

# Chapter 1

## THE LITERAL-GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

*“Whom shall He teach knowledge? Whom shall He make to understand the message?  
... So the word of the Lord to them will be, precept on precept, precept on precept,  
line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there, ...”*

Isaiah 28:9,13

The basic premise of the “**Literal Grammatical Historical Method**” of the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures lies in the belief that the Bible, as a whole, possesses a Divine Authority and that authority rests on its inherent nature and its actual phenomena, not on the theories, inventions, emotions or traditions of men respecting it.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, self-evident that all exegesis<sup>G</sup> must be unsound which is not based on the literal, grammatical<sup>G</sup>, historical, and contextual<sup>G</sup> sense of the original writers and their signatures. It is an exegetic fraud to invest with authority the conclusions which are arrived at either by distorting or ignoring the plain significance of the individual words themselves and the syntax of the sentences which those words form. It is the duty of the exegete to explain what the original text precisely says. The net result of this *a priori*<sup>G</sup> requirement for accurate interpretation of the Scriptures is that if the interpretation is not based upon what the text precisely says in the original languages<sup>G</sup>, then it can only be attributed to a misleading tradition or subjective emotion of men. Jesus Himself warned against this danger when he asked the Pharisees, “*Why do you*

*yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*” (Matthew 15:1-3) The task of the exegete is to explain first and foremost what the text literally says. His responsibility is to avoid burying it with tradition, ritual, ceremony and/or explaining it away by reducing it to something less than Divine Viewpoint.<sup>G</sup> Therefore, the communicator of the “Good News Information” about the Plan of God must take seriously the instructions of the Apostle Paul to Titus on how he should study and communicate: “*Not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.*” (Titus 1:14)

### NATURE OF DIVINE REVELATION

Revelation<sup>G</sup> of divine truth has come to us by means of a Book, set in real times, places, and human conditions. It is *impossible* that we should rightly apprehend the meaning of that Book otherwise than by normal and practical linguistic and literary laws of human communication. Only by studying the temporal setting can we reach the eternal truth. If anyone should object that the Bible should be interpreted as

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

The “literal” method of interpretation of Scripture seeks the exact basic meaning of the normal, ordinary and customary usage of individual words, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking. It is called the “Literal-Grammatical-Historical method” of interpretation when emphasis is placed on the fact that the meaning is to be determined strictly by grammatical and historical considerations.<sup>2</sup> The Bible must be examined by the same “laws of criticism”<sup>G</sup> which are applied to other writings of antiquity. This is not to undermine the supernatural and divine nature of the Bible, but it simply recognizes that God has revealed His message to mankind by means of the normal rules of the grammar of human languages. It is the inspiration<sup>G</sup> of these “words” by God the Holy Spirit in such a perfect form so as to render man in possession of the infallible Word of God. (II Timothy 3:16) It is only to the degree that these “words” of God in the Bible are not allowed to be ignored or twisted by humanly-invented theories and methods, that one may have any guarantee of arriving at the message which is “*profitable for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.*” It is only the Word of God which is “*alive and powerful*” (Heb. 4:12) and “*lives and abides forever.*” (I Peter 1:24) The “traditions of men” are only as permanent and reliable as are the men who form them, being ever subject to the whim and bias belonging to the spirit of the times. The Scripture warns, “*Be constantly on guard that no individual shall make you a booty to be carried off by means of his philosophy, even a hollow shell of pleasant enticement according to the norm and standard of the legalistic traditions of men, namely, in conformity with the requirements of the doctrinal elements of the world and definitely not according to the norm and standard of Christ.*” (Colossians 2:8)

we interpret any other book, we submit, in the words of Herbert M. Butler that:

"No apology can be required for applying to the Bible the principles of reason and learning; for if the Bible could not stand the test of learning, it could not be what it is -- a work of divine wisdom. The Bible, therefore, must be examined by the same laws of criticism<sup>G</sup> which are applied to other writings of antiquity."<sup>3</sup>

When the study of the Scriptures is freed from the fetters of legalism<sup>G</sup>, philosophy<sup>G</sup>, allegory<sup>G</sup>, and emotionalism<sup>G</sup>, it becomes clear that Butler's rule is necessary, and when fairly applied, will prove to be absolutely consistent with what the Book itself claims to represent.

## DIVINE REVELATION AND INTELLECTUAL CREATURES

The principles which apply to the field of the interpretation of Scripture include the Biblical description and definition of mankind's rational, intellectual nature. Man is an intellectual creature in that he possesses rationality, self-consciousness and self-determination, due to his having been created in the "image of God."<sup>G</sup> The Biblical record of God revealing Himself to mankind confirms the fact that He has consistently done so by involving the intellect of mankind. Divine revelation has not occurred through magic, mysticism, intuition, or accidental discovery. The historical record of divine revelation is couched in such phrases as "...and the word of the Lord came to him, saying..."; (II Samuel 7:4) resulting in such commands as, "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your intellect..." (Deuteronomy 6:5); confirming the divine requirement, that "...as a man thinks in his intellect, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7) In turn, this divine revelation has been reduced to written form, a Book, of which each part and parcel has such critical meaning and definition that Jesus said, "...not even the tiniest letter or the tiniest hook on a letter will in any way disappear from the law until all it calls for shall have taken place." (Matthew 5:18)

It is clear, therefore, that the revelation of the Plan of God has been recorded by God through the medium of "words." Since the message of God to mankind is in the form of "words," these become *divine* words which "live and abide forever." These "words" become the Word of God which contain the divine thought about history and the Plan of God.

