

## BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND CREATION

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### ABSTRACT

Since the acceptance of the General Theory of Evolution and its need for large amounts of time, many Biblical scholars have made attempts to change the "normal" reading of the Genesis narrative concerning the Creation. This paper proposes that the way one is to read, understand, and interpret the Biblical text is to use the same rules and regulations by which the text was originally written.

These rules and regulations will be called "the normative hermeneutic" and will be defined and used to examine the Day-Age Theory. When the goal of the normative hermeneutic is in mind then it is called the Grammatico-Historical Method.

### INTRODUCTION

In any discussion on Biblical hermeneutics it is usually wise to begin by examining the etymology of the word "hermeneutics." It comes from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, meaning "to interpret," "to expound," or "to explain."<sup>(1)</sup> Also, related to this is the name Hermes, the Greek god given the responsibility of communicating the will of the gods to the people. He was god of speech and writing and, therefore, assigned the task of knowing the language of the people and the rules of its communication. Sproul states:

...hermeneutics deals with conveying a message that can be understood. The purpose of hermeneutics is to establish guidelines and rules for interpretation.<sup>(2)</sup>

Indeed, the understanding of a message or communication is the central issue for anyone's attempting to communicate to another. In all forms of communication, whether they be spoken or written, the author uses certain known or given rules to convey his ideas and message. He also assumes that his audience knows these rules and will use them to understand his message. The hermeneutic then is that set of rules and regulations which the author uses to convey his message. Therefore, hermeneutics can be thought of as the science containing specific laws, rules and regulations enabling authors to communicate. Terry states:

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. The word is usually applied to the explanation of written documents, and may therefore be more specifically defined as the science of interpreting an author's language. This science assumes that there are diverse modes of thought and ambiguities of expression among men, and, accordingly, it aims to remove the supposable differences between a writer and his readers, so that the meaning of the one may be truly and accurately apprehended by the others.<sup>(3)</sup>

However, there is a very interesting aspect that may be somewhat hidden in the above quotation. The audience must use the same rules and regulations of communication as did the author in order to understand properly his message. That is, they must use the same hermeneutic as did the author. Otherwise, the audience will not be able to determine the precise message the author has intended. Therefore, the burden rests upon the audience to use the same hermeneutic as did the author.

Once the hermeneutic is determined and known, it is the author's responsibility to use and apply it consistently and correctly. If he does not do this, he then places his audience in a position where they can never know precisely what he is intending. On the other hand, and more important for this discussion, it is the responsibility of the audience to apply consistently and correctly the author's hermeneutic to his text. The application of the hermeneutic is called exegesis.

Exegesis is the application of these principles and laws, the actual bringing out into formal statement, and by other terms, the meaning of the author's words.(4)

Exegesis therefore is the art of applying the hermeneutic to the author's text. Ryrie states:

Hermeneutics is not exegesis, for exegesis is the practice of an art of which hermeneutics is the governing science. Hermeneutics, therefore, is the more basic science.(5)

It may be said that the Holy Spirit made absolutely no errors in His hermeneutic nor in the application of His hermeneutic while authoring the Biblical texts. It follows that if He has given the Holy Scriptures to be known by men, then His hermeneutic must also be known. Thus, the burden of proper Bible study and exegesis rests solely on the "regenerated" student of Scripture. To begin the discussion of Biblical hermeneutics we must start with the Doctrine of Scripture.

#### DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Biblical hermeneutics is somewhat of a different issue than what might be called general hermeneutics. When attempting to read a human author the audience cannot ultimately be sure that the author has been consistent in using his hermeneutic. If the author did err, then there may be some ambiguity in the understanding of the audience. However, the same cannot be said of the Bible's Author, the Holy Spirit. As previously stated, the Holy Spirit made absolutely no errors in authoring the Scriptures. Thus there should never be any ambiguities in the understanding of the student of Scripture due to the Holy Spirit and His hermeneutic and application. Therefore, the following doctrine of Scripture is offered and used throughout:

In their original autographs the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, accurate and inerrant in all that they affirm, both in the whole and in the part. The Scriptures constitute the necessary and sufficient rules for doctrine, faith and practice.

