

# The History and Significance of Premillennialism

## Lesson #3 The Hermeneutic\* Basis of Premillennialism <sup>0640</sup>

### I. Introduction

Let's be very clear. Any legitimate study of Scripture must begin with an understanding of and **a commitment to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy!** In my own statement of "What is Christian Orthodoxy?" Rev. 8 the first statement of an essential doctrine of the Christian faith is clearly Statement #1:

"God has revealed Himself to man through General Revelation (cosmos and conscience) and through Special Revelation (Scripture) both of which are without error. Both can and often are misinterpreted by man resulting in error."

#### Some Important Quotations About Hermeneutics:

"Theologians depend upon sound biblical exegesis, which they achieve by a valid hermeneutic. Exegesis means to expose all that the biblical text contains in its grammatical, historical, cultural, and literary context. Packer calls interpreting Scripture from the foregoing contexts as using the 'natural' or 'literal' sense. Hermeneutics is the art and science by which one interprets the biblical text. The goal of a sound hermeneutic is to capture what has been described as a 'pure biblical theology, which is an isolation and presentation of the unchanging biblical teachings which are valid for all times.'"

**Mal Couch**; *Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*; p. 32

#### A Statement of the Problem:

"We would not be able to 'delight in the law of the Lord' if we were continually questioning whether we could trust it. The liberal [theologian/ "Christian"] is put in such a position. He must decide what is fallible and what is infallible. When he decides what is fallible, he must decide to what extent it is fallible. Much time is spent trying to find the errors instead of enjoying the whole truth. For the limited inerrancy adherent, Scripture is held at the mercy of the interpreter. But for those holding to full inspiration, the rules of interpretation assume that each word is inspired and retains the meaning it held in the culture and the historical context in which it was written. In this way, we can determine with a high degree of accuracy the meaning of God's Word. The liberal, however, has abandoned these rules of interpretation since to him the words are not inspired, simply the ideas."

**Mal Couch**; *Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*; p. 19

#### The Answer to the Dilemma:

"The Scriptures have never erred. The Scriptures cannot err. It is certain that the Scripture cannot disagree with itself. It is impossible for that Scripture should contradict itself, only that it so appears to the senseless and obstinate hypocrites."

**Martin Luther**; in Mal Couch's; *Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*; p. 15

### II. Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture; (What does this shorthand phrase Mean?)

#### A. Definitions:

**Verbal** – means the very words and their grammatical forms are inspired in the original autographs.

**Original Autographs** – means the actual document produced by the prophet or apostle either through their own hand writing or through their direct communication with a scribe. **(Discuss)**

**Plenary** – means all of Scripture is inspired, not just parts of it.

**Inspiration** – means that Scripture is "God breathed" and speaks to the secret method by which God sovereignly informs the mind of the prophet and the apostle to cause the exact words in their specific

grammatical forms to be written by the prophet and the apostle, using his own language, vocabulary, style, education, all within God's sovereign power to communicate with His people.

\***Hermeneutics** – The study of correct methods of interpreting Scripture texts. We generally refer the hermeneutic method by which we interpret Scripture as the “**literal, grammatico-historical method**”.

## **B. The Path to Biblical Truth**

1. One cannot arrive at the truth of Scripture if one has a weak or incorrect view of hermeneutics.
2. Truth is derived only when one reads Scripture utilizing a proper hermeneutic.
3. All true Christians are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the time of their “new birth”/ regeneration. That same Holy Spirit ministers to each born again Christian by illuminating their mind regarding the truths of Scripture.
4. Scripture is written such that the lay Christian can study it and grow in the knowledge of that which is being taught by Scripture because it is largely clear to readers, especially with the help of the Holy Spirit. Caution should be exercised that in our study of Scripture, we do not read it carelessly or dishonorably using it to verify our own worldly opinions! Scripture is meant to change us, to sanctify us unto holiness. Do not treat it lightly!
5. The Biblical principle of the “Priesthood of the believer” is meaningless if Scripture is not meant to be read and studied by the average Christian. Consider:

**1 Pet 2:1-10** *Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, <sup>2</sup>like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, <sup>3</sup>if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. <sup>4</sup>And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

<sup>6</sup>*For this is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” <sup>Is 28:16</sup> <sup>7</sup>This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,” <sup>Ps 118:22</sup> and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE;” <sup>Is 8:14</sup> for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. <sup>9</sup>But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup>for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. - Discuss what it means to be “A royal priesthood”!*

## **C. The Clarity of Scripture**

“The doctrine of the **clarity of Scripture** (often called the ‘**perspicuity of Scripture**’) teaches that ‘the meanings of the text can be clear to the ordinary reader, that God uses the text of the Bible to communicate His person and will.’ ‘The witness of the Church throughout the ages is that ordinary people, who approach it in faith and humility, will be able to understand what the Bible is getting at, even if they meet with particular points of difficulty here and there.’