The Bible is indeed not a common book. It is a book supreme and unique to all books, yet, being a book, or rather a collection of books, it can only be accurately interpreted as what it is -- a book of thought

communicated to the human race from God via the normal and practical rules of linguistic and literary laws of human communication. That the Bible may indeed be accurately interpreted is straight forwardly implied by the injunction given to the interpreter that he should be careful to "*Strive to present yourself approved to God, a teacher not put to shame, accurately and skillfully exegeting the word with reference to its truth.*" (II Timothy 2:15) This means that one should not be forced to rely upon the insecure hope of mysticism, magic, accident, or emotionalism to receive the message of God to mankind. The fact that God is not the author of confusion means that His word is recorded correctly and accurately. Therefore, only correct and accurate **rules of interpretation** will result in a study of the Word of God which will, in turn, result in an accurate and correct understanding of the message of God to mankind. Study, in any field of endeavor, regardless of how sincere, is worthless if it is not done accurately, correctly, and systematically. This principle is especially important when dealing with the eternal Word of God, the correct versus incorrect interpretation of the same having eternal repercussions. "The priority necessity of the exegete is further manifested by virtue of the fact that the words of one age and nation can never be the exact. Therefore, to arrive at a complete understanding and expression of the thoughts of another, EXEGESIS becomes a matter of necessity."<sup>4</sup> The powerful force of human tradition upon our thinking causes us to believe that we possess an almost infallible a priori understanding of certain documents.<sup>5</sup> Exegesis becomes doubly important for such books which have become immortalized by the accumulated reverence of generations, so that we know for sure what they actually say, rather than what we wish they would say.

## REVELATION, NOT RIDDLE

Exegesis is required for explanation of the significance of any language which time, distance or culture has obscured.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to coordinate ancient thoughts with the discoveries, the experiences, and the philosophical inquiries of later periods.<sup>7</sup> The Bible furnishes no exception to this universal law. Therefore, to "interpret" the words of the Bible means to explain the original sense of a speaker or writer. To "interpret literally" means to explain the original sense of the speaker or writer according to the normal, customary, and proper usage of words and language. It is proper for a word to have various meanings and senses. However, when a word is used in a given situation, **it should normally possess but one intended sense or meaning**. "This is the regular law of linguistic exchange among sensible people."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the

literal method of interpretation of the Scriptures assumes that God had one definite purpose in each statement for the reader. The literal method of interpreting the Bible views the Bible as *REVELATION*, not *RIDDLE*!<sup>9</sup>

The Bible absolutely stands alone among sacred books in that it is avowedly the record of a Progressive Revelation<sup>G</sup>, a revelation given fragmentarily and multifariously in many portions and many ways (Hebrews 1:1) ***through language which was and is subject to all the ordinary conditions and limitations of human speech.***<sup>10</sup> The Divine Authority of Scripture is vested in its simple meaning, in its native majesty, and in its manifold record of a consistent and progressive revelation through passage after passage, book after book, and writer after writer. The Bible, while formed of many parts, forms an organic whole which justifies its meaning, purpose, definition and veracity. The Bible would have no claim to sacredness if it needed any apology beyond the simplest statement of plain facts — The Bible proves to be its own justification.

Therefore, the priority-one objective of the interpreter of Biblical Scripture should be to ascertain the specific meaning of the inspired human writer and God the Holy Spirit. This task will try the strength and patience of every laborer and it requires a lifelong devotion to many branches of criticism<sup>G</sup>, including literature, archaeology, language, and history. The Exegete must be ABOVE ALL one of dauntless independence, perfect candor, invincible academic honesty, and avoiding the misleading influences of his own *a priori* convictions. NOTE: Few are the translators, fewer still are the Exegetes, who have been so free from their ingrained idols, sacred cows, axes to grind, emotional demands, institutional security, and traditional taboos, so as to be able to abstain from finding in the Bible “thoughts” which it does not contain, and/or rejecting or unjustly modifying the thoughts which indeed are there. The Scripture enjoins the student of the Word of God to avoid human viewpoint<sup>G</sup> and return to divine viewpoint:

*“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the  
unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return  
unto the Lord;  
... for My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,’ says the Lord.”*  
Isaiah 55:7-8

The Exegete must not confuse revealed facts with traditional “theological” notions; he must not permit long-tolerated errors to put on the air of abstract truths; he must interpret language by the only laws whereby it can be objectively judged; in doing so, he will sweep aside all arbitrary interpretations. Arbitrary

interpretations will be characterized by his not being able to trace the origin of the same to Scripture. No deadlier disservice can be inflicted upon the Scriptures than the caustical<sup>G</sup> defense of *a priori* or conventional apology. Principle: On the Altar of Truth, the Exegete should take heed to offer no “*strange fire*.” (Leviticus 10:1-2)

Therefore, he who would reverence Scripture must reverence it as it is; he must judge it in its totality; and, by its actual phenomena. Its authority is derived from its final and genuine teaching known from its consistency and integrity, book by book, utterance after utterance. Scripture should neither be treated as an idol nor with misgiving, yet viewed as needing no defense, for if it be left to the power of its inherent greatness, it will vindicate itself.