Again, there is a very interesting aspect within the above definition that may be somewhat hidden. This aspect may be stated in the form of a question. How does one know what the Scriptures affirm? If the audience has no way of determining what the text is saying, then there is no communication. Indeed, if the audience has no way of determining what the Scriptures affirm, there can be no substantive statement of inerrancy. Hence, inerrancy is clearly dependent upon the hermeneutic. The hermeneutic is a most fundamental issue. Nevertheless, the above question can be answered, non-rigorously, by simple common sense. One uses common sense every time a newspaper or a periodical is read. However, a more rigorous solution may be stated as follows:

The Scriptures can only be properly read, understood, applied, and interpreted when using the same rules of grammar, syntax, linguistic constructions, figures of speech, etc., that the writers used when writing the original autographs. This set of rules and regulations is called the normative hermeneutic.

It is now possible to give a more pointed and compact definition of Scripture:

The Scriptures are said to be inerrant in all that they affirm, both in the whole and the part, if, and only if, they are consistently understood by the normative hermeneutic.

This is not to say that the Scriptures are not inerrant as they existed in their original forms. Rather, a discussion or definition of inerrancy is dependent upon the hermeneutic. The Scriptures are the Inspired Word of God outside of the hermeneutic issue. The hermeneutic enters in when the Scriptures are to be understood.

#### THE NORMATIVE HERMENEUTIC

What are the specific rules and regulations of the normative hermeneutic? This question can be answered both generally and specifically. First, the following general definition of the normative hermeneutic is offered:

Unless the context of the passage or parallel passages require otherwise, the standard usage of a word, phrase, grammatical construction, figure of speech, etc., prevails. The burden of proof is on the exceptional usage.

It is important to note that if the context requires a different meaning or interpretation than that which is "normal," then a more rigorous proof is required to show that that is indeed the case. The "normal" meaning or interpretation is assumed unless the context requires a different usage. This can be better understood by looking at some specific rules of the normative hermeneutic.

#### Word Usage Rules

1) Unless something in the context dictates otherwise, a word is assigned the meaning that is consistent with its Biblical usage elsewhere in that type of context, its usage in parallel passages, its usage in the Septuagint, its secular usage, its root meaning, etc.

2) A greater burden of proof is required to justify a rare meaning than a common meaning. This holds true if we restrict ourselves to a particular kind of context.

3) A word otherwise fixed in meaning shapes the context and hence the meaning of a word otherwise variable in meaning.

4) If a word is found to be quite variable in meaning in previously considered contexts, then its meaning in future contexts is decided on a "context-by-context" basis. The burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of each proposed interpretation.

#### Phrase and Grammatical Construction Rules

1) Unless something in the context dictates otherwise, a phrase or grammatical construction is assigned the interpretation that is consistent with its Biblical usage elsewhere in that type of context, its usage in parallel contexts, its usage in the Septuagint, its secular usage, etc.

2) A greater burden of proof is required to justify a rare interpretation rather than a common interpretation. This holds true if we restrict ourselves to a particular type of context.

3) A phrase or grammatical construction otherwise fixed in interpretation shapes the context and hence the interpretation of a phrase or grammatical construction otherwise variable in interpretation.

4) If a phrase or grammatical construction is found to be quite variable in interpretation in previously considered contexts, then its interpretation in future contexts is decided on a "context-by-context" basis. The burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of each proposed interpretation.

It should be noticed that the rules for phrases and grammatical constructions are essentially the same as for words, except that the word "word," has been replaced by "phrase or grammatical construction" and the "meaning" has been replaced by "interpretation." The reason for this is that words are the fundamental elements of language, (6,7) whereas phrases and grammatical constructions are comprised of words. Thus phrases, grammatical constructions, figures of speech, etc., are not said to have a meaning, but rather an interpretation.

