INTRODUCTION

The challenge of biblical interpretation is the challenge of understanding a document written between two and three thousand years ago in a culture vastly different from our own. Added to this challenge is the reality that the Bible itself was composed over a long period of time and by a large number of different writers with their own individual ways of expressing ideas. It was originally composed using three separate languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, which are very different from one another.

How then can a modern reader make sense of a document like this? On the positive side of the answer to this question lies the fact that the Bible is sacred scripture. This means that its ultimate author is God who inspired the many writers to put into human words divine ideas. And in Christian teaching believers have the presence and help of God's Spirit to assist them in understanding the words of the biblical text. But this is no guarantee that the modern reader will correctly understand the Bible. To be sure the failure to understand does not lie on the side of God's help. Rather it comes from human frailty and inability to correctly grasp the sense of scripture. We as modern readers are the 'weak link' in the chain of comprehending the meaning of the Bible.

In order to correct our limitations we need to take advantage of the developing insights into proper reading and understanding of ancient documents. The 'science of Bible understanding' can be labeled hermeneutics, from the ancient Greek word ἑρμηνεύω, *hermeneuō*, meaning "I translate", or "I interpret",[1] More properly it is "biblical hermeneutics" because the focus is on ancient religious writings regarded as scripture. Over the past two or three centuries substantial progress has been made in this field of study so that methods of interpretation used today are far superior in their approach than those used at the beginning of the modern era. This does not in any way guarantee correct interpretation at the end of the process, since correct understanding brings together several dynamics: the spiritual condition of the Bible reader, the level of interpretive skills etc.

Thus what we are focusing on with this series of studies is interpretive skill development. It will be up to you as the Bible reader to address the spiritual issues in your own life. These will indeed play an important role in arriving at correct understanding. But our goal is more modest: to develop better skills in interpreting the scripture texts through personal study of the Bible. Hopefully, we can help you achieve this goal during these sessions.

The strategy for doing this is to begin with the basics of written literature, and then apply these insights into ancient writings with a primary focus on the Christian Bible in both the Old and New Testament sections. The nature and perspective of this series of studies will most likely be considerably different than any other similar set of studies that you have examined

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[1]"Hermeneutics (*/hɜrməˈnjuːtɪks/*), broadly, is the art and science of text interpretation. Traditional hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of written texts, especially texts in the areas of literature, religion and law. A type of traditional hermeneutic is biblical hermeneutics which concerns the study of the interpretation of the Bible. In religious studies and social philosophy, hermeneutics is the study of the theory and practice of interpretation. Modern hermeneutics encompasses everything in the interpretative process including verbal and nonverbal forms of communication as well as prior aspects that affect communication, such as presuppositions, pre-under-standings, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semiotics.[1]" ["Hermeneutics," Wikipedia.org]

previously. This is not to condemn other ways of learning how to study the Bible. But it is to strongly insist that knowing why we are using certain interpretive skills is just as important as learning the mechanics of the skill. Put in modern terms, we are coming at it from a "Mr. Good-wrench" angle rather than from a "shade tree mechanic" approach.[2]

The joys of developing these skills are immense. What I have discovered over the years is that, studied in this manner, the Bible comes alive as the Word of God living and life changing. The biblical idea of inspiration (θεόπνευστος, God's breath)[3] -- not the modern twisting of it -- takes on profound meaning as we experience the living breath of God animating our minds and hearts through the words of the biblical text. Even after a half century plus of studying and teaching the Bible, it remains a book of continuing exciting discovery and profound spiritual nourishment. My prayer is that this series of studies will help lay a foundation for Bible study that you can build upon over a life time of study. And that these interpretive skills will enable the Spirit of God to breath dynamic life into your life through this kind of study of scripture.

1.0 What is written expression of ideas?

What is an idea? Have you ever consider how to define the word 'idea'? It is more complicated than first thought. The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary offers seven different meanings.[4] Some of these 'ideas' don't make much sense even. The simplest meaning is that an idea is a formulated thought or opinion. The key word here is 'formulated.' That is, an idea is expressed either verbally or in written form in a coherent, under-standable manner. Our focus in this series of studies is on the written expression of ideas contained in the Bible.

One should be clear about the distinction between words and ideas. These are not synonymous con-cepts. Words are the vehicle in structured language for expressing ideas, but they are not the ideas themselves. Most words in modern languages contain multiple ideas, as dictionary definitions illustrate. Seldom in any hu-man language can one word or a single set of words completely express a single idea. Any single idea can be

[2]The additional background angle that is important for you to understand is that these studies come out of having developed and taught for many years a PhD seminar on "New Testament Critical Methodology" at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. That single seminar produced more PhD dissertations during the 80s and 90s than any other single doctoral seminar at the seminary in the largest PhD program in theological studies anywhere in North America. It became a hugely important part of the training of New Testament doctoral students at this seminary during the period when SWBTS was the largest single seminary in North America. One out of every ten seminary students in the hundreds of seminaries and divinity schools in both the United States and Canada was a student at Southwestern Seminary during this era. Out of the experience of both developing this doctoral seminar from scratch and then teaching it until my retirement in 1997, I gained enormous greater understanding of the process of biblical interpretation. Two year long sabbatical leaves were spent working in the theological faculties of two major German universities -- and lecturing in two others -- working on developing skills in this area of expertise as a New Testament professor and scholar.

What these studies represent is a greatly simplified expression of those insights. The highly technical skills gained from the years of teaching at SWBTS in Texas (1974-1997) were honed and refined by teaching mostly undergraduate students for eleven years (1998-2008) at the large Baptist university in North Carolina, Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs. Countless numbers of week end "January Bible Studies" in Baptist churches over these years helped me gel the basics down into terms more easily understandable to those not involved in formal ministry training in higher education.

[3]For a detailed understanding of biblical inspiration see the lecture given to students at Gardner-Webb University in Religion 492, *New Testament Seminar* at cranfordville.com. The basics of this understanding were expressed years earlier published in the article "In-spiration" in the two volume *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Press, 1996).

Religion 492 was a senior level undergraduate seminar focused on the same topics of these series of studies. During the first half of the semester I gave lectures on the foundations of biblical interpretation, and during the second half of the semester the students pre-sented research papers on assigned topics connected to biblical interpretation. I take considerable pride in the fact that the several of the students whose papers are listed on the web page at cranfordville are today serving as professors in the religion departments of different universities across the US. Most of the others are engaged in Christian ministry in churches and church related organizations. This is one of the great blessings of being a teacher at this level of education.

[4]1 a : a transcendent entity that is a real pattern of which existing things are imperfect representations b : a standard of perfection : ideal c : a plan for action : design

2 archaic : a visible representation of a conception : a replica of a pattern

3 a obsolete : an image recalled by memory b : an indefinite or unformed conception c : an entity (as a thought, concept, sensation, or image) actually or potentially present to consciousness

4 : a formulated thought or opinion

5 : whatever is known or supposed about something <a child's idea of time>

6 : the central meaning or chief end of a particular action or situation

7 Christian Science : an image in Mind

["Idea," *Merriam-Webster.com*]

expressed with multiple words and/or sets of words. For our situation in Bible study, when translation from one language to another stands between words and ideas, no single translation can begin to capture the full meaning of words first written in Hebrew or Greek and then translated centuries later into a modern language such as English, German, or Spanish. The goal of all legitimate translations is to accurately communicate the ideas into the 'receptor language' text, i.e., English, German, or Spanish, that are contained in the 'source language' text, i.e., Hebrew or Greek. Different translation methodologies are employed today in the effort to achieve this common goal -- something we will study in greater detail later on.

But it is important to grasp the distinction between words and ideas. And Bible interpretation is all about grasping the ideas embedded originally in the sacred text through Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek words. This is one of the many things that sets Christians apart from Muslims. In Islam, the ultimate goal is to grasp the ancient Arabic words of the Koran and then from memorization to repeat them back to the god Allah, because he gives spiritual credit to those repeating his words back to him. Understanding the ideas contained in those words is of very secondary importance and is left up to the religious teachers of Islam to interpret them to the adherents of the religion. The overwhelming majority of Muslims repeating the Koran in their prayer services every Friday have little or no understanding of the ideas contained in those words being repeated orally. But for Christians it is the ideas of God that matter first and foremost, and the understanding of those words in modern linguistic settings. We respect the original language texts of the Bible but insist upon the correct translation of the ideas in those words through modern translations of scripture.

The task of interpretation is then to make sense of those ideas contained in the biblical text. This has a purely human side and a religious side. God chose to express His ideas through human language in place at the time of His inspiring the writers of the Bible. The only available vehicle for this was the language that people used, however limited it was for idea expression. The biblical writers were far from perfect individuals and these limitations are reflected at points in the words recorded in the biblical texts. But the miracle of inspiration is that God breathed His presence into those human words so that His ideas can be clearly grasped from these human words. And most of this miracle takes place not in the composition of the documents of the Bible but in the study of the Bible by readers with a heart open to the Spirit of God to speak to them.[5]

In this series of studies we will give some attention to the religious side of interpretation, but our primary focus will be on skill development for interpreting the human side of the biblical text.

1.1 Nature of recorded ideas

When you write a letter -- or more likely these days, compose an email -- what are you doing? At its most basic level, you are putting your ideas into words. The ideas begin in your mind, but come out through your fingers in writing them into words. When expressed in written form, and sent out either as a letter or as an email, these ideas become fixed because they express the ideas you had at that particular moment in time. A later letter or email may express these same ideas but almost always with different words and with a somewhat different perception of those ideas. We call this 'maturity' in western culture. Our ideas mature over time through additional experiences and greater understanding. This is fundamental to human experience. Thus we should not be surprised to find this sort of thing present in scripture. In no way did God override the varying perceptions of His will by the writers at different times in their ministries over a life time of service. Now it is not God changing His mind that we see in scripture, but human writers with maturing and growing perceptions of His will.

The primary point at the moment is to recognize that any written text reflects the perceptions of the writer at that particular moment in his or her life. As biblical writers, the historical point of composition of a biblical document reflects their understanding of God's will at that particular moment in their ministry. Traditionally this has been labeled 'progressive revelation' of God's will. Implied in this is that the ideas contained in Genesis, although valid expressions of God's will, do not provide the Bible reader with a full disclosure of God's will. This ultimately comes with Jesus Christ who brought to completion the written expression of the ideas of God in sacred scripture.

What qualities are present in these written expressions of God's ideas? Every written expression takes on both literary qualities and historical qualities. In order to best understand those ideas we need to learn all that is

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[5]The often made modern distinction between 'inspiration' and 'illumination' by the Holy Spirit is a completely modern concept based on European rationalism, and is completely foreign to biblical concepts. It becomes necessary largely because 'inspiration' is not understood correctly biblically.

possible to know about both the literary and the historical aspects of the written expression, i.e., the text.[6] What we will do here is to briefly summarize these qualities, and then in subsequent sessions come back to each one for more detailed analysis. The goal now is begin thinking about these aspects in order to become aware of what they are.

1.1.1 Literary Aspects

What does 'literary' mean? The English adjective 'literary' designates one of two possible meanings, according to the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*:
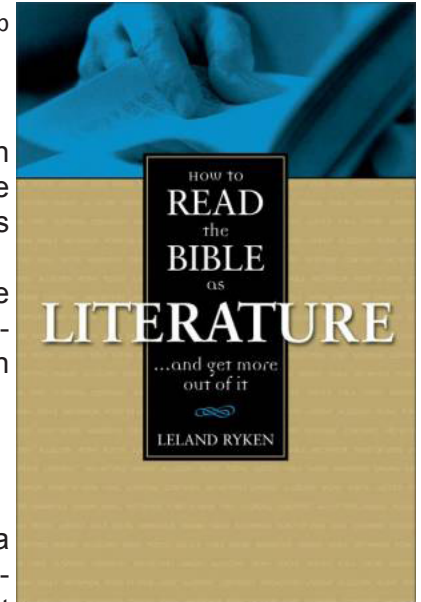
> 1. a : of, relating to, or having the characteristics of humane learning or literature; b : bookish; c : of or relating to books;
> 2. a : well-read; b : of or relating to authors or scholars or to their professions
> — lit·er·ar·i·ly adverb; — lit·er·ar·i·ness noun

The range of possible meanings here are almost as diverse as for the English word 'literature.'[7] Although some dispute the idea, the Christian Bible is a piece of literature.[8] And as such, it possesses literary qualities. Understanding these is an important part of the interpretive process.

Literary qualities can be naturally divided into three groups: the form, the context, and the structure of written expression of ideas. Here we will take a summary overview of these aspects, and then come back to them in a later session for more detailed study.

1.1.1.1 Literary forms: genre

When an author sets out to produce a piece of writing, whether it be a novel, history, poem etc., he or she will seek to express the ideas often in generally understood patterns. Every language, which reflects a distinct culture at some point of history, develops patterns of expressing ideas that make understanding easier and clearer. At its

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[6]For a little more detail see Lecture Notes for Topic 1.1 in Religion 492 at cranfordville.com.

[7]Definition of LITERATURE
1. archaic : literary culture
2. the production of literary work especially as an occupation
3. a (1) : writings in prose or verse; especially : writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest (2) : an example of such writings <what came out, though rarely literature, was always a roaring good story — People> ; b : the body of written works produced in a particular language, country, or age; c : the body of writings on a particular subject <scientific literature>; d : printed matter (as leaflets or circulars) <campaign literature>
4. : the aggregate of a usually specified type of musical compositions
["Literature," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online]

[8]Few individuals in today's world will dispute the contention that the Bible is a piece of literature. But in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, this was a hotly debated topic. In the years following World War II in public education throughout the US, discussion arose over the propriety of teaching Bible courses in public schools all the way from elementary schools to state supported universities. This was a uniquely US discussion that arose because of the heritage of separation of church and state in US history. The founding fathers of the USA absolutely did not want any form of a state church modeled after the variety of patterns in Europe at that time. Thus strict laws were built into the Constitution and Bill of Rights with the intent of making the US a non-sectarian country where no form of Christianity would have official status over others and thus enjoy a privileged role in society.