However, sadly to say, the history of what passes for “exegesis” demonstrates that the interpretation of Scripture has through the centuries been dominated by “traditions of men,” unproven theories and overlaid by ritual and ceremony. The history of exegesis, or the lack thereof, demonstrates that every time students and communicators of the Bible abandon the “line by line” and “word by word” examination of the original signature of the “God-breathed Scriptures,” that is, abandon the search for the immediate and primary sense, the result is a drift into formalism, ritualism and emotionalism. Therefore, such “exegesis” has most often darkened the true meaning of Scripture, not uncovered and elucidated it. Hence, it is no surprise to discover that the vast mass of so-called “Scriptural interpretation” resulting from such tactics is no longer deemed tenable, and has now been condemned and rejected by the wider knowledge and deeper insight of mankind. By means of an increasingly accurate “canon of interpretation”<sup>G</sup> of Scripture, through bonafide exegesis and the resultant ever-advancing illumination of truth in general, it has become common knowledge that many of the things espoused by church dogma and institutionalized *persona non grata*, has been excused as just so much whim, bias and emotionalism.<sup>11</sup>

**THE CONCEPT:** “Exegesis” is taken from the Greek term “ἐξηγεομαι” and literally means “to lead,” but in Biblical literature it means “explain, interpret, describe,” etc. In the ancient New Testament World the term was technical for the “activity of priests and soothsayers who impart information or reveal divine secrets.”<sup>12</sup> Notice the specific instructions given to the Pastor-Teacher:

*“Strive to present yourself approved to God, a  
teacher not put to shame, accurately and skillfully  
exegeting the Word with reference to its truth.”*  
II Timothy 2:15

Therefore, this term is used in the Christian Scriptures to signify the responsibility of the interpreter of Scripture in that it signifies "to make known or to declare." The more full the exegete's acquaintance with the original languages, the development of "textual criticism"<sup>6</sup>, the study of history, medicine, psychology, archaeology, and comparative religion, the better he is able to come to an accurate understanding of what the original writer had in mind. Hence, the better able he is "to make known" the divine viewpoint resident in the Scriptures. The Bible clearly specifies this method of teaching as the norm for every generation of believers and not the exception: (Ecclesiastes 12:9-11; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 1:13; 2:15; 3:16-17 & Hebrews 12:9-11.)

*"And they read aloud clearly in the Book of the Law of God, and they gave the sense, and caused (them) to understand the reading."*  
Nehemiah 8:8

Furthermore, a study of the early Church and the teaching method employed at that time fully supports the critical-analytical method of teaching the Bible. Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 1, states: "Toward the end of the second century we find the beginnings of a distinctive exegesis of the New Testament comparable to that which Christians were already practicing in the Old Testament."<sup>13</sup> And again, "The story of early Christian exegesis of the Bible, which has been unfolded, has shown that in the

first two centuries exegesis was cautious and conservative, not departing very far from the text of the Bible, not venturing much beyond an expository type of exposition."<sup>14</sup>

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continues, "The Bible was the sole source book for preaching. It was the 'Word of wisdom' vs. 'wisdom of words.' The structure of teaching was the analysis of the text and proofs of Scriptures for the doctrines and the reasons and uses (applications). That is, the preacher first expounded his text in its context, then exemplified the doctrines which it contained by reference to other parts of Scripture, and finally applied them to the life and manners of men in a simple and plain speech."<sup>15</sup>

The absence of such emphasis on "Who wrote it?", "To whom was it written?", "Under what conditions was it written?", "How did the recipients receive it?", etc., has resulted in the indefinite limitation, if not the complete abandonment of the

principles of "exegesis." This neglect, which has prevailed for many hundreds of years, has resulted in methods of interpretation which have consigned to oblivion the true meaning of Scripture by ignoring the grammatical historical methods. Apart from applying the strict rules of the literal-grammatical-historical method, the interpreter begins to see "mysterious meanings which the writer may not have intended at all."<sup>16</sup> A classic example of the abuse of language is offered by Dr. Don Carson in his book, Exegetical Fallacies. The following "logical fallacy" illustrates the point:

#### WHY ARE FIRE ENGINES RED?

They have four wheels and eight men;  
four plus eight is twelve;  
twelve inches make a ruler;  
a ruler is Queen Elizabeth;  
Queen Elizabeth sails the seven seas;  
the seven seas have fins;  
the Finns hate the Russians;  
the Russians are red;  
fire engines are always rushin';  
so they're red.<sup>17</sup>

By comparison, there have been historical pockets of individuals who remained loyal to the literal-grammatical-historical method. In some instances, this has led to the gradual development of a "canon of interpretation"<sup>6</sup>, purer and freer of *a priori* contamination from human ideas and imagination.

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This is just what should be expected from the gradually developed conditions of history under which the revelation has been presented.