#### Figures of Speech

E. W. Bullinger, the foremost Biblical scholar on figures of speech, has defined a figure of speech as:

...some form which a word or sentence takes, different from its ordinary and natural form. This is always for the purpose of giving additional force, more life, intensified feeling, and greater emphasis. Whereas today "figurative language" is ignorantly spoken of as though it made less of the meaning, and deprived the words of their power and force.(8)

There are over 200 different figures used in the Holy Scriptures, each of which has a specific usage and application; therefore, it behooves the student of Scripture to become familiar with them.(9) Once the usage is known for each figure, then the same hermeneutic applies to figures of speech as to phrases and grammatical constructions.

#### Prophetic Revelation

The following rules apply when it is clear that the Scripture passages under consideration are of a prophetic nature:

1) Older revelation must be interpreted and understood by the above rules and regulations BEFORE newer revelation is interpreted and understood by the above rules and regulations.

2) If, after this is done, it is decided that both older and newer revelations address the same subject, the interpretation of the newer is tailored, if need be, by the interpretation of the older, never the reverse.

More could be said on this point, but since the topic at hand is not prophetic in nature, the above discussion will have to suffice for prophetic revelation.

#### THE DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

Now that the basic hermeneutic is known, it is possible for the student of Scripture to apply it to the text and determine precisely "what saith the Scripture." It may be said that the consistent application of the normative hermeneutic will produce the proper doctrinal framework that is contained in Scripture. As the framework is ascertained by the normative hermeneutic, it is clear that the framework will satisfy the following criteria:

1) **Simplicity** - The correct doctrinal framework is the simplest framework accommodating all Biblical data, especially "difficult" data.

2) **Clarity** - The correct doctrinal framework is that framework which gives the utmost clarity to all Biblical data.

3) **Knowability** - The correct doctrinal framework is that framework which does not raise questions which cannot eventually be answered in conformity with the normative hermeneutic. Thus, only answerable questions are a natural product of the correct doctrinal framework. The regenerated are driven to know this framework precisely.

4) **Elegance** - The correct doctrinal framework is that framework which produces the most elegance and beauty in handling all Biblical data.

5) **Efficiency** - the correct doctrinal framework is that framework which is the most efficient in dealing with all Biblical data.

In addition to the above criteria, there are also various corollary criteria that the correct doctrinal framework will satisfy.

1) **No Contradictions** - The correct doctrinal framework is that framework which does not contain or lead to any contradictions when dealing with all Biblical data.

2) **No Tautologies** - The correct doctrinal framework is that framework which does not contain or lead to any "circular" arguments when dealing with all Biblical data.

All Biblical data are ascertained by way of the normative hermeneutic. The hermeneutic and its doctrinal framework provide the student of Scripture with an objective method by which he is to know and understand the Biblical text. This method lies completely outside one's own experience and pre-conceived notions of science and theology. Again, the student of Scripture is to approach the Biblical text with only the normative hermeneutic and that doctrinal framework which is derived from its application. This method then provides the believer with the freedom to construct scientific or theological models to explain the real world, such as Newton's Laws of Motion, Maxwell's Equations, the Vapor Canopy Theory, etc.

This method of the hermeneutic and its application also provides the student of Scripture with a system of "checks and balances." That is, it is testable from one person to another. One individual can test and check to make sure that another has consistently and properly applied the hermeneutic. With this method people can come into agreement on "what saith the Scripture," because the method is testable and objective. It is therefore claimed that, concerning the Scriptures, the normative hermeneutic is that hermeneutic which the Holy Spirit used to communicate the Biblical text to its human writers. Hence, all students of Scripture are to understand the text by that and only that hermeneutic. There can be only one interpretation of the Biblical text and that interpretation is that which the Spirit of God intended for the original audience. How can the student of Scripture know what that interpretation is? By the consistent application of the normative hermeneutic!

#### THE DAY-AGE THEORY

In order for Bible scholars and theologians to accommodate the vast amounts of time scientists were insisting on, regarding the age of the earth, they came up with many theories.

One such theory is the Day-Age Theory. This theory states that the days of creation in Genesis One are not literal solar periods of 24 hours, but rather, long periods of geologic time.(10) The issue at hand is therefore: can the days in Genesis One be precisely determined? An attempt will be made to apply consistently the normative hermeneutic to the Genesis days and determine their length.