In the controversies of the 1950s with American society in the early stages of massive change, the concern was to offer instruction about the Bible through state supported educational entities. While that battle continues to some degree in elementary and secondary public school structures, it has long been settled at the higher educational level of community colleges and universities. Almost every state supported college and university in the US has a Department of Religious Studies. In those departments are courses covering an introduction to the Bible, to the Old Testament, to the New Testament etc. The way that US higher education has been able to set up such programs of studies within the framework of US law is to offer such courses as studying the Bible as literature. The content of the course as well as the teaching approach of the professor must carefully avoid 'sectarian' orientation. That is, a Baptist professor teaching such a course must not advocate a Baptist understanding of the Bible in the class. An entire body of published literature for use as textbook material has emerged in the US market. One of the early and very popular textbooks was Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, that is still in print.

This issue is uniquely found in the US and no where else in the world, largely because no other country has the US heritage of church and state, nor similar legal regulations.

most basic level, this is language grammar. But at another level writing makes use of patterns of idea expression common to that culture. Everyone in today's world clearly recognizes the difference between prose and poetry, in large part because in the modern world the formating of these two literary forms are visually different from one another.

For the Bible translator this basic difference in formatting has been used since the mid-twentieth century to reflect prose and poetry in the text of the Bible as the following example from the NIV translation illustrates:

Job 42:1-3

1   Then Job replied to the Lord:

2   "I know that you can do all things;
              no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3   You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
              Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
              things too wonderful for me to know.
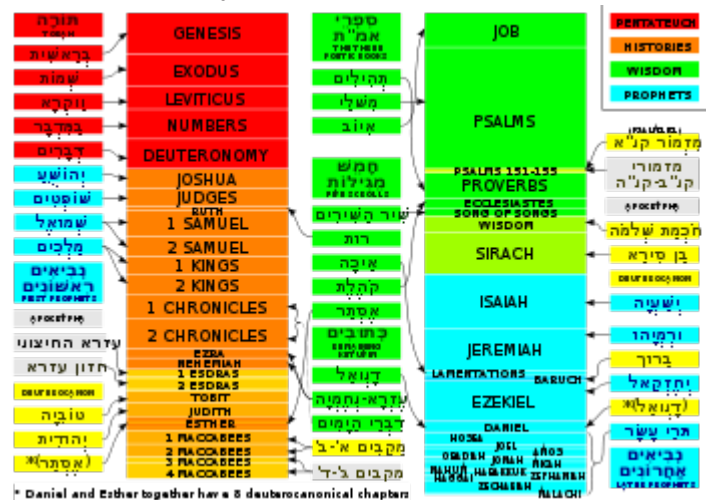
Job 42:10-11

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

The special challenge to the Bible translator in distinguishing between prose and poetry is that both Hebrew and Greek patterns of poetry are dramatically different from contemporary English patterns, as well as from one another. Thus when rhythmical patterns of poetical expression surface in the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts, the Bible translator must first grasp meaning within the ancient pattern of expression, and then convert that over to a modern English, German, or Spanish poetical pattern for the benefit of the modern reader. Not something easy to do!

Beyond the foundational prose / poetry differences, literature will utilize distinct patterns that fall into what in modern literary terms are called genres. These patterns surface at different levels in a document.

For a long time Bible interpretation has followed several foundational categories of genre for the various books of the Bible. In Protestantism, the Old Testament documents are usually grouped as Law (Genesis - Deuteronomy), History (Judges - Esther); Wisdom (Job - Ecclesiastes); and Prophets (Isaiah - Malachi). Jews and other Christian groups have different groupings of the Old Testament, in part because of a different canonical listing of books.[9] Most all Christian groups group the documents of the New Testament into four categories: Gospel (Matthew - John); History (Acts); Letters (Romans - Jude); and Apocalypse (Revelation).

Why has this grouping been done? Primarily because the basic categories help one understand the dominant literary orientation of a given document. One would not want to read Psalms as though these psalms are Israelite history. A document in the Gospel category is very different than one of the letters of Paul in literature structure. Thus the literary grouping signals a certain way to approach the understanding of each document in the Bible. While there are common aspects of biblical interpretation that stretch across these basic literary forms, there will be distinctive aspects of Bible interpretation that are determined by these basic literary forms. Additionally, grouping by genre form becomes very helpful for comparative studies. When one studies a 'history book' in the Old Testament and then shifts over to Acts as a NT history document, are the two sets of histories being written the same way? The answer is a dramatic NO! Luke followed a very different understanding of how to write history than did the editors of First and Second Kings. And neither of the ancient approaches to history has much in common with how a modern history oriented document would be written today. Knowing these matters can facilitate much better understanding of the biblical text.
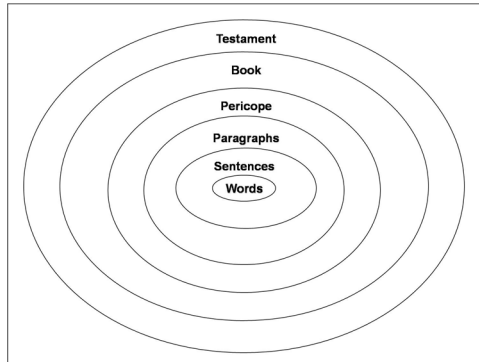
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[9]For a more detailed treatment of this see "Books of the Bible," Wikipedia.org.

In Session Three, we will come back to this topic in much greater detail and offer some practical tips on understanding the genre nature of a biblical text.
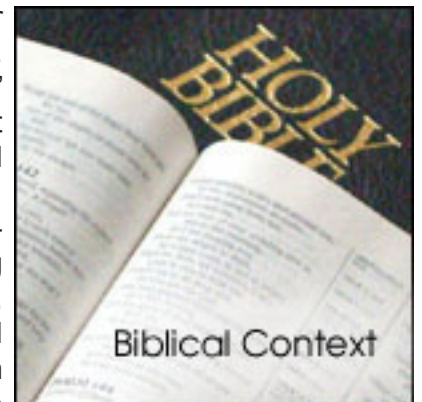
1.1.1.2 Literary setting: context

A colleague of mine at Gardner-Webb University used to say to his students, "A text without a context is a pretext!" There is a lot of truth in that. There are two basic sources for determining meaning in a passage of scripture: the 'dictionary' definition of word meanings, and the contextual meaning. The starting point is with the dictionary meaning, but anyone using a Greek or Hebrew lexicon (= dictionary for ancient languages) immediately discovers that virtually every word in the original language text of the Bible contains multiple meanings. How do we know which one to use? The decision is not guess work at all. Instead, the context determines the correct meaning of the words found in a passage. This contextual impact operates at a variety of levels. Traditionally, this has been labeled by the Latin *usus loquendi*, literally meaning 'usage in speech' but in literary studies, and especially in biblical hermeneutics, it refers to an expanding level of context beginning with words around this word to paragraphs to biblical books to the New Testament to the Bible to ancient world. The sentence and then the paragraph or pericope the word is in serve as the primary contextual signals of meaning. Picture this in terms of concentric circles or an expanding wave as illustrated in the graphics.

The special challenge of working only with translations rather than the original language text is to avoid taking the variety of possible meanings of the translation word in English, Spanish, German etc. and arbitrarily assigning one of those meanings to the biblical expression. Normally one of those meanings is more appropriate than the other possible meanings. In practice quite often this arbitrary practice has been done in the English speaking world with the King James Version of the Bible. For example, the KJV translation of James 1:2, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," is not a warning against boys and girls swimming together, as it has on occasion been preached to mean over the years.

Another example is First Peter 3:1 where the Greek says Ὁμοίως [αἱ] *γυναῖκες*, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις *ἀνδράσιν*. If you checked the word γυναῖκες in a Greek lexicon you would discover that it means either an adult woman or a wife, and that ἀνδράσιν means both men or husbands. Clearly Peter is not saying the women should be submissive to men as a general principle. The contextual clue here is the possessive adjective ἰδίοις meaning 'their own.' This contextual signal along with several others in the larger paragraph make it clear that Peter is talking about wives and husbands here, not about women and men in general.

A third example is the Greek verb σῴζω. In the writings of Paul very dominately, σῴζω means 'I save' in the sense of spiritual salvation. This is something of a derived meaning to the verb that Paul created himself. On the other hand, in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the more original medical meaning of the term σῴζω is retained and thus it is used to specify healing from disease, particularly in relation to the healing miracles of Jesus. Context is the difference, even at a broad level.

One of the principles we will learn in **Session Five** is how to do comparative translation Bible study which will greatly reduce the tendency to make such mistakes. Additionally consulting commentaries and Bible dictionaries can be very helpful here, a topic we will explore in **Session Six**.

1.1.1.3 Literary structure: idea organization

One of the more challenging aspects of the literary nature of a text is figuring out how the ideas are put together. This includes determining major and minor themes in a pericope.

Every culture has its own ways of thinking and reasoning. One of my early challenges of working in the German language as a guest university professor in Germany back down the way was coming to grips with the

fact that both in a sermon for a congregation and also in an university lecture for the classroom a very different way of assembling ideas had to be followed for a German audience over against for an American audience. Germans and Americans just don't think the same way. And if you want to communicate to a German audience either in church or in the university classroom your ideas must be presented in thought patterns they are familiar with and accustomed to. I was very fortunate in having a dear German friend in Bonn who very early on helped me grasp this and develop communication skills in German. My greatest challenge was over-coming my "Texanisches Deutsch" accent when I preached or lectured. But I gradually sensed this was more of an advantage rather than a disadvantage, and so I didn't work on this aspect as much. Even though this would have horrified my German teachers at the Goethe Institut where I studied the German language. In modern terms, this ancient Semitic way of thinking is more like a kaleidoscope pattern.
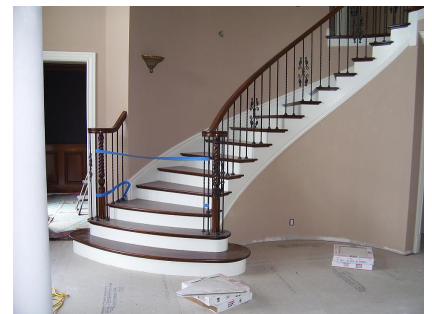
The challenge to biblical interpretation is that we are dealing with not just one way of thinking in the Bible, but with many. The Bible is a collection of documents written over a long period of time by quite a large number of writers. In the Old Testament, a fairly consistent Semitic mindset surfaces with the distinctives of either He-brew or Aramaic reflected. But that generally consistent ancient way of thinking is very different from modern western ways of thinking. One rather dramatic illustration of this is to try to develop an outline of one of prophetic books, particularly the book of Jeremiah. No modern, rationally developed outline of that document is possible -- legitimately. The book does not follow any chronological progression of thought, nor any progression of theme development. It is purely Semitic in the way ideas are bundled together.

In the New Testament a greater diversity of idea expression surfaces because of the enormously diverse backgrounds of the different writers. Additionally, the basic literary form plays a substantial role on assembling ideas as well. Matthew writes very differently from Mark, one with strong Jewish influence and the other with Greco-Roman influence. Plus the structuring of ideas in these two documents, for example, are different in part because of very different targeted audiences by each writer. Often these matters are labeled under writing style by each biblical writer. But it becomes important to take a little time before working through a document to read a commentary introduction or a Bible dictionary article that discusses the writing style present in the biblical doc-ument being considered.[10] The broad general contours of style are usually retained in translation, although a lot of the details will vanish through being translated into another language.[11]

Two examples of this emerge in dramatic fashion with careful studies of the Gospels. When comparisons are made among the three synoptic gospels of the temptation of Jesus, these writing differences surface quickly, but unfortunately often vanish in the process of translation. Mark's writing style is a tendency to use more dramat-ic action verbs; Jesus does only a little talking in Mark's narrative because he is describing Jesus as a decisive man of action along the lines of a typical ancient Roman biography. For example, in describing Jesus going into the wilderness to be tempted, Mark says, Καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, and immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. But with much milder expression Matthew says, Τότε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνήχθη εἰς τὴν ἔρημον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, then Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the Devil. With only a slight difference Luke follows Matthew's pattern by saying, ἤγετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, he was being led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Careful attention to such details provides much greater understanding of the details.

Another level of literary structure probes how the writers connect up their ideas to one another in a passage. In the world of today most people think linear. That is, idea two logically follows idea one and so forth. The way these ideas are connected can vary, from being dependent on one another in the manner of a staircase, all the way to being completely independent from each other but sequenced by the writer in a certain way in order to make some distinctive point. For the modern reader of the Bible to assume that the writers of the Bible used this kind of reasoning is a huge mistake. What I just described

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[10]As a side note, you will want to pay close attention to the discussion of *Literary Structure* in each of the Bible studies posted at **Bible Studies: Series** at cranfordville.com. Each of these studies is done using the principles laid out here.

[11]How much of the original style of the biblical writer is retained and how much is replaced by a modern recep-tor language style depends to some extent on the translation methodology being used by the translators.

about modern reasoning came out of the Enlightenment in the post Middle Ages, and did not exist prior to that. For anyone who has ever lived in Europe, you come quickly to understand that a Frenchman does not think the same way that a German does, and neither of them think like an American does. In reality, a Bavarian German in the south of the country seldom thinks the same way that a Prussian oriented German in the northern part of the country thinks.[12]

If such is dramatically true across cultures in our world, it is no stretch of imagination to realize that an early Hebrew writer would not think the same way that a Gentile Luke Greek writer would think many centuries later. Plus writing in two hugely different languages where ideas have to be expressed differently because of grammar differences adds considerably to the distinctiveness of the final written expression in the Bible. Thus when trying to read through any passage of scripture close attention should be given to how the writer constructs his ideas and then links them together.