But, in general, the history of "exegesis" actually

becomes the record of how the "theologian" has ignored the Scripture's plain teaching. An extreme example of this, yet no more dangerous to the discovery of "truth" about what the Word of God actually says than any other departure from the literal-grammatical interpretation, is manifest in a speech by Minister Louis Farrakhan presented at Howard University.<sup>18</sup> He asserted that the black race was indeed the real Hebrew nation, that Jesus Christ was black, and he further went on to expound on a theological position of the creation of the first man and woman, namely, Adam and Eve by saying that "Everyone should know the truth concerning the original parents. That is, Adam and Eve were black, not white. And the reason we know for sure that they



were black is because of how they were created by God. God formed them from the dust of the ground, and as everyone knows, dirt is black.” The lessons which we can learn from past experience is to see the fact that the humanly-invented theories and methods of such as Louis Farrikhan; the Rabbinic, Alexandrian, Patristic, Scholastic, Reformed and even the Evangelical, have proven to provide no consistent answers to the great “Whys?” of history. Why? — Because they are more interested in power, influence, and institutional compliance than in the truth<sup>G</sup>.

Amazingly, the process is still going on, despite the fact that even the simplest mind knows that there is not only black soil, but there is also red, brown, grey, white, blue and all shades between. Therefore, clearly to this day, men of all schools unconsciously deceive themselves and others by a liberal adoption of the words of Scripture into meanings inconceivably remote from those which they really imply. These errors in interpretation are uncovered when Scripture is interpreted under the normal and reasonable rules of the syntax of the communication of human language. PRINCIPLE: Whether by “sincere orthodoxy” or by “unscrupulous unorthodoxy,” the result is the same, i.e., the intrusion of the subjective<sup>G</sup> into the sphere of revelation.

The violation and contamination of the objective Divine Viewpoint recorded in the Word of God manifests itself in extremism. One extreme is the religious enthusiast who does not care what the Bible teaches so long as he feels good or it furthers his cause. He, therefore, arbitrarily “adds to the Word of God” that which is entirely foreign to what the text actually says in blatant violation of Biblical warnings against doing so. Moses warned Israel about this violation of the Word of God: *“You shall not add to the Word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I commanded you.”* (Deuteronomy 4:2 cf., 12:32) The same spirit is caught in the instructions given to the Church by the Apostle John: *“...If any man shall add to these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”* (Re. 22:18) The religious enthusiast, the ceremonial ritualist, and the caustical<sup>G</sup> radical adds to the Word whatever emphasis on emotion, ritual, ceremony, tradition or whatever is his “axe to grind,” which is necessary to stimulate as many of the masses as is possible to join him and to cause them to remain loyal to and sacrificial for his movement.<sup>19</sup>

The opposite extreme is the unmoved intellectual who appreciates the Bible only because of a thorough knowledge of the text and the etymological<sup>G</sup>, grammatical<sup>G</sup> and syntactical<sup>G</sup> components of its very structure. This is the individual who deems himself a “higher critic,”<sup>G</sup> and, as such, elevates himself in his own mind above any appreciation for the content and

authority of the message that the very components of the Scripture have been intended to convey.<sup>20</sup>

The literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation is the procedure for ascertaining the message intended by the written Word of God which lies between these two extreme views.<sup>21</sup> While it bases its understanding of the content of the Bible through the study of the literal etymological, grammatical and syntactical components of the text, it crosses over the barrier between a mere academic understanding to make *intellectual application* of the message which is conveyed by the details of each “jot and tittle.” (Matthew 5:18-KJV)

The literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation does not admit mystical<sup>G</sup>, magical<sup>G</sup>, or allegorical<sup>G</sup> usage of the text. Rather, it applies the literal intellectual concepts conveyed by the language of the Bible to the present historical circumstances. The Divine Viewpoint of the Bible is conveyed by human language which relates real historical circumstances, people, events and doctrines<sup>G</sup> by linguistic description. Hence, it is called the “Word of God.”

The tendency to ignore the ACTUAL TEXT, thereby failing to intellectually apply its content and authority to the real historical circumstances which confront us has led the Church to a situation characterized by Carl F. H. Henry as one of “Hermeneutical Nihilism.”<sup>22,G</sup> Hermeneutical Nihilism meaning to invent out of nothing, church dogmas and procedures which absolutely do not exist in the actual text. Legitimate “hermeneutics” is the science, skill and art of interpretation of literature. This entails striving to arrive at an understanding of the original sense intended by speaker or writer. The laws of hermeneutics guard against faulty interpretation.<sup>A1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, while some “leap off the platform and run around the tent,” others see visions and dream dreams. Eschatological<sup>G</sup> details of the “Rapture of the Church” are revealed to a charismatic which had never been revealed to any student of the Scriptures before, mainly, because it is not there. Others have come to the conclusion that the footnotes in the Schofield Reference Bible are to be regarded as inherent as the text of the Scripture itself. Others have concluded that if the King James text was “good enough for Paul,” then it should be good enough for anyone. In this manner, the “Christian Truths” have been modified in keeping with the personality of the modifiers who have felt obliged to remodel it because they did not like its original design. They range from the emotionalist who relies on glandular stimuli to those who conduct formal liturgical services, rejecting

emotion and deeming themselves intellectuals for it. Few there are who find in the text of the written Word of God the message of the very Divine Viewpoint. (John 17:17) Fewer yet are those who, by the study of its very components, which components convey the divine message to man through human language of accommodation, arrive at a status of nonconformity with the world which comes only by "the renewing of the mind." (Romans 12:1-2)

Why? This means that the student of the Word of God would be forced under the authority of the actual "words" of the Scripture. This would require that one accept that the divine revelation is located in the text, not in the subjective impression of the reader; not in the dogma of institutions; not in the "good feeling" of emotionalism; not in the caudal objectives of "hot heads"; and, not in the "reward" of doing much good.

