with truth and were confident that all that was rationally certain in Platonic speculation would prove to be in perfect accordance with the Christian revelation.²⁶ In this way it became indistinguishable which methods were Jewish and which were Greek.

Evans points out: "Figurative interpretation was by no means a Christian innovation. It was recognized even in pagan antiquity that inspired utterance would often be obscure. Oracles required interpretations. Philo was anxious to show that Moses had anticipated the best in Greek thought, and he himself used allegorical interpretation for that purpose. But Christian interpreters developed allegorical interpretation to unprecedented heights of sophistication under the stimulus of the need to show the harmony of Old Testament and New where a literal reading would make them incompatible."²⁷ Its best-known spokesman is Origen. He argued that just as humans consist of body, soul and spirit, so Scripture has a threefold meaning... Thus said Origen, the wise interpreter of Scripture must move from the events of a passage (its literal sense) to find the hidden principles for Christian living (its moral sense) and its doctrinal truth (its spiritual sense).²⁸

Use of Jeremiah

Origen's interpretation of Jeremiah...corresponds to the historical, moral, and mystical senses of Scripture. These three senses must be understood as

²⁴ This appears to be a real institution of theological learning, which was based in Alexandria; the Antiochian school was a school in a sense of trend. It had no organizational structure or building to it that could characterize in any way as a theological seminary.

²⁵ A. Siedlecki, "Book of Jeremiah: Interpretation through the 19th century," in: J.H. Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation A-J* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 566.

²⁶ A. Hilary Armstrong, & Henry J. Blumenthal, "Plato and Platonism," *Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia.*, Vol. 25, 15th edn. (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1992), 900.

²⁷ G.R. Evans, "The Christian adoption of the Old Testament," in Byrne, P & Houlden, L (eds). *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Routledge), 51

²⁸ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 34.

consistently interdependent rather than as individual layers of meaning. A significant passage in this regard is Jer.18:14-16.

Origen equated the fountain of mountain waters with Christ and stated that the believer must thirst for all three fountains of water (i.e. the historical, the moral, and mystical senses of Scripture) in order to find any source of water at all.²⁹ Commenting on Jer.1:15 Origen, unconcerned with the 21st century's evangelical issues, passes by a normal "anti-abortion passage" by saying: "God sanctifies some people for himself. He did not await his person so that he can sanctify him after he was born...we hold that in a literal sense...is in reference to him (Jeremiah). Whether in an analogical sense it applies to Jeremiah, we have dealt with already, and whether it applies to the Savior what do we need to say? ...he prophesies to all the nations, so that from all nations he accomplishes his prophecy and draws men to salvation."³⁰ Half a century later, St. Augustine of Hippo popularized this method in his writings. For Augustine...the literal meaning is often the least interesting, the least edifying, and the least theologically significant meaning...interpretation is carnal when one fails to see that the thing signified by a sign is itself a sign of something higher.³¹

Augustine, in commenting on Exodus 20:8-11, which in turn is indirectly connected with Jer.17:19-27, writes: "We are not ordered to keep the Sabbath day by a literal corporeal abstinence from work, as the Jews observe it... However, the Lord's day, was not made known to Jews but to Christians by the resurrection of the Lord, and from that event it began to enquire its solemnity... But the rite of the Sabbath was taught to our ancient fathers, which we Christians observe spiritually so that we abstain from all servile work, that is, from all sin... to celebrate the Sabbath is to hope to receive from God this very thing, of not committing sin."³² Overall he give very little attention to the book of Jeremiah. Mostly Jeremiah is referred to in his exegesis when it is quoted to support whatever scriptural theme Augustine happens to be discussing.

The more literal counterpart of the Alexandrian school was Antiochian movement-school of interpretation, the influence of which will subside and ultimately surrender to the popularity, indeed the triumph of the Alexandrians. It appears that this took place due to accusations of heresy towards the Antiochians as well as the later divide of the Western and Eastern Church.

²⁹ *Homiliae in J. 18:9.*

³⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah (Homely I)* in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Translated by John Clark Smith (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1998), 13.

³¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, "Language, Literature, Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology" in: *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol.I. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 19.

³² *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2001), 104.