Many years ago I developed a systematic way of analyzing these aspects that is called *Block Diagramming*. The system is a greatly modified and simplified version of what Merrill Tenney at Wheaton College taught his students to do in the 1950s. Additionally, I developed an additional process called *Semantic Diagramming* which enables the Bible students to bridge the gap between the thought patterns of the Bible in the ancient world to more familiar thought patterns in the modern western world. The end product is a teaching or sermon outline of the biblical text that grows directly out of the thought structure of the text, rather than being artificially imposed on the text externally. In **Session Three** more attention to this procedure will be given.[13]

Built into the diagramming procedures of the biblical text are several foundation stones that make such a process possible. **(1)** One needs to first determine the units of thought.[14] This begins with determining the natural beginning and ending of a unit of scripture text, which is called a pericope. Sometimes the paragraphing of modern translations is helpful, but often it is misleading. Comparative checking of four or five translations will give you a better sense of natural units of biblical text material. One huge influence on the determination of a unit of thought is whether a specific genre form is being used. If so, then the genre pattern itself usually imposes natural boundaries on idea expression.

(2) Once the pericope boundaries have been discovered, then note the number and kinds of sentences contained in the pericope. Are they making a statement, asking a question, giving a command? How long is each sentence? Does it have just one, or more than one, main clause? What is the subject and verb (and possibly the direct object) of each main clause? How are the other words attached to these two or three core words in the clause?

(3) Once the main clauses in each sentence have been identified with the attached modifiers, how are these main clauses connected to one another across the sentences in the pericope? Look for 'connectors' which are words like "and", 'but," "therefore," etc. Connectors come primarily in the form of coordinate conjunctions and correlative adverbs, e.g., 'thus,' 'likewise,' etc. Analyzing these connections will tell you how the writer moves from one main idea to the next in the pericope. All of this can then be visually presented in a Block Diagram, as described above. But it doesn't have to be diagrammed in order to gain a basic understanding of thought structure in a passage of scripture.

Practice in doing these kinds of things sharpens your skills greatly. Gradually over time, you will come to the place where in your Bible reading you automatically look for these elements every time you read a passage

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[12]One very fascinating but often puzzling (to the outsider) example of this comes from German political life. The official 'Christian' political party in Germany is called die Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU, Christian Democratic Union of Germany) in all of the provinces except for Bavaria. There it is the Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU, Christian Social Union of Bavaria). This in part because the supposed religious based political party in Bavaria will have to reflect conservative Roman Catholic values with almost 90% of the population in Bavaria being Roman Catholic. In the rest of Germany, the CDU is more a reflection of Protestant Christian values. But the two political parties work together in tandem with each other at the national level, virtually as a single political party.

[13]For those familiar with the format of the Bible studies being done as a part of the Biblical Insights Commentary series, a block diagram of an English translation of the biblical text is included in each of these studies.

[14]For some readers who may be familiar with the details of modern Literary Criticism, and especially Structuralism, the most foundational thought expression linguistically is a colon. What I have taught students over the years to look for is a compilation of colons that comprise a pericope, or natural literary unit. At a basic level this is not as difficult to do as it first seems. But to do it at a highly technical level necessitates some skills with the literary critical methodologies.

of scripture.[15] This will help you get away from the mostly shallow 'devotional' reading of scripture. In reality, the way it is usually taught today makes it nothing more than an existentialist based word association game where a few words in the translation resonate with you experientially and thus stand out as major concepts in the passage.[16] Four times out of five, this is utterly false,[17] and leads to false interpretation of the passage. Coming at the scripture text this way makes your experiences the authoritative standard for Bible interpretation -- something very dangerous and deceptive. Also never let anyone try to assert that divine inspiration of the scripture, or the so-called illumination of scripture by the Holy Spirit, supersedes these dangers. In reality, when you offer up a dull instrument following questionable procedures, you just make things enormously harder for the Spirit of God to guide you into proper understanding of the text. Instead, give Him a keen mind following solid procedures, and you will quickly discover the powerful difference He can make in your understanding!

1.1.2 Historical Aspects[18]

The first question needing to be asked is: What is history? Many of the biblical interpretation controversies of the modern era have been generated solely by the artificial imposing of modern definitions of history on to the ancient biblical text that was written with a variety of very different understandings of the meaning of history. This often the attempt to 'fit a square pipe into a round hole' just doesn't work and generates much frustration. To be clear, we do live in a modern -- actually these days, a post modern -- world and so our definition of history will inevitably be shaped by definitions presently considered as standard and widely accepted in our day. But it must never be overlooked that the Bible was not written in a modern world, and the various understandings of history current in the ancient world served as the models and standards for writing history at that day. Allowances for these differences must be taken into consideration when trying to understand the historical aspects of the biblical text. In **Session Four**, the details of this will be explored in much greater depth. Here the basics need to be put on the table so that we become aware of these perspectives.

A very logical approach to getting a handle on the history connected to a biblical passage is to treat it from the twofold perspective of internal and external history. Somewhat arbitrarily, this twofold arrangement approaches the various historical aspects from the history treated by the biblical writer inside the biblical text (Internal) and history that has to do with the composition and transmission of the fixed written text over time (External). This twofold division then sub-divides into at least five categories that each focus on a distinctive aspect of history

[15]And you thought learning the details of grammar in English, Spanish, or German was a waste of time when you were in primary school! Now they become important for understanding the Bible.

[16]Although most conservative Christians don't realize it, their engaging in this kind of Bible study is based on the core tenant of philosophical Existentialism beginning in the mid-nineteenth century in western society: "Existentialism is the philosophical and cultural movement which holds that the starting point of philosophical thinking must be the experiences of the individual." ["Existentialism," wikipedia.org] Over many years I have sat in many Sunday School classes watching these word association games being played with the class members completely unaware of what was actually happening and have thought to myself: "The old German agnostic Fredrich Nietzsche who played a major role in popularizing this way of thinking would have been delighted to see Christians following his anti-Christian way of thinking while doing Bible study no less." For the Spanish speaking readers, the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo (1864-1936), especially with his volume, *Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida*, is an important figure in this movement in the Spanish speaking world.

[17]Why is this so false? Several factors come into the dynamic. Your experience itself may be religiously twisted, but none the less will still become the definitional standard for the translation word in the passage. Your experience may link up to the translation word at the point of meaning 3 of the translation word, whereas in the biblical context meaning 1 is the scripture intention of the word. Without careful consideration through commentary checks etc. the translation word in the text may not be correct itself in expressing the idea in the original language text of the passage. There are but a few of the land mines present in coming at the text in such a manner.

[18]For you really eager beaver readers, check my lecture to PhD students in NT 771 at SWBTS on "History and Its Relevance to New Testament Theological Formulation: A Pivotal Issue for Interpretation of the New Testament" at cranfordville.com: http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/NT771hislec.pdf. The issues addressed are more technical, but are foundational to the material being presented here. The students targeted in the lecture are doctoral students beginning a year long probing of very technical critical interpretive methodologies over a two semester long PhD seminar study (NT 771 / 772, New Testament Critical Methodology). The biblical text 'laboratory' for the seminar was Luke-Acts and the General Epistles.

For you who would like a less technical approach, check out my "Lecture Notes for 3.0 Interpreting the New Testament documents" presented to the Religion 102 New Testament survey class at Gardner-Webb University in the beginning of the semester: http://cranfordville.com/NT-Lec31-3229.html. Particularly relevant to our discussion are topics 3.1 and 3.2.

Even more basic are my lecture notes "Understanding the New Testament" topics 1.1-1.3 for the Religion 102 class at GWU: http://cranfordville.com/NT-Lec01.html.

connected to the written biblical text.

1.1.2.1 Internal History

When a writer refers to history, how to we recognize this? At the direct level the reader traces out the time and place markers found in a passage. These have to do with words and phrases that refer to time and location in some manner or another. For example consider 3 John 3-4:

> 3 I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

As to location markers, notice some of the friends arrived and testified clearly signals that the writer was living a some geographical location and some Christian friends arrived there with a positive testimony about Gaius. The question automatically arises: Where was the writer living? This is something to find an answer to. Also the double reference to Gaius "walking in the truth" raises the locational question of where did Gaius live? The time question in these two verses is at what point in time did these friends travel from where Gaius lived to where the writer of Third John lived? Clearly it was during the life time of the writer of the letter. So identifying the writer of the letter becomes important.

This small 'appetizer' hopefully illustrates what I'm talking about.

Out of identifying these time and place markers in the passage of scripture then will flow addressing questions related to two important historical aspects.

1.1.2.1.1 Formal History

The level of history that most of us learned in primary and secondary school as kids and teenagers is formal history. From a modern historiographical view, it is a survey of the major events and personalities of a given period of time in the past, be it American History, Costa Rican History, European History etc. In connection to the study of the Old Testament, it centers on the broad movements of history from the beginning of the historical period to four hundred years prior to the Christian era.[19] Having awareness of the major empires that dominated the ancient near east is very important. Connecting their impact on the very small group of Hebrew descendants of Abraham is critical. By just reading the internal history within the Old Testament, one would conclude that the ancient world revolved around the story of the descendants of Abraham. In reality, outside their own circles of very limited influence, the vast majority of the ancient world did not know they even existed.

Regarding the New Testament formal history, the starting point is usually the intertestamental period of 400 years prior to the beginning of the Christian era, and the terminus point is the end of the first Christian century.[20] The first century is regarded as the Apostolic Age, and defines the era of the beginning of the Christian religion.

The importance of learning the formal history for both the Old and the New Testaments is to gain a basic grasp of the flow of events in either time period. Basic exposure to the movers and shakers of history in the time periods is helpful also. Additionally, this formal history will be studied from a modern historiographical view, which means that the broader perspective of history, rather than just a Jewish history of these time periods, will be included. This is important for putting the history of the Israelite people (Old Testament history) in perspective with the rise and fall of the dominating empires of this period who controlled the ancient near east and thus impacted substantially the flow of Israelite history. Having a knowledge of the empire of Alexander the Great as well as of the Roman empire is critical background understanding for the New Testament. The Hellenistic culture left by Alexander in the ancient near east along with that of the Romans played powerful roles in shaping how Christianity emerged in the first century. For example, without understanding Hellenism there is no way to explain why the New Testament was written entirely in Koine Greek originally by mostly Jewish writers for whom Aramaic was

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[19]In order to gain a big picture of this check my Religion 101 course topics list for the freshman level undergraduate Old Testament survey course that I taught at Gardner-Webb University for many years. It is still online at http://cranfordville.com/OT-List.html. The Religion 102, New Testament survey, topics list is also available at http://cranfordville.com/NT-List.htm. In the NT survey structure, the formal history aspect centers in **Topic 2.0, The World of the New Testament**. These represent typical approaches standardized to most every Bible survey course and related textbook that is taught in the western world today.

[20]In the last four or five decades the beginning and ending points for New Testament history are increasingly debated. Consequently, textbooks used with the New Testament survey courses will vary in these terminus points. Some do not include much about the 400 year period of Intertestamental History prior to the beginning of the Christian era. Some will extend the closing point beyond the Apostolic Age to include the Apostolic Fathers who lived and wrote primarily in the first half of the second century, and serve as a historical bridge from the apostles to the era of the Church Fathers.

their mother tongue.

In relation to Third John, this formal history plays an important role. The document is a very short personal letter, which was a major vehicle of written communication in the first century world. Understanding how individuals went about composing letters is vitally important for correct understanding of this document. The historical role of letters in first century society, admittedly, is in the grayish territory between Formal History and Social History, but certain aspects of letter composition belong to the Formal History category. Additionally, the structuring of ideas in an ancient letter comes under Literary Genre concerns.[21]

1.1.2.1.2 Social History

Social History, in distinction to Formal History, is the study of the past in terms in interaction between individuals and groups of individuals according to established norms of proper and improper relationships. It pays a great deal of attention to patterns of interaction between regular people on a day to day basis, rather focus on the role of politically powerful people and their connection to the major events of history. This field of biblical studies has emerged since the 1960s with the principles of the social sciences (formally labeled sociology) being applied to the study of ancient texts with appropriate modifications of procedure. The foundation for this kind of study actually reaches back to the 1800s with the emergence of biblical archaeology and the comparative religions studies that arose in the middle to late 1800s. In the period between World War I and the early post World War II era of the 1900s both these fields diminished in influence considerably in biblical studies. But in the newly emerging Literary Criticism of the post WWII era especially in the English speaking world, new emphasis surfaced on understanding social interactions of regular people in the ancient world. Thus among biblical scholars today, the social history aspect represents a dominant concern for English speaking scholars, while the formal history focus remains dominate for European scholars.[22]

Within the framework of the Socio-Scientific Exegesis of scripture texts the major goal is to understand the social interaction patterns present in the ancient text. Then the scholar will probe into the surrounding literature to establish the established norms of propriety and impropriety of interaction by the cultures being addressed by the text. This involves a rather technical implementation of evaluative models developed in the modern sciences of sociology and anthropology. Coming out of this process will be a clearer understanding of how behavior is perceived by the biblical writer and / or the characters in the biblical text narrative.

For example, consider divorce in the ancient Jewish world. The biblical writers generally frown severely on divorce. But why? Beyond reflecting their understanding of God's negative attitude, it becomes clear that socially marriage was a contractual agreement between two families, much more than between two individuals. It was not based on love between the two individuals but primarily on what would mutually benefit the two families the greatest. In the vast majority of instances, the marriage came between two individuals representing families that were relatives of one another at the level of cousins. The marriage was an important bonding of the two families for peaceful co-existence through a 'mixing of the bloodlines' of the two families by the children born to the couple. Thus divorce represented a serious rift between two families, not just two individuals. In extreme instances, it led to open warfare between the two families, particularly if the families were wealthy and powerful in society. This was in large part the basis for the Jewish practice that only the husband could divorce his wife. His family held the position of greater power in the relationship. A significant percentage of the existing written marriage contracts available to us today from that world contain provisos specifying damage claim options for the supposed failure of the wife in the marriage. Any attempted understanding of divorce in the Bible without this kind of foundation understanding will never be able to correctly apply the concepts of marriage and divorce to a modern setting.

In connection to Third John, the issues connected to Diotrephes assuming dictatorial power over the congregation where Gaius was a leader plays against norms of social status and control in the Greco-Roman society of that time. Understanding what was considered legitimate and illegitimate control over a group in that

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[21]All this should clearly signal that these categories between literary and historical will overlap one another often. Both the two broad categories and the sub-categories underscore the study of dominate traits of each category, not absolute traits understood to be either literary or historical.