*The determination of what the text actually says is only made possible on the basis of historical exegesis and this by means of diction, grammar, syntax, context and the spirit of the times.*

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## NOTES----Chapter 1

1. Frederic W. Farrar, DD., FRS., History of Interpretation, (New York: Dutton and Co., 1886). (I am deeply indebted to Dr. Farrar for much of the thought represented herein. Over a century ago he demonstrated that clear objective thinking about the truth invested in the very words of the Christian Scriptures is possible in all generations. Dr. Farrar was a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge; Archdeacon and Canon of Westminster; and Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen. His objective in his 553 page work was "...to defend the cause of Christianity by furthering the interests of truth." He said, "Facts are God's words, and to be disloyal to God's facts is to dethrone Him from the world.")
2. J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 9.
3. Farrar, p. xvii.
4. Randolph O. Yeager, DD., Renaissance New Testament, 18 vols. (Gretna: Pelican, 1983) 12: iii-xvi.
5. Ibid., p. vii. By comparison, there are those who deem themselves "spiritual" because they have become convinced that "emotionalism" (short circuiting of brain synaptic structure) is the only means of attaining the truth of what the Scripture intends. Therefore, they give higher marks to subjective impressions rather than to objective exegesis and hermeneutics. Added to this the desire to make the Bible teach what one wishes it had, instead of those thought patterns it actually does convey, results in "disciples" who are no longer interested in what the Bible *SAYS*, because they "think" they already know what it *MEANS*. The example that Yeager uses is that "It is much easier to watch television and be told what is true than to make the intellectual effort to be a Berean and 'search the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.'" (Acts 17:11)
6. Under these conditions, "revelation" is not considered to be *in the text*, but in personal subjective encounters with the text. Thus the resultant common claim, "The same text can mean something different, perhaps even opposite, to two different people." "The text could mean one thing to a reader one moment and something different to the same reader a moment later." ***This is sensory interpretation of the Scriptures.*** By this method, the meaning and definition of the "content" of the original languages are subjected to the millions of sensory stimuli which bombard our brains and souls each day, some of which we ignore and to others we respond. Since every man and woman's environment is different, there is no possible way that such sensory interpretation of the Bible could convey a specific intended divine message for mankind which is to be described as "living and abiding forever." Under these conditions, its message should be expected to change every time the stimuli changes. Yeager summarizes this sensory type of interpretation when he says, "The bottom line becomes subjective impression, not the text, and the Bible can only mean what ten thousand butchers, bakers and candlestick makers say it means." He draws the final line in the sand between the two methods of interpretation of the Bible when he notes, "This amounts to saying that the Bible says nothing significant to anyone."
6. Col. Lloyd J. Matthews, Ret., "On Clausewitz...", ARMY, (February, 1988), pp. 20-24. At the United States Army War College stands an alcove dedicated to Gen.-Maj. Karl von Clausewitz. Students tread lightly when passing this hallowed niche because, to many, Clausewitz's On War is the Rosetta Stone that will unlock the deepest secrets of martial art. **The works of Clausewitz serve as powerful evidence of the absolute must of a later generation interpreting literature of an earlier age, to know and understand the times within which the document was penned.** There was a time in history in which every thought of

Clausewitz might have been meaningful when proposing a course of action in war. Matthews, however, states, "Much in the book is dated." This refers to the fact that Clausewitz was entirely ignorant of the American Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, The Israeli Conflicts, or the Gulf War. He is innocent of all that has both been learned about warfare and the modern armaments and techniques. Simply put, Clausewitz wrote before, as Matthews puts it, "...the day of breech-loaded and rifled firearms, tanks, armored troop carriers, helicopters, airpower, chemical weapons, electronic communications, missiles and precision guided weaponry, submarines, air-craft carriers, nuclear munitions and space technology." In light of these historical changes and advances, like any literature from the past, it only becomes relevant to the extent that it is "exegeted" in terms of present technology, experience, scientific discovery, culture, etc. Therefore, Col. Matthews states, "On War demands exegesis, that interpretive function performable only by military historians equipped to go outside the text proper --- into Clausewitz's voluminous earlier writings, so that the lines of his [doctrinal] development become distinct; into his notes about the *On War* manuscript, so that his intentions become clearer; into his historical context, so that his operative assumptions and intellectual influences are bared; into his professional life, so that his feelings, values and biases stand revealed; and into his language, so that the often nebulous meaning of his Teutonic tongue is deciphered." The terms and concepts endorsed by Matthews seem as though they should have been copied out of a text dealing with Biblical Hermeneutics. This is because these same basic principles apply to all literature out of the past which is being interpreted accurately and relevantly in the present. Only by application of the basic laws of "exegesis," "performed by those equipped (to do so)," within the "historical context" of the documents in question, and based on the "feelings, values, biases, etc.," called "isagogics"<sup>G</sup> or "spirit of the times," may anyone hope to come even relatively close to "deciphering" the tongues of the past. These laws of linguistics which apply to the languages of sensible people, find no exception in the interpretation of the Scriptures of the Christian Bible.