This doctrine is in contrast to other positions like that of the Roman Catholic Church, which asserts that Scripture is imperspicuous (unclear) apart from the interpretative framework of the Catholic church and tradition, and of positions like that of Postmodernism and Mormonism, which assert that subjective experience should be preferred over knowing the originally intended meaning of scripture, since it is basically unclear.

Christians who promote the clarity of the Bible encourage others to read it for themselves. Those who deny the perspicuity of the Bible have not historically encouraged a personal devotional time of studying the Bible, and have even ‘denied free access to the Scriptures lest [others] interpret them improperly and disseminate false doctrine.’

The issue of **perspicuity** is not entirely unique to the Bible, as it concerns the basic principles of hermeneutics which are relevant to all texts. That the scripture is clear does not ensure, however, that man will receive it for what it is. Man is depraved and needs the illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to see the meaning for what it is.” <https://www.theopedia.com/clarity-of-scripture>

**Deut 6:4-9** *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. **Discuss***

These commands are from our Lord and Savior. They are not to be ignored. Clearly Scripture must be central to our lives. We must be shaped by Scripture.

**We are not to be shaped by our culture at the expense of the truths of Scripture!**

#### **D. Elementary Application of a Proper Hermeneutic**

Below is a set of simplified principles that the lay Christian should seriously consider when reading or studying any text of Scripture.

1. Simply read Scripture for understanding as you would read other books. This is to try to learn from it by the consideration and use of normal interpretive skills. What is the Bible saying? 90% of the time you will get it right or very close to right through any careful, prayerful, serious reading of it!

Always! Always! Always! know the context of the passage you are studying. Who is speaking, who is being spoken to, what is the question/concern at hand, etc? All of these considerations are the “**literal**” part.

Nevertheless, you can improve in your individual skill of interpretation if:

2. You develop your skills with knowledge of grammar and understanding how the parts of a sentence work together to arrive at the meaning of a sentence.

In addition, you need to learn about various types of “figures of speech” such as metaphors, similes, alliteration, euphemism, hyperbole, irony, personification, etc. Here is an online resource listing the 20 most common forms of figures of speech:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/top-figures-of-speech-1691818>

These are the “**grammatico**” part.

3. To go further you should develop skills with respect to the historical and cultural influences of the people to whom the author is writing to and trying to communicate with.

We often assume that it is we (of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) to whom the author is writing to. Much of the Old Testament is written primarily to Israel. We can learn principles about who God is, what He expects of His people, how to live righteously, etc, but also much of it is not written directly to us. We must study the Old Testament, but be careful to always work at understanding its historical and cultural context. It is the word of God to we who are in the Church, but not every promise made is to us. These are the “**historical**” and “**cultural**” parts.

4. Consider here several examples of historical and/or cultural understandings necessary to get the most out of Scripture:

**1<sup>st</sup> Matt 13:31-32** *He presented another parable to them, saying, " The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."*

Some critics of Scripture point out that there are many plants which have seeds much smaller than those of the mustard plant. This is true, but constitutes a serious hermeneutical error! Namely, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of persons untrained in Botany, they are farmers who work the soil for a living. The only thing that is relevant to them are the seeds of crops by which they make a living in that part of the world.

This is an entirely logical way of making a point of the parable through which Jesus is teaching them. It is referred to technically as accommodation and that in no way reduces the truthfulness of Scripture. Jesus would have no reason to expand beyond their own experience. He is not teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century botany, but rather is teaching spiritual truth about the Kingdom of Heaven that they can relate to. We do this ourselves all the time. This is a normal way that we talk to one another every day.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm 23:1-2** *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want, He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.*

Since most of us do not live in an agrarian culture, do not live on a farm with sheep, we probably do not understand the significance of the phrase underlined above. To see the importance and meaning of this phrase, we need to learn about an agrarian culture involving sheep herding. Sheep with their heavy wool coats tend to avoid “rapids” in a stream and desire to drink from still water that does not present to them a danger of drowning. Quiet or still waters are very important to sheep in having their thirst quenched.

Hermeneutics is a “hard” technical word, but most of us use its principles in our everyday reading and conversation. Much of it is just thoughtful common sense. Sometimes it can become more technical, but don’t let that scare you when you are seeking to understand the meaning of the Scripture.

Receiving a personal letter from a family member (mother, father, brother, sister, etc.) causes you to read it based on its context, the history of the subject being written about, knowing the individuals being discussed well and remembering their history with you. You can choose to be offended or you can seek to understand. The same is true with regard to God’s message to you. If you love Him, you will seek to understand!

**Next:** In **Lesson #4** we will dig into the principles of the use of a proper hermeneutic approach to Scripture. We will provide some actual practices that reflect the use of an improper hermeneutic.