[22]Clearly exceptions to this pattern exist, but in terms of dominant patters this depiction is correct. One major exception is the work of Prof. Dr. Gerd Theissen at Heidelberg University in Germany. I had the privilege of working closely with him during my sabbatical leave year of 1991-1992. He is among the top three or four experts in the field of socio-scientific exegesis of the New Testament in the world.

day will help us understand more clearly the problem the letter is attempting to address. Issues of power and control always take on distinctive cultural traits and values of the culture they emerge in. The social history concern helps give us awareness of those patterns in the ancient world and also in our world too. This makes building an applicational bridge between the then and now meanings of the text much better.

1.1.2.2 External History

These historical aspects of the text connect to how the written text was composed at the beginning, and then how it was copied over the following centuries of hand copying of sacred scriptures, prior to the printing press in the 1400s. These aspects are vitally important is determining exactly what was written in the beginning, which should be the wording of the biblical text that we both regard as sacred and also as the foundation for our interpreting the text. Issues connected to the canon of scripture are related to this, but will be addressed summarily because of not desiring to expand this study into a massive examination. For those with a keen interest in these related topics, check the previous study I did at two levels of details entitled "The Origin and History of the Bible" at cranfordville.com under Bible Study Series.[23]

The fundamental reason for the importance of considering this historical aspect is the simple reason that no original manuscript of any of the documents in the Bible exist today. What we have to depend on are copies of copies often made many centuries after the time of the original writing of the document. In most of Christian history, the majority of Christians have depended upon one particular translation to accurately reflect the words of the original writings. Since the fourth century AD Roman Catholics have turned to the Latin Vulgate first and foremost -- sometimes exclusively -- as their correct Bible. From the Council of Trent in the 1500s the official version of the Vulgate adopted by the Vatican has been considered the official Bible of the Church. In the Protestant world different groups consider a particular translation as the correct Bible. For many German Lutherans Die Luther Bibel is their Bible exclusively, just as the King James Version is the same for many English speaking Christians. But careful analysis of the now existing several thousand later copies of the Greek New Testament, and a much smaller number for the Hebrew Old Testament, consistently reflect weaknesses and mistakes in all of these translations. No translation is a perfect reproduction of what was originally written. And the determination of what was the original wording of these biblical documents has to be done through meticulous comparative analysis of this large volume of existing hand copies of these documents.

Thus the very first step in serious Bible study has to be to "Establish the Text," i.e., determine the most likely original wording of the text when it was first written.[24] Once this has been accomplished, the adopted reading of the biblical text stands as the starting point for interpreting the scripture passage. For the lay person without training either in the biblical languages or in the process of analyzing manuscript copies, secondary tools especially commentaries will become the focus of attention for seeking to understand possible variations of wording that may be present in any passage.[25] Identification of the more important variations will show up in most modern printed translations as footnotes in the translation indicating possible alternative translations of a word or phrase.

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[23]The shorter five session version was developed for the First Baptist Church in Shelby, NC several years ago. The longer 17 session version was developed for the International Baptist Church of Cologne Germany during the time I was pastor (2008-2010). In the shorter version topics 2.2 "How did the NT come together as a collection of documents?" and 1.3 "When did the OT come together as a collection of documents?" are relevant to this theme. In the longer version topics 1.3 (session 3) and 2.2 (session 11) are relevant.

[24]For a more detailed discussion see my "Guidelines for Exegeting a Text from the Greek New Testament" at cranfordville.com: http://cranfordville.com/Exegeting.html. This is discussed in Pre-Step 2.

[25]For those who follow the Bible studies produced for our class, you will remember the subsection called "External History" in each Bible study. This section addresses this concern for the passage being studied in that lesson. This section is generated using the Text Apparatus of the two dominant printed Greek New Testaments in the modern world: *The Greek New Testament* published by the United Bible Societies in the 4th revised edition and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft in the 27th revised edition. These are the two printed Greek New Testaments that well over 95% of modern translations are based upon today.

The method of comparative analysis of manuscript copies used by the vast majority of biblical scholars with expertise in this field is laid out in detail for my students to learn the basics about in the Greek 202 course I taught for many years at Gardner-Webb University under Textual Criticism: http://cranfordville.com/g202TxtCritStdy.html#Wk1   This material is intended only the acquaint the student with how it is done, rather than make the student an expert in the methodology. The companion commentaries, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (R.L. Omanson) and *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed by Bruce M. Metzger) provide detailed explanation of these variations of wording found in the Text Apparatus of *The Greek New Testament*. These are especially oriented toward Bible translators to help them address issues in translation of the Bible.

1.1.2.2.1 Process of composing manuscripts

A little over three centuries ago a new biblical study discipline arose out of the emerging Historical Criticism methodology called New Testament Introduction (in German, Einleitungswissenschaft, or Old Testament Introduction). Out of the developing field of study has emerged the Bible survey courses widely taught in church related colleges and universities around the world. One of the longest published related textbooks is that authored in more recent times by Werner Georg Kümmel, *Die Einleitung in das Neue Testament*. This volume was first published by Paul Feine in 1912, then in 1936 was taken over by Johannes Behm with the fourth edition. Werner Georg Kümmel assumed responsibility for the volume in 1963 with the twelfth edition, who did the periodic updates through the twenty-first edition in 1983.[26]

A major component of this discipline is examining the so-called reporter questions of what, when, where, who, and why regarding the composition of each of the documents in the Bible.[27] These questions are intended to establish as far as is possible who wrote each document, where were the writers when they wrote them, whom were the writers targeting as their intended readers, and why did they write the documents. Such questions probe the historical origin of each document. Answers to these questions establish a general historical framework for interpreting the contents of each document.

1.1.2.2.2 Process of copying manuscripts

From existing writings in the ancient world it is clear that very soon after the composition of a particular document in the Bible copies of it were made by meticulous hand copying. These copies were then distributed to different Jewish and / or Christian communities scattered through out the ancient Mediterranean world. Copies of the copies were then made in successive stages until the invention of the printing press in the 1400s of the Christian era. The printing press forever altered the way written materials were then produced and distributed.

The importance of giving some attention to this topic is because no original manuscript of any document of the Bible exists today. The wording of the text of the books of the Bible is based on manuscripts at least three centuries or more after the original document was written. In particular for the Hebrew Old Testament, the time gap between writing and the earliest copies known to exist in our world is sixteen hundred years. The only exception to this is the Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947; the date of this from the carbon-14 dating process ranges from 335 BC to 107 BC, placing it over a thousand years earlier than the other existing manuscript copies of the Old Testament.

Having a basic awareness of how this process of copying was done is important to understanding the text. Additionally, one needs to have awareness of the very different way of copying the manuscripts of the New Testament differed from the copying of the Old Testament documents. Particularly with the New Testament documents, the copying process resulted in manuscripts with considerable variations of wording etc. over time. That such would happen is not surprising given human traits in hand copying materials.

1.1.2.2.3 Process of analyzing manuscripts

This final historical aspect addresses the question of how can we know that our Bible today is the same Bible that was originally written. For most of Western Christianity, this was not a concern until the late 1800s. Even with the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, the Latin Vulgate translation was the Bible of the church, rather than the original Hebrew and Greek texts of scriptures. From the time of the Reformation until the middle 1800s Protestant Christians largely used a translation of scriptures in their mother language based completely on the Vulgate. The creation of the printing press in the late 1400s led to the printing of the first Greek New Tes-

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[26]As a side note, one of the few print volumes I retained in my personal library when the three thousand volume print library had to be disposed of in 2008 with the move to Cologne Germany from North Carolina is a personally autographed copy of the 20th edition by Dr. Kümmel with a personal note of encouragement written to me inside. He presented it to me August 4, 1980 while sitting together in his backyard at Marburg Germany discussing my sabbatical leave plans for the following year. With his help I ended up studying with Prof. Dr. Erich Gräßer at the university of Bonn in 1981-1982, one of Dr. Kümmel's prized students at Marburg.

[27]For more details see "The External History of the Text, topic 3.1.1.1" in the *Interpreting the NT lecture*. At the Bible survey course level, not much attention was usually given to the transmission history of the text, although I included a basic survey of the New Testament at topic 1.7 of Religion 102: http://cranfordville.com/NT-List1.htm#1.7.

tament in the early 1500s prepared by the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus but it was based on a very few Greek manuscripts from the middle ages that followed similar wording to the Vulgate. This tended to confirm in the minds of many that the Vulgate was the most accurate Bible available. In the English speaking world after a rocky beginning in the early 1600s, the King James Version of the Bible gradually became the Bible in the English speaking Protestant world, and especially in the American colonies, in spite of being produced as the official Bible of the despised Church of England. It was fundamentally an English translation of the Latin Vulgate. One has to remember that until the twentieth century Christianity in the western world looked overwhelmingly to the Latin Vulgate as THE BIBLE from which all translations had to come from. This included the Protestant world as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

The emergence of Biblical Archaeology in the mid 1800s began changing things profoundly. The existence of Codex Alexandrinus had been known in select circles from the 1600s, but it gained public attention in the middle 1800s when scholars began noticing considerable variations in wording of the New Testament portion of the manuscript from the Textus Receptus Greek text largely followed by the Vulgate and the King James Bible especially. By the 1880s the explosion of manuscript discovery of portions of the Greek New Testament text, and a few manuscripts containing virtually all of the New Testament began reflecting patterns of wording far closer to that found in Codex Alexandrinus than to the Textus Receptus. Along with the growing influence of Biblical Archaeology's influence on biblical studies, a renewed interest in the study of ancient documents in their original languages exploded in the western world. The study of biblical Hebrew and Greek took hold in Protestant Christianity profoundly in both Europe and North America. One should also note that the Modern Missionary Movement developed during this period also especially with the work of the British Baptist William Carey in the late 1700s to the early 1800s. Missionaries needed Bibles in the language of the peoples they were serving. Largely out of this need arose the modern Bible Societies movement to supply Bibles translated into the many local languages. This in turn generated growing concern to have an original language biblical text in both Hebrew and Greek that could be trusted to represent accurately the wording of the original texts of scripture. This would be the starting point of modern translations of the Bible rather than the Vulgate.

The continued discovery of more and more manuscripts of the Greek New Testament through the 1950s led to the development of scientifically based methods of comparing this growing number of manuscripts with the goal of determining "the most likely original wording of the text." Thus the field of biblical studies called Textual Criticism was born in order to produce the best possible Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible for translation purposes. The end product of this process is that the printed Hebrew and Greek texts used for Bible translation today are virtually certain to the reproductions of the exact wording of the original documents when they were first written. Scholars working in this field of biblical studies are the envy of other scholars working with ancient documents, e.g., the classical Greek philosophers. Every other field of comparative studies of ancient document manuscripts struggle to find even a single complete document within a thousand years of the date of original composition. New Testament scholars, on the other hand, work with well over five thousand Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, a few of which reach back to within a century of original composition. This does not count the thousands of ancient translations, i.e., versions, which tend to date back to this early period as well.

Thus the procedure of "Establish the text" in the interpretive process depends on the work of these highly trained experts in analyzing all the variations surfacing among the manuscripts containing a particular biblical text. In regard to Third John, how does this work?

Most modern translations with reflect the same pattern found in the New Revised Standard Version. It lists six footnotes in its translation regarding alternative translations of words. In each instance, however, these are not based on variations of wording in the underlying Greek text. Instead, they are alternative translations of a particular Greek word in the underlying text. Put another way, these are translation issues, not text critical issues.

Does that mean that no variations of wording show up in the Greek manuscript copies? Not at all. The UBS 4th rev. ed. The Greek New Testament text apparatus lists two places where variations of wording are present that can impact the translation of Third John. These are in verse four[28] and in verse nine.[29] Both places are

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[28]UBS GNT: 4 {A} οὐκ ἔχω χαράν ℵ A Ψ 048 33 81 436 945 1067 1175 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 (1844c omit οὐκ ἔχω) 1846 1852 2138 2344 *Byz* [K L P] *Lect* it^ar v.r. vg^mss syr^ph, h cop^sa arm eth geo slav (Cassiodorus) // χαράν οὐκ ἔχω C 322 323 1241^vid 1739 1881 (l 422) l 596 // οὐκ ἔχω χάριν B² (B* ἔχων) (1243 2298 χάριν οὐκ ἔχω) (1844* omit οὐκ ἔχω) it^ar*, l vg cop^bo

[29]UBS GNT: 9 {B} Ἔγραψά τι ℵ* A 048^vid 1241 1739 2298 l 596 (it^l) cop^bomss arm (Jerome) // Ἔγραψάς τι B cop^sa, bo // Ἔγραψα ἄν ℵ2 33 81 436 945 1067 1243 1292 1409 1505 1735 1881 2138 2338 2344 *l* 422 *l* 1439 it^ar vg (syr^ph, h) // Ἔγραψα ἄν τι 322 323 1611* l 1178 // Ἔγραψα C Ψ 1175 1611^c 1844 1846 1852 ^Byz [K L P] ^Lect (eth) geo slav

listed by the UBS editors because of possible minor impact on the translation. Does that mean that these are the only two places where variations may exist across the spectrum of several thousand manuscripts? No, again. This is where the text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Gracae becomes important. It lists virtually every instance of textual variation within the framework of the adopted format for the apparatus. In such an analysis some twenty-four places emerge containing variations of wording in Third John, not counting the variations in the header inscription added much later for ID purposes.[30] As is easily visible from the two footnotes