da Vinci (1452-1519) had sketched a "fall-breaker" in the form a cloth pyramid and had discussed the basic aerodynamic principles of gliders in 1514. The biggest draw-back to da Vinci's progress was the materials with which he had to work. Until the advent of the development of much lighter and stronger materials, man could not even begin to test his theories, because he could not get off the ground. Yet, with all the modern materials and scientific insight into the principles of flight, many in this field admit to inspiration and ideas gained from the ancient Leonardo. This graphically demonstrates how the coordination of ancient thoughts with the discoveries, the experiences, the philosophical inquiries and testing of later periods, results in advanced understanding of even ancient principles and their implications.

This illustrates the principle that as history has witnessed the unfolding of many of the secrets of many sciences, including the science of hermeneutics, additional light has been shed upon the meaning and definition of what God the Holy Spirit wrote down through His chosen human authors. For example, consider the contribution of the science of archaeology, which has only been added to the curriculum of Bible colleges and theological seminaries within the last 50 years. W. F. Albright is quoted as saying, "There are few fields of human knowledge where the progress of discovery makes constant revision of handbooks and other aids to study more necessary than in biblical research." (J. A. Thompson, The Bible and Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), p. 3.) He further states, "...through this study we are better able to understand and interpret the textbook of our faith." In short, the new information now available to students of the Word of God through archaeological excavation in Bible Lands have made an incalculable valuable contribution to the study of the Bible. In the forward to Thompson's book the renowned theologian F. F. Bruce states, "Large areas, especially of the Old Testament, have been so greatly illuminated by it [archeology] that it is not easy to imagine what readers made of them before the days of biblical archaeology." (emphasis added)[Ibid., Thompson, Forward by F. F. Bruce.]

Author Custance states, "Whatever evidence from archaeology is unmistakable, it tends always to support the most literal interpretation of Scripture that can be allowed in light of the interpretation of other Scriptures according to the norms and standards of the simple and ordinary literary grammatical rules. Archaeology has never supported, for example, the allegorical method of interpretation of Scripture, rather it has

7. SPJ, "History of Flight," The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1984, Vol. 7, p. 393. Example: Even before man had left the ground in flight, Leonardo

encouraged the most literal interpretation that the text will allow.” [Arthur C. Custance, Time and Eternity, 10 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) VI: 219.]

8. Paul Lee Tan, The Interpretation of Prophecy (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), p. 30. I am more than deeply indebted to Paul Tan. This section quotes extensively from Chapter One of his book. His work is highly recommended for an excellent summary of these principles. See also a complete list of mentors in his “Acknowledgments.”

9. Ibid. The principles of “ordinary usage” as it applies to the “figurative” language of the Bible: Figures of speech are the legitimate, charming ornaments of language. But these figures of speech being present in some passages does not militate against literal interpretation, because “figures of speech are normal and customary” ways of communication of specific information. Therefore, the presence of a “figure of speech” does not release the interpreter from all the rules of sensible linguistic laws. It simply means that the interpreter must “identify the normal customary meaning of that figure” as it existed at the time of writing and in the mind of the writer himself. These same principles must also be applied to the interpretation of “spiritual truths.” In other words, just because a given text is deemed to be a “spiritual truth,” does not free the interpreter from sensible linguistic laws. All spiritual truths which are necessary for the function of the Christian Way of Life are revealed through the medium of WORDS. These words are recorded with perfect accuracy by God the Holy Spirit, via inspiration of human authors, in the written Word of God. God the Holy Spirit has chosen to convey spiritual truths and principles through the medium of regular, earthly, human language. The literal interpretation of that which is so precisely written brings to light the specifics of spiritual truths. ***Therefore, Scriptural revelation of such spiritual truths must be interpreted according to the regular rules of human, earthly grammar and rhetoric, not by magic, mysticism, intuition, or imagination.*** Therefore, the proper bounds of research by Bible interpreters should be truths revealed in God’s “words.” To overstep and trespass the bounds of written revelation for that which is “hidden in God,” is contrary to the teachings of Scripture. It is the inspired Scripture that is “...god-breathed and becomes beneficial for teaching doctrine, for conviction, for restoration, for training in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:16) The Scripture

never allows the interpreter the freedom to seek out at his own whim the “secret meanings and mystical, hidden senses,” for only by “exegesis of given passages will one be assured that his devotional exposition or application is anchored on solid Scriptural foundation.”

10. Yeager, p. ix. Examples given by Dr. Yeager: Language is a form of communication, but language is the child of the culture in which it currently exists, having been evolved by the evolving culture of the past. For example, the debate rages over what Thomas Jefferson meant in the Declaration of Independence, i.e., if we cannot understand what Jefferson meant, who wrote only in 1776, how can we understand Paul who wrote in the first century? This problem in communication always exists between those separated by time and culture, as illustrated by the following: Indian students from Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, were given an IQ test which students in New York take. They did poorly and New Yorkers leaped to the false conclusion that Indians are not as smart as kids from the Bowery, the Bronx and Flatbush, until New Yorkers were given the IQ test given to Indians of the same age in Muskogee. They did less well than the Indians. The difference was not in the native intelligence, but in the cultural conditioning.