It cannot be argued that the Antiochian school was exclusively literalist over against the Alexandrian being the allegorist school. There was plenty of allegorical use among the Antiochian school.³³ What made Alexandrians allegorical is that the historicity of the books studied was not important or necessary. On the other hand, Antiochian interpreters accepted typology and allegory to certain extent, but were unwilling to go any further.³⁴ Two notable representatives of the Antiochian school were St. John Chrysostom, who popularized it through his homilies, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who was a student of Lucian, the pioneer of this school. Theodore of Mopsuestia in his *Concerning Allegory and History against Origen* argues that since in the allegorists' view there are no real events, Adam was not really disobedient. How then, he asks, did death enter the world, and what meaning does salvation have? For the school at Antioch, the historical reality of biblical revelation was essential.³⁵

In his homily on Matt.12 which echoes the issues raised in Jer.17:19-27, St. John Chrysostom³⁶ says: "But they are not priests. Nay, they are greater than priests. For the Lord of the temple Himself is here: the truth, not the type... For indeed the Sabbath did at the first confer many and great benefits; for instance, it made them gentle towards those of their household, and humane; it taught them God's providence and the creation, as Ezekiel saith; it trained them by degrees to abstain from wickedness, and disposed them to regard the things of the Spirit... Did Christ then, it will be said, repeal a thing so highly profitable? Far from it; nay, He greatly enhanced it. For it was time for them to be trained in all things by the

³³ The basic principle of Jewish typology, "*Ma'aseh abot siman le-banim*" (the lives of the Patriarchs prefigured the lives of their descendants), became the motto of the Antioch school. Aphraates makes diligent use of this typology, and his successors do so in even greater degree; with them the aim of this typology is not always Messianic, and not even Christological. Thus Theodore of Mopsuestia regards Jacob's anointing of the stone (Gen. xxviii. 18) as a type of the erection and consecration of the Mosaic tabernacle, just as the Midrash does ("*Nicephori Catena*," *ad locum*) *Jewish Encyclopedia* [Http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com).

³⁴ Twentieth century conservative Christian Reformed scholar Berkhof is displaying a modern version of Antiochian school by saying that: "The Word of God originated in a historical way, and therefore, can be understood only in the light of history. This does not mean that everything it contains can be explained historically. As a supernatural revelation of God it naturally harbors elements that transcend the limits of the historical. But it does mean that the contents of the Bible are to a great extent historically determined, and to that extent find their explanation in history (Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), 113-114.

³⁵ Duncan Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 151.

³⁶ John Chrysostom. *Commentarium in Jeremiam prophetam*. S.P.N. Cyrilli opera omnia quae extant, XIII. PG 64, 1860 (Col.739-1038).

higher rules, and it was unnecessary that his hands should be bound, who was freed from wickedness, winged for all good works..."³⁷ As seen in the above quote, Chrysostom engages in a fulfillment and christocentric interpretation of the Temple and Sabbath. Christ is enhancing what was before, not completely replacing it.

Even though born in Antioch and having spent his first twenty-three years there, Theodoret of Cyrus cannot be characterized as a representative of Antiochian hermeneutic, as he, in a sense, combines the Alexandrian and Antiochian approaches perhaps more than anyone in early church history. He was also the most prolific ancient commentator on Jeremiah. "While Theodoret did not completely avoid christological typologies in his readings of Jeremiah," writes A. Siedlecki, "he tended to subordinate such readings to the more historical sense of the passage in question... he read the messianic oracle of 23:5 as referring primarily to Zerubbabel and only secondarily to Christ."³⁸

Middle Ages

Period Distinctives and key figures

Throughout Middle Ages many notable interpreters were participating in Bible interpretation under the close supervision of the Church.³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, Denys the Carthusian, Jean Gerson, Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor, Hugh of St. Cher and Nicholas of Lyra were the most distinguished figures.⁴⁰

The hermeneutical activity during this time had three distinguishing characteristics. First, almost all interpreters were seeing in the text several layers of meaning, as had many of the Church Fathers before them. In this sense, status quo in Bible interpretation was the characteristic of this period. Second, there was progress in that during this time Christian interpreters began to lose

³⁷ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series I, Vol.X (Homely XXXIX)
www.johncrysostom.org.

³⁸ A. Siedlecki, "Book of Jeremiah: Interpretation through the 19th century," in: J.H. Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation A-J* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 566.

³⁹ To this period belong the so-called catenists, or compilers of expositions from the more ancient fathers. It was not an age of original research, but of imitation and of appropriation of the treasures of the past. (Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 661.

⁴⁰ *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Leicester, InterVarsity, 1998), iv. All of these interpreters were interpreting the Bible from Roman Catholic, not Eastern Orthodox prospective.

their fear of the Jewish community and became less threatened by Jewish hermeneutics in general. They began to actively incorporate the findings of Jewish scholarship in their own work⁴¹ and therefore, by default, benefited from the interpretation of the Sacred Literature that was happening in the Islamic World. Third, and perhaps most important trend, was that almost all of the representatives of this period had a growing appreciation of literal meaning.⁴²