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[30]**Inscriptio:**
 * Ι. επιστολη γ´ Ψ 049. 33. 69. 323. 614. 1739. 2464 al (P 81. 630. 1505 al)
        | επ. γ´ του αγιου αποστολου Ι. L al
        | του αγ. Ι. (Ι. του απ. 1881 pc) επ. καθολικη γ´ 1852. 1881 al
        | Ι. προς Γαϊον επ. 1243 pc
        | txt (ℵ A B)
 3. Johannes 2
 *[προ Piscator cj]
 3. Johannes 3
 * ℵ 33. 81. 623. 2464. 2495 al (l) vg co
 * μαρτυρουν B
 3. Johannes 4
 * –ζονα τ. 614. 630. 1505 pc
        | –ζοτερον ταυτης 322. 323. 1739. 1881
        | –ζοτεραν ταυτης (69). 1243. 1846 al
 * 3 1 2 C (69). 322. 323. (614). 1739. 1881 pc
        | ουκ εχω χαριν B (* εχων) (1243. 2298) pc lat bo
 * ℵ C² P Ψ 1739 *M* bo
        | txt A B C* 33. 81ᵛⁱᵈ pc
 3. Johannes 5
 * (ε)αν –ζη A Ψ (630). 945. 1505 pc
 * εις τους P m
        | τους 81 pc
        | txt ℵ A B C Ψ 048. 33ᵛⁱᵈ. 323. 1241ᵛⁱᵈ. 1739 al l vgᵐˢ (vg) syʰ co
 3. Johannes 6
 * ŏ K 630
 * αληθεια και 614. 630. 1505 pc syʰ
 * –σας –ψεις C vgᶜˡ
 3. Johannes 7
 * αυτου Ψ 614. 630. 1846. 2495 al vgᶜˡ syᵖʰ·ʰ**
 * εθνων P *M* vg
        | txt ℵ A B (C) Ψ 33vid. 630. 1505. 1739. 1881 al l; Hier
 3. Johannes 8
 * απολ– C² P m
        | txt ℵ A B C* Ψ 33. 81. 323. 1739 al
 * της –θειας 614. 623. 630. 1505 pc l vg
        | τη εκκλησια ℵ* A
 3. Johannes 9
 * 1 C P Ψ *M*
        | εγρ. αν (+ τι 323 pc) ℵ2 33. 81. 323. 614. 630. 945. 1505 al vg sy
        | εγραψας τι B co
        | txt ℵ* A 048ᵛⁱᵈ. 1241. 1739 pc boᵐˢˢ
 3. Johannes 10
 * εις C vg
 * επιδεχομενους C 323. 1241. 1243. 1739. 1881. 2298 pc vgᶜˡ syᵖʰ·ʰᵐᵍ sa
 * ℵ 049. 614. 630. 1243. 1505. 1739 al
 3. Johannes 11
 * δε L 1852 pc vgᵐˢˢ bo
 3. Johannes 12
 * εκκλησιας P⁷⁴* ᵛⁱᵈ A*ᵛⁱᵈ
        | εκκλησιας και της αλ. C syᵖʰ·ʰᵐᵍ
        | txt P⁷⁴ᶜ ℵ Ac B P Ψ 049. 33. 1739 *M* latt syʰ co
 * οιδατε P *M* vgᵐˢ syʰ
        | οιδαμεν 2143 al boᵐˢ
        | txt ℵ A B C Ψ 048. 33vid. 81. 323. 614. 1241. 1739 al d vg syᵖʰ co
 3. Johannes 13

containing the text apparatii of these Greek New Testaments each is structured differently. This is due to the different objectives of each apparatus. The UBS apparatus is geared toward Bible translators to help them with text variation issues impacting how they translate the passage. The N-A apparatus is geared toward the biblical scholar to create awareness of all of the possible variations of wording across the spectrum of manuscripts of this passage.

In the UBS variations, the first one in verse four is an issue of the sequencing of the words οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, I don't have (greater) joy. No matter which sequential listing of these three words, the translation will remain the same. In verse nine the second listing relates to the presence or absence of the pronoun τι. So the two plausible variations amount to whether the writer says "I am writing something to the church," or "I am writing to the church." Again, there is no substantial meaning shift between these variations. The other variation Ἔγραψάς τι is the use of a participle rather than a verb, "having written something to the church, ...". The additional ones listed in the N-A apparatus have less impact than these two. Mostly they represent attempts to update the style of the Greek expression to make it more natural to the way Greek was written at the much later time of copying the text.

What is reflected here will be the case in the vast majority of places where variations surface. Knowing this helps you have greater confidence in the text of the Bible. It also prepares you for the absolute nonsense that you will hear from ignorant folks outside Christianity that the Bible can't be trusted because it has all these errors in it. Across the entire Bible absolutely no variation surfaces that has a significant impact on the doctrinal teaching of scripture! This within itself is amazing given the time span and way the documents of scripture were written, and then copied. It points to the providential care of God in bringing the Bible into existence and then preserving it intact over the centuries of its being copied.

1.2 Ancient world of writing

In human experience communication begins with oral sounds being directed toward others. Gradually these sounds are shaped into understandable signals of ideas -- something we call language. At some point the desire to make those ideas last pushes the development of a written form of the language.[31] In all of this rules and regulations for those sounds develop for both the oral and written expressions. In the modern world considerable effort is spent learning those 'grammar' rules in order to improve the written expression. In the ancient world, particularly the near eastern world of the Old Testament, the greater attention was given to the oral means of

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* γραφειν P (2495) *M*
   | txt ℵ A B C Ψ 048[vid]. 81. 323. 630. 945. 1505. 1739 al
* ουκ εβουληθην A vg
*[1] 2 1 A Ψ 048. 0251[vid]. 33[vid]. 81. 323. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 al
   | σοι γραψαι P *M*
   | txt ℵ B C pc
3. Johannes 14
* ℵ P Ψ *M*
   | txt A B C 048[vid]. 33. 81. 323. 1241. 1739 al
* λαλησωμεν K 049. 0251. 1241. (1243) al vg[ms]
   | λαλησαι 81 (pc) d vg[mss]
3. Johannes 15
* αδελφοι A 33. 81* al sy[hmg]
* ασπασαι ℵ pc
*[1] φ. σου Ψ
   | αδελφους 630. 1505. 1611 pc sy[h] bo[ms]
   | αμην L 614. 1852 al vg[mss]
[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 627-28.]

[31]"A general definition of writing, based on that of Gelb, is a system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible signs associated with conventional word meanings and sounds of language. In principle, writing has to be considered written language — at least in the biblical world — even if it does not reach the ideal, to be the exact counterpart of spoken language. The basic function of writing is to express the sounds of speech in visible, durable signs: speech is fixed in writing. In many writing systems certain signs express whole words (such as & or %); particularly common are special signs for numbers.

"From ancient times, writing, which preserves the spoken word from forgetfulness or change, has served to make various economic and administrative records, to fix agreements between persons and communities, and, along with other special marks, to denote weights and volumes of vessels. Even in times when knowledge of writing was limited, written seals bearing the names of persons served for identification in place of handwritten signatures."
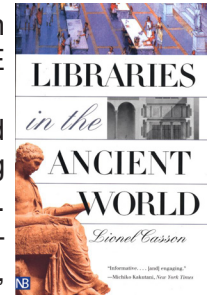
[*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 4:1136-37.]

communication than to the written means. The tools for composing written expression were rather primitive, and the time it took for written composition was extraordinarily long.

Typically some individuals trained to become the experts at written communication and came to be called scribes. They fulfilled a variety of roles in different ancient societies, and worked primarily with the reigning monarch of the region where they lived. The rudimentary form of a library evolved out of the depository rooms often located in the royal palace where all of the written records and documents were kept.

The emergence of the ancient library through the period of the Roman empire is a fascinating story.[32] One very helpful resource is a publication by Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (Yale University Press, 2002). In his work Prof. Casson discusses the ancient near east and then focuses attention on the libraries of ancient Greece and then of Rome where the forerunner of modern libraries developed. By the beginning of the Christian era the library at Alexandria Egypt was the largest and most influential library in the ancient world.[33] Over time some tens of thousands of papyrus scrolls were housed in the library, and even with several disasters such as fires happening periodically over its life time from the third century BCE to the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the seventh century AD.

The trained scribes became the experts with written materials in the ancient world and this gave them unusual influence over society at times. Literacy rates differed greatly among the various cultures, and typically only a small portion of the population possessed writing skills. In the Old Testament world the Egyptians tended to lead the way in literacy and focus on written expression of ideas. But also the cultures of Mesopotamia (Hittite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian) developed huge royal archives.[34] By the beginning of the Christian era the Romans placed high value upon literacy, and among the wealthy one's personal library built into his home was an important status symbol.[35] The graphic to the right shows the ruins of the front entrance facade of the personal library of the Roman senator Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemeanus that was completed in 135 AD in Ephesus.[36] With the model of the library at Alexandria, both private and public libraries flourished during the Roman empire. Yet one would want to remember that the so-called public libraries were not accessible to the general public. Instead, they mainly served the Roman government and the aristocratic side of society. From the available records it is clear that only the highest government authorities could 'check out' books from the public libraries; everyone else was required to do their reading of the books while in the library.

The terminology connected here to this theme includes the following:

[32]"Libraries in the Western world began as archives in ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. These archives were record depositories kept by court scribes and religious functionaries. Two of the first libraries we know of which were recognizable as organized collections of written knowledge were at Alexandria in Ptolemaic Egypt and Pergamum in Hellenic Turkey. Ancient librarians would have had high status in their societies because they were often scholars or priests and they would have been among the only people able to read." ("A Brief History of Librarians and Image," cyberresearcher)

[33]For more details, see "Library of Alexandria," wikipedia.org.

[34]"Abraham came from Mesopotamia, which had a well-developed tradition of palace and temple archives/libraries. Since 1974 over 20,000 tablets have been found in the archives of Ebla in northern Syria from pre-Abrahamic times. Many of the 25,000 tablets from Mari (1700s B.C.) and the 4,000 tablets from Nuzi (1400s B.C.) have helped to illuminate the backgrounds of the Hebrew patriarchs. Sumerian texts from among the 20,000 tablets at Nippur (before 1500 B.C.), and Akkadian texts from among the 20,000 tablets of Ashurbanipal's (about 668–629 B.C) famous library at Nineveh have provided literary parallels to biblical stories such as the Gilgamesh Epic. Texts written in five scripts and seven languages from the libraries of Ugarit shed important light on the literary and religious background of the Canaanites." [*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1035.]

[35]"The libraries of ancient Roman Empire were the core of all knowledge. The individuals who worked in them were some of the most respected persons in the Empire. The buildings, large and impressive, required large numbers of trained staff. Those staff persons who worked in the ancient libraries were for the most part slaves. In the palace of Antium there was such a large number of personnel that the slaves formed a collegium (a union of sorts). Private as well as public libraries had large staffs of slaves. According to Cicero 'Atticus employed so numerous a library staff that he could lend Cicero several trained Greeks for sometime'" [Jacalyn C. Spoon, "Ancient Libraries of Greece and Rome," ithaca.edu]

[36]For more information on personal libraries of the Romans see "Private Libraries in Ancient Rome," Jerryfielden.net

Language:	Library	Scribe	Writing	Book	Scroll
Hebrew:	no word	סוֹפֵר	בַּסֵפֶר	סֵפֶר sôpēr	בִּמְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר
Greek:	βιβλιοθήκη bibliotheke	γραμματεύς grammateus	γράμμα gramma	βίβλος βιβλία Biblía	βιβλίον biblion
Latin	bibliothēca	scrība	scrīptum	liber	volūmen

The Hebrew language never developed terminology referring to a 'library.' It only moved toward referring of a collection of documents without a specific term indicating where they would be kept. But because the basic concept of 'library' developed among the Greeks and Romans prior to the beginning of the Christian era, terms for 'library' emerged as a designation for keeping collections of books or scrolls. But the Greek word for library is never used in the New Testament. The scribe played a very important role in Hebrew life, particularly from the time of Moses onward with increasing focus on the copying of the Torah. These individuals loom very large in the New Testament as Jewish experts in the Torah, and also as being closely identified with the Pharisees. In ancient Hebrew a written document normally was a scroll and so all three of the above listed Hebrew words will normally specify a scroll as the writing. In the Greek of the LXX, as well as in the New Testament, both βίβλος and βιβλίον are used interchangeably and normally to imply a scroll. The term γράμμα is only used once in the New Testament -- and in the plural -- to refer to writings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15, τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα for the sacred scriptures). But it is common in the language outside the NT for writing. The Latin terminology is somewhat more precise and less ambiguous than the Greek, although the terms listed above are oriented toward the ecclesiastical Latin like that found in the Vulgate, more than toward classical Latin.

The emerging languages that dominate in the Judeo-Christian religious traditions through the first Christian century are Hebrew, Koine Greek, and Latin. What did those language look like? The Latin alphabet is foundational to the alphabets of all modern western languages, so Latin would not differ very much in appearance to most modern languages. But Hebrew, as a Semitic language, developed a set of characters that by nature are consonants as its alphabet, and Koine Greek has its own alphabet of 24 letters which is slightly less than the alphabet for classical Attic Greek. The chart reflects the print form of the letters of these two languages. On the next page is a chart reflecting patterns of hand writing of the wide range of ancient languages connected either directly or indirectly with the writing in the Bible.

Having some awareness of what these ancient languages looked like is a helpful reminder that Bible interpretation for every Christian, outside of the few who are highly skilled in the biblical languages, is always going to mean working with translations.[37] And as every bilingual person knows from experience, no two languages work exactly the same way. Nor do they express perceptions of reality the same way. The process of translation always means some loss of meaning, and that loss of meaning will vary in proportion to the cultural distances between the two languages.

We begin with a quick overview of both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Koine Greek of the New Testament.

1.2.1 World of the Hebrew scriptures

For anyone who has studied languages, and reflected some on it, the realization is clear: active languages never remain static; they are always undergoing changes and modifications. They only become static when they become 'dead languages.' This usually happens when their culture basically is destroyed or undergoes profound changes usually through warfare. The language will either stop being spoken, or else it will evolve into a significantly different form.

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[37]Just recently a friend described an experience while trying to buy a Bible in a religious bookstore in Texas. The clerk said they did not carry that translation. And she went on to ask, "Since the King James Version was what Jesus used, why would anyone want another Bible?" Completely dumbfounded the friend left the store vowing to never return there again. Years ago, a dear Polish German friend posed a similar question to me in a Bible study group in southeastern Germany: "If the Luther Bibel was good enough for the apostle Paul, why do we need other translations?" Both individuals were very sincere, but completely unaware of the nature of the Bible.

Such is clearly the case with the Hebrew in the Old Testament.