A second example is that Italian children were asked to supply the missing item on a picture of a door that had no doorknob. They penciled in a crucifix. Everyone who has been to Italy knows that there are few doors with doorknobs but none without a crucifix.

11. Ibid., p. v. One extreme is the religious enthusiast who does not care what the Bible teaches so long as he feels good. He therefore, arbitrarily “*adds to the Word of God*” (Re. 22:18) that which is entirely foreign to what the text actually says. He adds whatever emphasis on emotion, ritual, ceremony and tradition is necessary to stimulate as many of the masses as is possible to join him and to cause them to remain loyal to and sacrificial for his movement.

Dr. Randolph Yeager relates a story which illustrates the “emotional” extremist: “In a tent meeting the preacher and the choir occupied a high platform, equipped with an additional railing across the front to approximate total height of perhaps five feet above the sawdust floor. During the sermon a man in the choir, whose intellectual elevator did not go much above the mezzanine, was suddenly attacked by something that the preacher called the Holy Spirit. Whereupon he



arose, leaped over the railing and ran down the center aisle. The preacher followed in hot pursuit. After two or three circumnavigations around the tent they ended up playing “dog and bear” around the center pole of the tent. The man “faked the preacher out,” ran back to the front and tried to leap over the rail to his place in the choir. He didn’t make it, but caught his foot on the railing, fell back and hit his head on a front seat. Those nearest him rushed to his rescue, only to be told by the preacher, ‘Leave him lay where Jesus flang him.’”

There is nothing in such activity or experiences which could even remotely be justified from the actual text of the New Testament description of the function of God the Holy Spirit or that relates to the inscripturated mechanics of the Christian Way of Life. As Dr. Yeager summarized it, “...jumping off a platform and running around a tent as a witness for Jesus is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit.”

12. Walter Bauer and William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 275.
13. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, ed., Cambridge History of the Bible, 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 1: 416.
14. Ibid., 1: 449.
15. Ibid., 3: 185.
16. Merrill C. Tenny, ed., “Allegory,” The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1: 104.
17. Don Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) p. 91.
18. Louis Farrakhan, Speech given on Public Access Television Channel, Raleigh, North Carolina, Summer, 1994.
19. Jeffrey Burton Russel, Inventing the Flat Earth, Columbus and Modern Historians. (New York: Praeger, 1991), pp. 23-24. Examples: Although the vast majority of Christian theologians and philosophers believed that the earth was round, there were a few “flat-earththers” who based their beliefs on the Christian Scriptures. Lactantius (c. 265-345), Cosmas Indicopleustes (c. 540), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-430, indirect evidence only), Diodore of Tarsus (d. 394, indirect evidence only), Severian, Bishop of Gabala (c.

380 — “The Homilies on the Creation of the World”) are some of the very few flat-earththers.

e.g., Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. xviii. “John Calvin asked, “Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?” John Owen, the Puritan theologian said, “Newton’s discoveries are against evident testimonies of Scripture.”

e.g., [J. D. Douglas, ed., “Copernicus, Nicolas (1474-1543),” The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974 ed.), p. 262.] Theologians argued against Copernicus’ theory of the universe due to the fact that they said that God could not create infinity, therefore, an infinite universe was an atheistic conception.

20. Henry M. Morris, Ph.D., Many Infallible Proofs (San Diego: CLP Publishers, 1974), p. 41-44. “The field of study, euphemistically called ‘higher criticism<sup>G</sup>,’ the motivations for which are suspect, to say the least, and the results of which have been devastatingly corrosive to Biblical faith. ...The ‘higher critics’ profess to be scientific in this endeavor, but actually they are completely subjective, seeking by all means to find a naturalistic, evolutionary explanation for the Bible and the history of Israel and the Christian Church. ... The Bible, to the higher critics, is thus a purely natural book, full of errors and contradictions and outright lies.”

Morris cites as evidence the works of Jean Astruc, an “infidel French physician, who in 1753 wrote that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 were from two different and conflicting sources; He was followed by Eichron in 1779 and DeWidtte in 1806, both of whom suggested other documentary divisions within the Bible. The Graf-Wellhausen “hypothesis” further developed this very complex division of the first six books of the Bible. Other prominent “higher critics” cited are Kuenen, Driver, Cheyne, Ewald, Coonhill, all of whom were evolutionists and naturalists. Morris states, “Although these critics and their writings are full of high-sounding technical discussions about vocabulary and style, the real underlying presuppositions of such writers were as follows:

1. Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, because writing was unknown in his day.
2. The evolutionary theory of man’s cultural developments preclude attainment of high civilizations and literary abilities as early as Israel’s history as the Bible indicated.
3. The miracle stories of Genesis, Exodus, Kings, Jonah, etc., were derived from ancient mythologies. This must be so, since miracles are impossible scientifically.