Jewish, Islamic and Christian Interaction

“Jewish interpretation was not monolithic...had experienced multiple in-house debates, many of which had extended to impact the Christian interpretive community. R. Moses ben Maimon, known as RaMBam or Maimonides (1135-1206)...brought rabbinic exegesis to the zenith of its splendor especially through its work *More NeBokim* (“Guide to the Perplexed”) in which he emphasizes the relationship between revelation and reason. According to the Mainonides, the Bible contains the essential of philosophical teachings so a philosophical interpretation is the best way to enforce faith and to explain the true meaning of the Scriptures.”⁴³

Direct, serious interaction with Islamic scholars was not politically possible since the two communities (Christian and Islamic) were engaged in polemical conflict that resulted in battles and bloodshed. Theologians were busy defending their countries and justifying/preaching crusades against the Muslim infidels. There was no psychological or philosophical time for any meaningful interaction to take place. What we see today in the hostility of many Islamic countries towards Europe and North America is sometimes termed a “civilizational frustration.” Right now most of the Islamic countries are not up the speed with the level of culture, science, and economics as well as political strength with their Christian counterparts. That was not always the case. There was a time when being a Muslim meant to be in the very forefront of human progress. These were hard times for Europe, but the Age of Renaissance for the Islamic lands. Muslims overall treated the Jews a lot better than did Christians. It is at this time that great theological and philosophical Jewish writings were developed in Muslim Lands. It is through the Jewish Community that Christians began their interactions with the

⁴¹ In many ways this constituted a paradigm shift. Since the time when the Christian Church began persecuting the Jews in return for the persecution of Early Christians by them, there was virtually no interaction other than, that, which was characterized by repressing the Jewish voice in Middle Age Europe.

⁴² Interaction with Jewish exegetes spurred on an already developing trend toward greater appreciation of the literal-historic meaning of the Holy Writ. They were still more allegorical than today’s scholars would have liked them to be, but for their time they were definitely moving towards a more literal interpretation, paving, as it were, the road to the time of Reformation.

⁴³ Available www.myjewishlearning.com.

Golden Age of Hermeneutics in the Islamic Empires. At this time there was a default interaction with Arabic interpreters as well as Jewish. Arabic philology...in many cases was the basis for Jewish exegeses. Thus, the work *Hebraicae Institutiones* (1526) by Pagnini, a Christian, was based on Radaq's grammar Miklol, a Jew whose main source of inspiration was *Kitav al-Luma* of Abu al-Walid Merwan ibn Ganah at the beginning of the 11th century, who in turn knew the work of Yehuda Hayyug, *Kitav al-Afal*. Similarly, Pagnini's Thesaurus is based on Radaq's dictionary *Sefer haShorashim*, which in turn depends on Abu al-Walids work *Kitav al-Usul*, which was preceded by *Kitav Ali al-Alfaz* of the 10th century Karaite David ben Abraham al-Fassi.⁴⁴

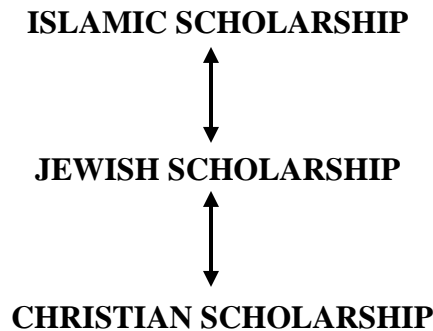


Diagram D

Use of Jeremiah

This period seems to be characterized by status quo. Not much discovery and progress was made in biblical interpretation, largely due to the fact that the interest of scholars ran more towards philosophy than Scripture. Hence not many careful treatments of particular biblical books were produced. In Thomas Aquinas as an example, Jeremiah was largely used in a supporting role to whatever philosophical discussion he was engaged in. Discussing the rationale for joining religious ranks (monastic and priestly) or remaining a layman, Aquinas refers to Jeremiah in support of his claims: "... The greater the evil the more it should be lamented. But the sins of those in the state of sanctity and perfection should be lamented the most, for Jeremiah says, 'My heart is broken within me;' and then he adds, 'For the prophet and the priest are defiled; and in my house I have found their wickedness.'"⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An introduction to the history of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 488.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* (Blackfriars with New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1968), 141.

The interaction that took place between the Christian interpreters and the Jewish interpretive community is crucial for this period. Nicholas of Lyra employed much of Rashi's writings in his exegesis. In the prologue to Jeremiah, Nicholas (of Lyra) comments that Rashi was right in insisting that the prophets spoke only concerning the days of Messiah, but this must be understood as referring only to their primary intention, because they also spoke about many other things⁴⁶. To a certain extent it could be said that this work was an interaction (agreeing and disagreeing) with Rashi's methodology, hermeneutical principles and conclusions.

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⁴⁶ Philip Krey, *The Apocalypse Commentary of 1329: Problems in Church History* in Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture, ed. Philip Krey and Lesley Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 286.