Biblical Hebrew (Hebrew: מקראית עברית‎), also called Classical Hebrew (Hebrew: קלאסית עברית‎), is the archaic form of the Hebrew language, a Canaanite Semitic language spoken in the area known as Canaan between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Biblical Hebrew is attested from about the 10th century BC, and persisted through the Second Temple period (ending in AD 70). Biblical Hebrew eventually developed into Mishnaic Hebrew, which was spoken until the 2nd century AD. Biblical Hebrew is best-attested in the Hebrew Bible, a document which reflects various stages of the Hebrew language in its consonantal skeleton, as well as a vocalic system which was added later, in the Middle Ages. There is also some evidence of regional dialectal variation, including differences between Biblical Hebrew as spoken in the northern Kingdom of Israel and in the southern Kingdom of Judah.

Biblical Hebrew has been written with a number of different writing systems. The Hebrews adopted the Phoenician script around the 12th century BC, which developed into the Paleo-Hebrew script. This was retained by the Samaritans, who use the descendant Samaritan script to this day. However the Aramaic script gradually displaced the Paleo-Hebrew script for the Jews, and it became the source for the modern Hebrew alphabet. All of these scripts were lacking letters to represent all of the sounds of Biblical Hebrew, though these sounds are reflected in Greek and Latin transcriptions of the time. These scripts originally only indicated consonants, but certain letters, known as *matres lectionis*, became increasingly used to mark vowels. In the Middle Ages various systems of diacritics were developed to mark the vowels in Hebrew manuscripts; of these, only the Tiberian system is still in wide use.

Biblical Hebrew possessed a series of "emphatic" consonants whose precise articulation is disputed, likely *ejective* or *pharyngealized*. Earlier Biblical Hebrew possessed three consonants which did not have their own letters in the writing system, but over time they merged with other consonants. The stop consonants developed *fricative allophones* under the influence of Aramaic, and these sounds eventually became marginally phonemic. The *pharyngeal* and *glottal phonemes* underwent weakening in some regional dialects, as reflected in the modern Samaritan Hebrew reading tradition. The vowel system of Biblical Hebrew changed dramatically over time and is reflected differently in the ancient Greek and Latin transcriptions, medieval vocalization systems, and modern reading traditions.

Biblical Hebrew had a typical Semitic morphology, placing *triconsonantal* roots into patterns to form words. Biblical Hebrew distinguished two genders (masculine, feminine), three numbers (singular, plural, and uncommonly dual). Verbs were marked for voice and mood, and had two conjugations which may have indicated aspect and/or tense (a matter of debate). The tense or aspect of verbs was also influenced by the conjugation I, in the so-called waw consecutive construction. Default word order was verb–subject–object, and verbs inflected for the number, gender, and person of their subject. Pronominal suffixes could be appended to verbs (to indicate object) or nouns (to indicate possession), and nouns had special construct forms for use in possessive constructions.[38]

Scripts of the Bible and of the ancient versions, and some of their antecedents

Column identifications
1. Ugaritic
2a. Phoenician
2b. Samaritan
3. Square Hebrew
4. Mandaic
5. Syriac
   a. Estrangelo
   b. Nestorian
6. Arabic
   a. isolated
   b. final
   c. initial
   d. medial
7. South Arabian (Sabaean)
8. Ethiopic (Ge'ez): consonant followed by each of
9. Greek
   a. Majuscule
   b. Minuscule
10. Coptic
11. Gothic
12. Armenian
13. Georgian
14. Glagolitic

a. The transliterations are those most often used by the respective specialists. Cols. 1-8 display the most usual attested orders. The horizontal alignment of cols. 9-16 demonstrates the correspondences between the Greek and the later alphabets, also shown in their standard orders. Val.: Phonetic value; (Ugaritic values); [Mandaic values]; <Gothic values>; -not used in modern Georgian-. Num.: Arithmetic value when the letter is used as a numeral. b. 3, 5, 9: Where two forms are given, the one on the right occurs at the end of a word. c. 3, 5a-b, 5c, 6: Vowel symbols shown alone and with b. West Syriac (Serto) vowel symbols may be placed above or below the consonant symbol.

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[38]"Biblical Hebrew," wikipedia.org.

Logically then comes the question: When was the Old Testament written? The answer to that question is essentially over a long period of time. The creation of the Hebrew scriptures is more of a process than an event.[39] Bits and pieces of it came together over a period of many centuries,[40] but it did not come together as a single collection of documents until well into the Babylonian exile and after.[41] Even into the beginning of the Christian era, Jews were not unified in their understanding of which documents should be regarded as sacred scriptures.[42] It is highly doubtful whether they ever took an official action of some kind specifying a list of documents as the canon of the Hebrew Bible.[43]

Thus the precise text that we consider as the Old Testament can most easily be examined from the time perspective of when these documents reached a finalized form largely in the intertestamental period between the Old and the New Testaments. Very little information is provided inside the documents themselves about their composition. Ancient Jewish sources strongly suggest a process of revision and updating took place over most of this long period of time. Virtually none of the OT documents themselves attempt to specify the writer of the document. The prophets come closer but careful examination clearly implies that the book of Amos is a collection of the orally delivered prophecies of Amos. Whether Amos was the one who assembled all these into a written document or not is not indicated inside the document, and is assumed by much of modern scholarship but without hardly any concrete evidence asserting such. The one place where concrete data does exist relates to the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer. 36:1-4):

> 1 In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today. 3 It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. ***4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him***.

Baruch served as the scribe for the prophet and was responsible for the written expression of Jeremiah's oral proclamations. How widespread this practice was is unknown. It could have been typical, but more likely it was an exceptional situation for Jeremiah.

But clearly with the Babylonian exile a powerful motivation emerged to pull together the religious heritage of the Jewish people into a collection of documents that would preserve for future generations all of the history and teachings of the great leaders of the Jewish people. The process of accomplishing this collection would extend itself over several centuries before it begins coming together clearly in the native language of the Jewish

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[39]"The first five books - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, book of Numbers and Deuteronomy - make up the Torah, the story of Israel from the Genesis creation narrative to the death of Moses. Few scholars today doubt that it reached its present form in the Persian period (538-332 BC), and that its authors were the elite of exilic returnees who controlled the Temple at that time.[7] The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings follow, forming a history of Israel from the Conquest of Canaan to the Siege of Jerusalem c.587 BC: there is a broad consensus among scholars that these originated as a single work (the so-called 'Deuteronomistic history') during the Babylonian exile of the 6th century BC.[8] The two Books of Chronicles cover much the same material as the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic history and probably date from the 4th century BC.[9] Chronicles links with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which were probably finished during the 3rd century BC.[10] Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments contain two (Catholic Old Testament) to four (Orthodox) Books of Maccabees, written in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC.

"The history books make up around half the total content of the Old Testament. Of the remainder, the books of the various prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the twelve 'minor prophets' - were written between the 8th and 6th centuries BC, with the exceptions of Jonah and Daniel, which were written much later.[11] The 'wisdom' and other books - Job, Proverbs and so on - date from between the 5th century BC and the 2nd or 1st BC, with the exception of some of the Psalms.[12]"

["Old Testament," wikipedia.org]

[40]This process is signaled in part through a concordance tracing of the word "write" in the Old Testament.

[41]"The process by which scriptures became canons and Bibles was a long one, and its complexities account for the many different Old Testaments which exist today. By about the 5th century BC Jews saw the five books of the Torah (the Old Testament Pentateuch) as having authoritative status; by the 2nd century BC the Prophets had a similar status, although without quite the same level of respect as the Torah; beyond that, the Jewish scriptures were fluid, with different groups seeing authority in different books.[15]" ["Old Testament," wikipedia.org]

[42]For a very helpful, non-technical discussion of this see "Development of the Hebrew Bible canon," wikipedia.org.

[43]We will explore this in more detail in **Session Two: Origin of the Scriptures**.

people. That process would be spurred along, however, with the translation of a set of those documents from Hebrew into early Koine Greek. This mostly took place in the third century BCE, and the final product is called the Septuagint (=LXX).[44] Among Greek speaking Jews until the end of the first Christian century, this collection of documents was widely used and studied. Its use greatly diminished beginning in the second century AD among Jews largely because of the extensive use of it by Christians.

Consequently our focus on the compositional nature of the documents of the Old Testament will center on the final centuries of the Old Testament era and the early centuries of the intertestamental era. This is the period of history when these documents came into the finalized form that we have today in the Old Testament.

1.2.1.1 Writing materials

The OT texts will speak of individuals writing (כתב) words down on stones (הָאֲבָנִים), scrolls (מְגִלָּה), tablets (לוּחַ), and 'books' (סֵפֶר). Inscriptions were a very early written form for marking significant places and events, as well as reigning kings. The earliest known forms of written expression reach back to about 3200 BCE in Mesopotamia, specifically ancient Sumer.[45] The time of Abraham reaches back no further than about 1800 BCE, so forms of writing were already in place by the age of the patriarchs in the Old Testament. The written recording of Israelite history begins with Moses around 1400 BCE, about the time of the emergence of a Proto-Canaanite alphabet. The writing was done mainly on tablets either of stone or of soft clay which was the baked in order to harden into a more permanent form. Out of this linguistic background ancient or classical Hebrew will develop and evolve over the centuries.[46] The Hebrew Bible contains more than one of these developing dialects -- not

[44]"The date of the 3rd century BCE, given in the legend, is confirmed (for the Torah translation) by a number of factors, including the Greek being representative of early Koine, citations beginning as early as the 2nd century BCE, and early manuscripts datable to the 2nd century.[13]

"After the Torah, other books were translated over the next two to three centuries. It is not altogether clear which was translated when, or where; some may even have been translated twice, into different versions, and then revised.[14] The quality and style of the different translators also varied considerably from book to book, from the literal to paraphrasing to interpretative.

"The translation process of the Septuagint can be broken down into several distinct stages, during which the social milieu of the translators shifted from Hellenistic Judaism to Early Christianity. The translation began in the 3rd century BCE and was completed by 132 BCE,[15 16 17] initially in Alexandria, but in time elsewhere as well.[3]

"The Septuagint is the basis for the Old Latin, Slavonic, Syriac, Old Armenian, Old Georgian and Coptic versions of the Christian Old Testament.[18]"

["Septuagint," wikipedia.org]

[45]"It is generally agreed that true writing of language (not only numbers) was invented independently in at least two places: Mesopotamia (specifically, ancient Sumer) around 3200 BCE and Mesoamerica around 600 BCE. It is believed that writing used in an inscription discovered in Jiroft, Iran came into existence at around the same time as that of Mesopotamia; carbon-14 tests conducted on the layers in which the Jiroft inscription was discovered have dated it to around 2500 BCE. Although such tests have not yet been carried out on Mesopotamian inscriptions, archaeologists believe that Mesopotamia's script goes back to 2600-2700 BCE. At most, Twelve Mesoamerican scripts are known, the oldest being from the Olmec or Zapotec of Mexico.

"It is debated whether writing was developed completely independently in Egypt around 3200 BCE and China around 1200 BCE, or whether the appearance of writing in either or both places was due to cultural diffusion (i.e. the concept of representing language using writing, if not the specifics of how such a system worked, was brought by traders from an already-literate civilization)."

["History of writing," wikipedia.org]

[46]In its widest sense, **Classical Hebrew** means the spoken language of ancient Israel flourishing between the 10th century BCE and the turn of the 4th century CE.[8] It comprises several evolving and overlapping dialects. The phases of Classical Hebrew are often named after important literary works associated with them.

Archaic Biblical Hebrew from the 10th to the 6th century BCE, corresponding to the Monarchic Period until the Babylonian Exile and represented by certain texts in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), notably the Song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5). Also called ***Old Hebrew*** or ***Paleo-Hebrew***. It was written in a form of the Canaanite script. (A script descended from this is still used by the Samaritans, see Samaritan Hebrew language.)

Standard Biblical Hebrew around the 8th to 6th centuries BCE, corresponding to the late Monarchic period and the Babylonian Exile. It is represented by the bulk of the Hebrew Bible that attains much of its present form around this time. Also called ***Biblical Hebrew***, ***Early Biblical Hebrew***, ***Classical Biblical Hebrew*** (or ***Classical Hebrew*** in the narrowest sense).

Late Biblical Hebrew, from the 5th to the 3rd centuries BCE, that corresponds to the Persian Period and is represented by certain texts in the Hebrew Bible, notably the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Basically similar to Classical Biblical Hebrew, apart from a few foreign words adopted for mainly governmental terms, and some syntactical innovations such as the use of the particle shel (of, belonging to). It adopted the ***Imperial Aramaic*** script (from which the modern Hebrew script descends).

Israelian Hebrew is a proposed northern dialect of biblical Hebrew, attested in all eras of the language, in some cases competing with late biblical Hebrew as an explanation for non-standard linguistic features of biblical texts.

Dead Sea Scroll Hebrew from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE, corresponding to the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

surprising given the wide range of time for the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew Bible, known also as the Tanakh, according to the Jewish Talmud, was complied into its present form largely by 450 BCE, and has remained in consistent form since then.[47] Both Christians and Jews today use the Masoretic Text (𝔐) of the Hebrew Bible as the authoritative text. This text tradition was developed between the seventh and tenth centuries AD by Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes. Most modern translations of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible are based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) Hebrew text, derived from the Masoretic text tradition. The BHS first appeared in 1906, and uses the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete Hebrew text in existence, as its starting point text. This is officially the fourth edition of the Biblia Hebraica. Currently in process is a completely revised fifth edition of the Biblica Hebraica labeled the Biblica Hebraica Quinta. The first publication of the initial portion appeared in 2004 and successive portions continue to be published with the latest (#7) in March of 2012. The project is projected to be complete by 2020. The graphic to the right is a sample page from this Hebrew text of Jeremiah 23:1-9.