4. Fulfilled prophecy is also a miracle, and therefore impossible.

Dr. Morris states emphatically, "But all these presuppositions are false!" Morris then offers a complete set of refutations of these allegations. He says, "the fact that these refutations have been completely ignored by liberals means only that such critics are either too lazy or too ignorant to read them, for they are answerable." See the Doctrine of Canonicity suggested at the end of these notes for further study of the details of the proofs.

21. Yeager, p. xiii. What are we to say then to the polarity of the fact that the Scriptures are addressed to all, yet can only be understood in their original language form by the qualified exegete? On the one hand, while the expertise of the exegete can never be perfect, this is a far cry from the view that what the reader "feels" should be considered as the basis of arriving at the true meaning of Scripture. If the latter be true, Dr. Yeager states, "...then why slave over the aorist tense as distinct from the imperfect, or the difference between the subjunctive and the optative moods if a high school dropout can distill divine wisdom out of thin air?" This is not to say that God has not used high school dropouts in the ministry, but it is to say that if they used the Word of God effectively, leading men to actual salvation and spirituality, then they got their message from a book that had been produced by another, who, in turn, got their message from the original text.
22. Ibid., p. v. The tendency to ignore the ACTUAL TEXT, thereby failing to intellectually apply its content and authority to the real historical circumstances which confront members of the human race, has led the Church to a situation characterized by Carl F. H. Henry as one of "Hermeneutical Nihilism." [Carl F. H. Henry, "The Interpretation of the Scriptures: Are we Doomed to Hermeneutical Nihilism?" The Review and Expositor, Vol. LXXI, #2, (1974), pp. 197-215.] Hermeneutical Nihilism means to invent out of nothing church dogmas and procedures which absolutely do not exist in the actual text.

Recently this writer encountered just such a case of clever inventive nihilism. It involved the invention of a basis for raising money for the church. The church published a beautiful brochure which asked the membership to give to a fund for renovating their church building. The basis of the urgency of giving was based on a quotation from Ezekiel 36:26-27: *"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit*

*within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."* The pastoral comments about the project, and how this passage relates to giving to the church, took the passage completely out of context. He said, "...God's Spirit is moving in \_\_\_\_\_ Church. Just as God promised His people many years ago, He has put a "new heart and a new spirit" within us (Ezekiel 36:26) ... As you look through the Bible, you will notice that there is an inseparable link between spiritual revival and building programs. Whenever God's people were revived, they built; and whenever they built, they were spiritually revived! ... the renovation campaign is a tangible way for you to participate..." *THIS IS HERMENEUTICAL NIHILISM* because the Ezekiel 36 passage is strictly dealing with Israel and the Millennial Kingdom. This is not to mention that: (1) The New Testament Christian Way of Life conveys not the tiniest shred of a hint that there is an "inseparable link between revival and building programs"; (2) "Revival" is not mentioned in the New Testament; (3) "Revivalism" is basically an American institution [Earle E. Cairns, Th.B., Ph.D., Christianity Through The Centuries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), p. 400.] of emotionalism which has nothing to do with the New Testament at all, but grew out of movements characterized by "frenzied excitement and emotional outbursts, even by physical aberrations. It could be ... frequently dignified and orderly ... its offer, presented mainly on an emotional basis..." [Clifton, E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1960), p. 257.] The plea for giving money was clearly based on blatant circular reasoning and not hermeneutics. By circular reasoning one can demonstrate the "truth" of the absurd and even the impossible. This "preacher's" reasoning has no more to do with the theology of Ezekiel 36 than saying, "Brown animals are often cows, therefore, we know that often cows are brown," has anything to do with animal husbandry. Not only does it not have anything to do with Ezekiel 36, but more importantly, where does such circular reasoning leave us in answering the great questions of life that begin with "Why?" "Why are there cows at all?" If we cannot know why the cow exists, who cares that they may be brown. The application is that if we cannot know why we are here in history, possessing the intellectual ability to contemplate building a church building, then how could it possibly matter in the grand scheme of things if we are "revived." The circular reasoning of "If we

get revived we will build, and if we build we will get revived” is typical hermeneutical nihilism which not only answers absolutely no questions that begin with “Why?,” but it has absolutely nothing to do with the inscripturated mechanics of the Christian Way of Life.

## **STUDIES----Chapter 1**

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[The following is a list of Bible Studies taught by Dr. Killingsworth in Rephidim Church, Wichita Falls, Texas. The listing includes the name of the doctrinal subject and the corresponding cassette tape number(s). For additional information write: RDBS, INC., 4430 Allendale Rd., Wichita Falls, TX 76310]

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**GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE - G224;  
I64-I65**

**HISTORY OF GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF THE CHRISTIAN  
SCRIPTURES -  
I138-I141**

**METHODS OF INTERPRETATION OF  
SCRIPTURE - D77-D80**

**DOCTRINE OF CANONICITY - F75-F101**

**DOCTRINE OF DIVINE REVELATION -  
F153-F155**

**DOCTRINE OF SPIRITUALITY  
(Spiritual State) - B227-B236**

**DOCTRINE OF UNCOMPLETED CANON  
CONDITIONS (Spiritual Gifts & Healing) -  
D306-D310**

**DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE -  
J274**