#### The Meaning of Day

The Hebrew word for day is yom. Its root meaning has the idea of "being hot," or the idea "of heat."(11) Thus, the application is to the warm part of a solar period. Yom occurs over 1000 times in the Old Testament and it has the following meanings:

- 1) The "light" portion of a solar day
- 2) An entire solar day equal to 24 hours
- 3) Some period of time
- 4) An individual's age, etc.

However, more than 95% of the occurrences of yom are to be translated "day" and they all refer to the solar period of 24 hours. Hence, the normal usage of yom is that of 24 hours and therefore, the burden of proof rests upon the shoulders of those who would say otherwise. Nevertheless, let us rigorously define yom.

In Genesis One, Moses uses a figure of speech called "polysyndeton," meaning "many-and's." He uses this figure to list the data of Genesis One. It is formed by each verse beginning with, "And God..." Each set of data is distinguished by the next occurrence of "And God..." Moses is using this figure to urge the reader to pay close attention to the details of each verse. That is precisely what this figure of polysyndeton is used to accomplish.(12,13) Thus the meaning of yom can be determined by examining closely the details of its context.

According to the normative hermeneutic, Word Usage Rule 3, a variable meaning word is determined by the context, which in turn is shaped by the words with more strictly limited meanings. This context then is to be shaped by the strictly interpreted phrase "evening and morning." The Hebrew word here translated "evening," is eh'reb. Its root meaning has the idea of "mixing" or "to mingle," thus, the idea of mixing day and night, or dusk.(14) Eh'reb occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament and is translated in the following ways:

- 1) Even
- 2) Evening
- 3) Eventide
- 4) Night, mingle, mix, etc.

However, more than 95% of the occurrences of eh'reb refer to the period of the sun's setting. Hence, the normal usage of eh'reb is that of dusk and beyond. Can "day" then mean a long geologic period?

The Hebrew word that is translated morning is, bo'ker. Its root meaning has the idea of "breaking forth," implying the time of sun-rising.(15) Bo'ker occurs in the Old Testament more than 170 times and is translated as follows:

- 1) Day
- 2) Early
- 3) Morning
- 4) Morrow

However, more than 95% of the occurrences of bo'ker refer to the period of the sun's rising. Hence, the normal usage of bo'ker is that of dawn or morning. Can "day" mean a long geologic period?

The real determination will be to determine the usage of the phrase "evening and morning." This is the very phrase that determines the meaning of yom. "Evening and morning" or its equivalent occurs in the following passages: Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; Ex. 18:13, 14; 27:21; Lev. 24:3; Num. 9:21; 2 Chron. 2:4; 13:11; 31:3; Ezra 3:3; Job 4:20; Psalms 55:17; 65:8; Dan. 8:26. In all of these passages the intended interpretation is a solar period of 24 hours. Hence, the normal usage of "evening and morning" is that of a 24-hour period. Unless something in the context of Genesis One dictates a rare interpretation the reader is to assign its normal usage. There is therefore absolutely nothing to warrant a rare interpretation of this phrase in Genesis One.

The normative hermeneutic demands that the days in Genesis One be literal 24-hour solar periods--days!

There is much more that could be examined in detail; however, for lack of time and space we shall stop with the proof at this point. It is nevertheless very interesting that many professing creationists hold to the Day-Age Theory even today, including such men as Wonderly,(16) Newman and Eckelmann,(17) D. Young(18) and Archer.(19) In every case the following errors have been made:

- 1) That current scientific theories are correct as they relate to the age of the earth and universe.
- 2) That uniformitarianism is the predominant factor in earth and universal formation.
- 3) As a result of 1) and 2), an abandonment of the consistent application of the normative hermeneutic as it relates to the Creation and Flood narratives.

#### SUMMARY

The Scriptures are knowable, and knowable only through the same hermeneutic that the Holy Spirit used to author the Biblical text. It is clear that to accommodate the Day-Age Theory one must abandon the normative hermeneutic. The clear meaning and interpretation of Genesis One is that the days are literal 24-hour periods.

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