Nash Papyrus, 2nd century BCE, pre-Masoretic Text of Decalogue & Shema

1.2.1.2 Writing methods

Quite early among the Hebrew people a special class of experts who came to be known as scribes (סוֹפֵר) developed as those who wrote down the dictation from authorities for preservation. The process of making new copies of existing manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible was a tedious task that took long periods of time to complete. Very strict guidelines for doing this work emerged over time.[48]

1.2.1.3 Motivation for Writing

As just a cursory glance at the Old Testament quickly reveals with a concordance search of the word 'write,' the composing of written scriptures among the Hebrew people came primarily out of the conviction that God said, "Write!" The process of writing both the original text and the subsequent copies of it then took on the

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before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and represented by the Qumran Scrolls that form most (but not all) of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Commonly abbreviated as DSS Hebrew, also called **Qumran Hebrew**. The **Imperial Aramaic** script of the earlier scrolls in the 3rd century BCE evolved into the Hebrew square script of the later scrolls in the 1st century CE, also known as *ketav Ashuri* (Assyrian script), still in use today.

Mishnaic Hebrew from the 1st to the 3rd or 4th century CE, corresponding to the Roman Period after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and represented by the bulk of the Mishnah and Tosefta within the Talmud and by the Dead Sea Scrolls, notably the Bar Kokhba Letters and the Copper Scroll. Also called Tannaitic Hebrew or Early Rabbinic Hebrew.
["Hebrew language," wikipedia.org]

[47]"According to the Talmud,[1] much of the contents of the Tanakh were compiled by the "Men of the Great Assembly" by 450 BCE, and have since remained unchanged. Modern scholars believe that the process of canonization of the Tanakh became finalized between 200 BCE and 200 CE.

"The Hebrew text was originally an *abjad: consonants* written with some applied vowel letters ('matres lectionis'). During the early Middle Ages scholars known as the Masoretes created a single formalized system of vocalization. This was chiefly done by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, in the Tiberias school, based on the oral tradition for reading the Tanakh, hence the name Tiberian vocalization. It also included some of Ben Naftali and Babylonian innovations.[2] Despite the comparatively late process of codification, some traditional sources and some Orthodox Jews believe the pronunciation and cantillation derive from the revelation at Sinai, since it is impossible to read the original text without pronunciations and cantillation pauses. The combination of a text (מקרא *miqra*), pronunciation (ניקוד *niqqud*) and cantillation (טעמים *te`amim*) enable the reader to understand both the simple meaning, as well as the nuances in sentence flow of the text."
["Tanakh," wikipedia.org]

[48]"The Jewish scribes used the following process for creating copies of the Torah and eventually other books in the Tanakh.1. They could only use clean animal skins, both to write on, and even to bind manuscripts. 2. Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines. 3. The ink must be black, and of a special recipe. 4. They must say each word aloud while they were writing. 5. They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the most Holy Name of God, YHVH every time they wrote it. 6. There must be a review within thirty days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone. 7. The letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted, and the document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document. 8. The documents could be stored only in sacred places (synagogues, etc.). 9. As no document containing God's Word could be destroyed, they were stored, or buried, in a genizah."
["Scribes: Ancient Israel," wikipedia.org]

goal of carefully preserving the words of God to His covenant people Israel.

But this did not prevent variations in wording from surfacing over the centuries. Add to that the modern reality that our oldest complete OT text in the Hebrew known to exist today only goes back to the middle ages of the Christian era. Translations into other languages, especially the LXX in early Koine Greek, exist in known manuscripts going back much closer to the time of the final composition of the Hebrew text in the middle 400s BCE.

The task of determining the perceived original wording of the Hebrew text is much more difficult and complex, than it is for the Greek New Testament. The modern science of Old Testament Textual Criticism faces substantial challenges in coming to conclusions about the form and content of the Hebrew Bible. The role of ancient translations, often labeled as versions, is much greater here. Some of the difficulty comes from simply not knowing the meaning of several of the Hebrew words present in the text. Frequently Hebrew lexicons will draw heavily upon well understood Greek and Latin words used to translate the Hebrew for their definition of the Hebrew term. Modern biblical archaeology over the past century plus has helped enormously at this point with the discovery of semitic language texts related to Hebrew in the Sumeran, Assyrian, and Babylonian cultures. But much work continues to occur in these fields of study with new insights surfacing regularly.

1.2.2 World of Christian scriptures

Working with just 27 documents in the New Testament, and some of these documents are less than a single page, is much simpler in many ways than working with the documents of the Old Testament. Yet, this is not without its challenges. They are just different in nature than those connected to the Old Testament.

The world of the New Testament centers in the first century in connection to the composition of these 27 documents, Dealing with one century versus fourteen plus centuries for the OT documents simplifies things considerably. Also one is working with a single language, Koine Greek,[49] rather than multiple dialects of Hebrew with some Aramaic thrown in at a few places. To be sure, the complexity often is understanding writers who for the most part were using Koine Greek as their first foreign language, rather than as their mother tongue. This makes for some interesting expressions on occasion that reflect thinking in Hebrew while writing in Greek. The Koine Greek found in the New Testament represents a dialectical form of Koine Greek spoken in Judea and Galilee during the first century, and possesses many affinities with the Alexandrian dialect of Koine Greek spoken in Egypt during the same era. These two forms will differ from many of the other dialects used elsewhere during this same period, e.g., the Ionic dialect of Asia Minor and the Aeolic dialect of Lesbos, an island in the northeastern Aegean Sea region. Communication challenges for a Palestinian Jew traveling to Asia Minor, like Silas, would compare roughly to someone from the deep South in the US traveling to Wales in the UK and both speaking 'English' to one another. Technically both are speaking English, but the two dialects of English will differ considerably from one another.

Toward the end of the first Christian century the process of copying these 27 documents gets underway in earnest. The 27 documents, within the framework of traditional authorship views, will have been composed from around the early 50s to the mid 90s of the first century, with the Johannine materials coming at the end of that period while some of the Pauline letters are the earliest writings. The three synoptic gospels and Acts come

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[49]Also labeled the Alexandrian Dialect of Greek, common Attic Greek, or Hellenistic Greek. It differs substantially from its predecessor, Attic Greek or classical Greek, the language of the classical Greek philosophers. In theory Koine Greek was intended originally to be a simplification of classical Greek for teaching to the non-Greeks, the barbarians, conquered by Alexander the Great. But it took on a life of its own over time as a distinct form of Greek separate from classical Greek.

23:1 הוֹי רֹעִים מְאַבְּדִים וּמְפִצִים אֶת־צֹאן מַרְעִיתִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃ 2 לָכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־הָרֹעִים הָרֹעִים אֶת־עַמִּי אַתֶּם הֲפִצֹתֶם אֶת־צֹאנִי וַתַּדִּחוּם וְלֹא פְקַדְתֶּם אֹתָם הִנְנִי פֹקֵד עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת־רֹעַ מַעַלְלֵיכֶם נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃ 3 וַאֲנִי אֲקַבֵּץ אֶת־שְׁאֵרִית צֹאנִי מִכֹּל הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר־הִדַּחְתִּי אֹתָם שָׁם וַהֲשִׁבֹתִי אֶתְהֶן עַל־נְוֵהֶן וּפָרוּ וְרָבוּ׃ 4 וַהֲקִמֹתִי עֲלֵיהֶם רֹעִים וְרָעוּם וְלֹא־יִירְאוּ עוֹד וְלֹא־יֵחַתּוּ וְלֹא יִפָּקֵדוּ נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃ ס 5 הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וַהֲקִמֹתִי לְדָוִד צֶמַח צַדִּיק וּמָלַךְ מֶלֶךְ וְהִשְׂכִּיל וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה בָּאָרֶץ׃ 6 בְּיָמָיו תִּוָּשַׁע יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכֹּן לָבֶטַח וְזֶה־שְּׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרְאוֹ יְהוָה צִדְקֵנוּ׃ ס 7 לָכֵן הִנֵּה־יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְלֹא־יֹאמְרוּ עוֹד חַי־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 8 כִּי אִם־חַי־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָה וַאֲשֶׁר הֵבִיא אֶת־זֶרַע בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹנָה וּמִכֹּל הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּים שָׁם וְיָשְׁבוּ עַל־אַדְמָתָם׃ ס 9 לַנְּבִאִים נִשְׁבַּר לִבִּי בְקִרְבִּי רָחֲפוּ כָּל־עַצְמוֹתַי

23:5 וּמָלַךְ בֿ וְמָלַךְ מֶלֶךְ וְהֵשׁ . וְמָלַךְ יֿ עֲלֵיהֶם ... וְמָלַךְ בֿ : עֶשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה בָּאָרֶץ בֿ וְהֵקִמֹתִי לְדָוִד . אַצְמִיחַ לְדָוִד צֶמַח ... וְלֹא יֹאמְרוּ צֹמַח בֿ : וֶסִמְנֹן כִּי עֶל הוּא לָכֵן הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם יְהוָה . הֶדַאֵר מֶעֱלָה : וְלֹא יֹאמְרוּ בַּנֵיהֶם סֵחָר . לָכֵן הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים ... 9 בְּקִרְבִּי יָא עֶל כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְקִרְבִּי . אוּלַי בְקִרְבִּי אַתָּה . אַף רוּחִי בְקִרְבִּי . לַנְּבִיאִים . וָהֶם בְּקִרְבִּי . חֻמֵשׁ בְקִרְבִּי . יָחֵל בְקִרְבִּי . כָּל אֲבִירֵי יְהוּה . נַפְשִׁי ...

23:1 וּמְפִצִים GST I *dilacerant* V (via פצץ•) מַרְעִיתִי V S T (assim-Ezek 34:31) I τῆς νομῆς αὐτῶν G (assim-10:21+ctext) • | נְאֻם־יְהוָה• V S T I > G (lit) •יְהוָה: | הָרֹעִים• Mᶜ Mᴸ יִשְׂרָאֵל• אֱלֹהֵי• ... •α'-σ'-θ' V S T I > G (lit) •הָרֹעִים: ס לָכֵן I מᴹ יְהוָה• Mᶜ Mᴸ | α'-σ'-θ' (homarc) • α'-σ'-θ' V S T I > G (lit) •צֹאנִי: | α' V S I •נְאֻם־יְהוָה: α'-σ'-θ' V S T I > G (lit) •3 •α' V S I | T (indet) τοῦ λαοῦ μου G (assim-usu) I •מִכֹּל הָאֲרָצוֹת α' V (S) T I sg G (lit) •הִדַּחְתִּי V S T (assim-50:19) I καὶ καταστήσω G | pref וַהֲשִׁבֹתִי see G • 4 • חַתּוּ G V T I וְלֹא יִפָּקֵדוּ S (via נדח) | (α') (V) (S) (T) I > G (lit) • יִפָּקֵדוּ S (facil-seman) I יוּעַן T (facil-seman) • 5 צֶמַח צַדִּיק α' S I αὐτῶν V S I ἀνατολὴν δικαίαν G (via מֹרֶה צְדָקָה) • מֶלֶךְ G V T I S (lib) • 6 שְּׁמוֹ S T I τὸ ὄνομα G V (facil-styl) • יְהוָה α' V •vocabunt eum V S T I | sadecenu Hieᵇᵉᵗ συρ' σ' (S) I (κύριος) Ἰωσεδεκ G (exeg) I T (indet) | pref יֹאמְרוּ יְהוָה צִדְקֵנוּ see Hieᵇᵉᵗ συρ' σ' (S) • vv 7-8 V S T I after v 40 G (lit) • 7 G V T I sg S (lib) •בְּנֵי α' V T (assim-16:14) I •8 בֵּית α' V T I ὃς συνήγαγεν G (lit) •אֶת־זֶרַע הֵבִיא ... ἅπαν τὸ σπέρμα G (lit) I S (facil-styl) •הִדַּחְתִּים V T I ἐξῶσεν αὐτούς G (assim-ctext) I S (harm-ctext) •וְיָשְׁבוּ עַל־ α' V S T I καὶ ἀπεκατέστησεν αὐτούς εἰς G (assim-16:15) • 9 לַנְּבִאִים V S T I clause & para div between προφήταις. & Συντρίβη G (lit) •לַנְּבִיאִים V S I ἐν τοῖς προφήταις G I ἀπὸ τῶν προφητῶν θ' (T) (harm-ctext) •

in the 60s through the 80s; the general letters are sprinkled from the 50s through the 60s.

One must also remember that many other Christian writings begin surfacing at the end of the first Christian century, e.g., First Clement around 96 AD, and a flow of them will come into existence from the second through the fifth centuries of the Christian era. Many of these writings make fictitious claims to have been written by apostles or other Christian leaders in the first century. Today they are grouped under a category called the New Testament Apocrypha. These include documents in the same four genre categories of the canonical NT documents: gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypses. Thus the early church after the first century apostolic era had not only to copy the 27 documents we have in the NT, but also to begin sorting through a growing body of writings claiming equal authority to these 27 documents. This process will take until the late 300s to fully sort out with the Easter letter of Athanasus, bishop in Alexandria Egypt, in 367 AD, defining the canon of the NT for all time. This process of developing an understanding of sacred NT scriptures is labeled the Canonization of the New Testament.

1.2.2.1 Writing materials

By the beginning of the Christian era the range of writing materials had not altered much from the earlier period of inscriptions on stone to something akin to paper called papyrus. The most permanent type of writing was that carved on to stones, and labeled inscription. The study of this is called epigraphy. In the first Christian century inscriptions were mainly placed on buildings etc. intended to be a permanent reminder of the accomplishments of some prominent person. Writings of a temporary nature, e.g., school homework, were written on a wax board or tablet where they could be easily written down and quickly erased (with the heat of a candle).
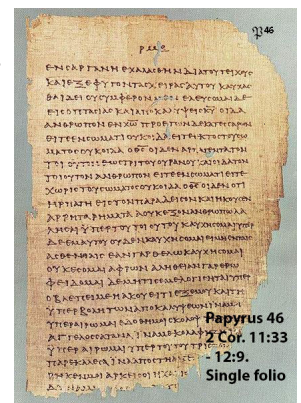
From the beginning of the Christian era until the fourth century, the documents of the New Testament were first composed and then copied on a scroll made of papyrus. The graphic Papyrus 46 on the right represents one sheet of a scroll containing 2 Cor. 11:33-12:9. This manuscript is one of the oldest fragment texts of the NT dating sometime between 175 and 225 AD. Most of the sheets, i.e., folios, are located at the University of Michigan in the US. It only contains selections of writings from the letters of Paul. The Greek text is written in the standard early Uncial form of ancient Greek, i.e., all cap letters with no punctuation marks or spacing between words. The scroll was composed of numerous sheets glued together side by side and then rolled up toward the center from both ends.[50]

Beginning in the third or fourth century AD a more permanent writing material, called parchment or vellum, began to be used for copying the texts of the New Testament. The Uncial form of writing continued to be used. This closely parallels the reign of Constantine, the first Christian emperor of the Roman empire. The tanned leather from calfskin, sheepskin, or goatskin was more durable, but also substantially more expensive. Connected to this shift to vellum was a re-formatting of the text of the NT from the scroll to the codex form, which is the basic way of binding books still today. Both the use of vellum and the codex format had existed for quite some time in the ancient world, but Christian use was closely linked to the official status

Wax tablet with 3 styli
From Roman times

of the church in the Roman empire and subsequently the availability of government funding for this much more expensive way of producing copies of the New Testament. One of the earliest and complete copies of the entire New Testament is Codex Sinaiticus from the fourth century AD.

Beginning in the sixth and seventh centuries AD a cursive form of writing Greek emerged rather than the all caps uncial form. Increasingly punctuation marks and spacing between words developed as well. This form of writing is called minuscule and grew out of the uncial form.[51] The manuscripts written in this style continued to use parchment, i.e., tanned leather. But these are much later in time and the distance between them and the original writings is between six and thirteen centuries, while the papyrus manuscripts are the closest in time to the originals, and followed by the uncial codex manuscripts.

Papyrus 46
2 Cor. 11:33 - 12:9.
Single folio

[50]The construction format has contributed greatly to the fragmentation of ancient scrolls since the glue often weakened and the pages became separated. The vast majority of the NT manuscripts written on papyrus are fragmentary and do not contain a complete copy of the New Testament.

[51]In order to prevent confusion, sometimes the Latin terms are used to distinguish between uncial (majuscule) and minuscule.

1.2.2.2 Writing methods

The method of composing a document of the New Testament tended to follow patterns commonly found in that world. The laborious task of writing prompted the dictation of most documents to an amanuenses, a writing secretary skilled in both writing and taking dictation. How much of the New Testament was originally composed this way is not clear. Paul gives direct indication that all of his letters were composed in this manner, and in Rom. 16:22, Tertius identifies himself as the secretary who did the writing of this letter: I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord, ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ. Also Silas is identified by Peter as the one who composed First Peter (5:12): Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God, Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ὑμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, ὡς λογίζομαι, δι' ὀλίγων ἔγραψα παρακαλῶν καὶ ἐπιμαρτυρῶν ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἣν στῆτε. As for the other documents it is not clear whether a writing secretary was used or whether the document was written directly by the author.

In the later process of copying the written documents of the New Testament, a multi-stage process emerged. Unlike the Jews who quickly developed the professional scribe who did the copying, Christianity until the era of Constantine in the fourth century had to make use of volunteers to do the copying. Copying was normally done in one of two ways. The best but slowest way was for a single copyist to hand write a new copy from an existing one that he could follow. The alternative way that was followed more often was for a group of copyists to come together and each one make a new copy for the oral reading of an existing text. In one process multiple copies could be produced. With, however, the emergence of Christianity officially in the Roman empire, professionally trained scribes took over the process of copying. The more expensive parchment in codex format becomes the way of doing this process. Interestingly very early on in this stage, ornamentation of the manuscripts begins showing up as signals of an official text with great value and importance.

It is clear that by the beginning of the second century collections of the letters of Paul were being circulated together. Soon afterwards by the middle of the second century the four gospels come into circulation as a collection and are bundled with those of Paul. The book of Acts then gets added, something as a 'paper clip' between gospels and letters. By the end of the second century at least three general letters are added to the collection, and by the end of the third century most all the 27 documents are being circulated together as a collection.
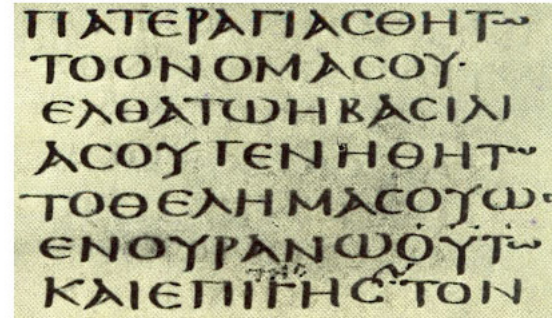
From the late middle ages until the 1800s not much interest was expressed in the Greek text of the New Testament. The Latin Vulgate had become the 'real' Bible of western Christianity to the neglect of the study of the original language text of the Bible. Some priests did continue to work on the Greek and Hebrew texts, some mostly in monasteries, and later on in the emerging universities. With the printing of the first Greek New Testament on the printing press in 1516 that came to be called the *Textus Receptus*, some interest in studying the original language texts flourished to some extent. But from 1516 to the middle 1800s only a small number of ancient manuscripts no earlier than the middle ages were known to exist. But with the explosion of biblical archaeology beginning in the 1800s the number of known manuscripts of the Greek New Testament went from less than a dozen to over 5,800 Greek text manuscripts known today.[52]

Codex Sinaiticus (א)
Luke 11:2
Fourth Century AD

Codex Ebnerianus (105)
John 1:5b-10
12th Century

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[52]"Parts of the New Testament have been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work, having over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian. The dates of these manuscripts range from c. 125 (the John Ryland's manuscript, P52; oldest copy of John fragments) to the introduction of printing in Germany in the 15th century. The vast majority of these manuscripts date after the 10th century. Although there are more manuscripts that preserve the New Testament than there are for any other ancient writing, the exact form of the text preserved in these later, numerous manuscripts may not be identical to the form of the text as it existed in antiquity." ["Biblical Manuscripts: New Testament manuscripts," wikipedia.org]
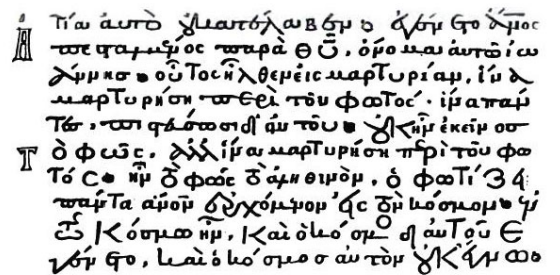
The science that has developed over the past 150 years for analyzing this abundance of manuscripts is called New Testament Textual Criticism. As practiced by the majority of scholars working in this field, it is a solid, scientifically based process for getting back to the original wording of the writings of the New Testament with full confidence.

1.2.2.3 Motivation for Writing

Why was the New Testament written? Second Peter 1:21 declares: no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι. But the writer is referring only to the prophetic portions in the Old Testament with this statement, and one is making a questionable stretch to apply these words inclusively to the whole Bible. What does become clear by way of motivation for writing is that all of the 27 documents were composed specifically to meet understood needs in different Christian communities across the Roman world of the second half of the first century. The most overt expression of this

Codex Alexandrinus (A)
End of Acts (c. 400 AD)

motivation comes with the letters in the New Testament. But increasingly careful study of the gospels, Acts and Revelation reveals a similar motivation for the writing of these documents. No single writer in the New Testament ever said to himself, "I think I'll write some scripture today."

To the contrary, news of spiritual issues taking place in religious communities having connection to a given writer came to them, and prompted the composition of their writing to address those needs. The four distinct genres in the New Testament signal different approaches to meeting those needs. Each of the four gospels sought to tell the story of Jesus in ways appropriate to four different communities all the way from Rome to Palestine. Acts is volume two of the Gospel of Luke intended to extend Luke's story of Jesus to include the first three decades of the movement called Christianity founded by Jesus. Revelation is an inspiring apocalyptic story of the ultimate victory of God over the evil of the brutal persecution of Christians in the reign of Roman emperor Domitian in the 90s of the first Christian century.

Consequently, the documents of the New Testament have a more personalized role with specific first century Christian communities, in contrast to the very general thrust of the Old Testament to the Jewish people as a whole as the covenant people of God. The powerful implication is that the message of God through the New Testament targets real people caught up with real problems as they try to faithfully serve God through Christ. We then become the beneficiaries of this as we 'piggy back' on to the shoulders of those communities to hear the message sent and then find connections to our situations today.
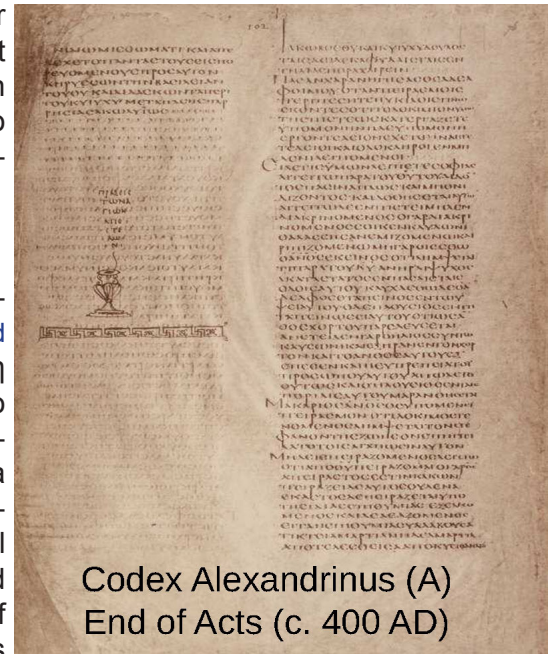
1.3 Utilizing insights for interpretation

The Bible, as hopefully is clear by now, is a collection of historically based documents. Unquestionably it is divine revelation of God's will to His people, first the Israelites and then to Christians. The first targeted readers lived in the ancient world. We as Christians have come to see these documents as sacred scripture for close to two thousand years, which by definition implies a timeless message of God's will for His people across the centuries. The better our interpretive skills, the clearer God's message comes through to us today. The relevant principle to remember: God's Spirit can use a sharp ax to get His job accomplished far better than a dull one![53]
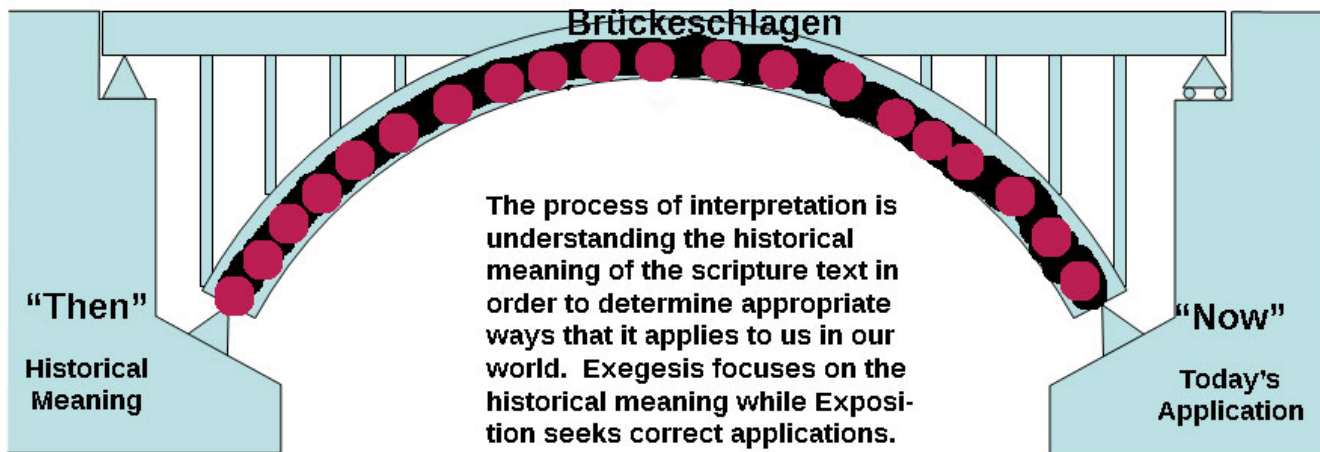
1.3.1 Understand how ancient patterns connect to modern patterns.

As the above diagram underscores, making connections between then and now is the heart of interpretation of scripture. Those connections exist at different levels, and all of them need to be linked up for the process to work best.

These connections are intended to bring across the bridge of time the ideas of the biblical text, not just the

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[53]By the way, if you are wondering what the German word Brückeschlagen means, it is a term found in discussions of principles of preaching, i.e., Homiletik, that literally means to 'throw across the bridge.' The task of every sermon should be to correctly throw the ideas of God across the bridge of time from the ancient world to our world. If done right, these ideas will hit us with life changing impact.

Brückeschlagen

"Then"
Historical Meaning

The process of **interpretation is understanding the historical meaning of the scripture text** in order to determine appropriate ways that it applies to us in our world. Exegesis focuses on the historical meaning while Exposition seeks correct applications.

"Now"
Today's Application

words of the biblical text. Legitimate interpretation is not some kind of hokus pokus where specific words have magical powers. Nor do Christians come at their Bible as though the mere repeating of the original language text words brings them spiritual 'brownie points' with God; we'll leave that sort of thing to the Muslims in their repeating of the Arabic text of the Quran to Allah. Our concern is to develop a clear understanding of how God wants us to live and serve Him in our world. The Christian Bible as sacred scripture is the exclusive source for gaining such understanding. Therefore every conclusion we reach about the Christian life must stand under the scrutiny of Christian scripture for validation of legitimacy.

The ideas of the Bible are couched in Greek and Hebrew words that take on literary forms and historical based meaning. We must understand those literary forms along with their historical setting if we are to grasp the ideas. Gaining skills to do this better is what this study is all about. The study won't make any of us a scholar, but it will open up new avenues of deeper comprehension of God's Word for our day.

1.3.2 Understand as much as possible about ancient source languages

When thinking about how the Bible was written so long ago in comparison to the world most of us live in today, I find it amazing that we can understand much of anything about the ideas in scripture. To me it is a testimony to God's providential watch care over the preservation of the scriptures down through the centuries.

What is a language? At the basics any language ancient or modern is a mirror of the culture it exists in. It becomes a means of moving from our culture and ways of thinking into the culture and ways of thinking of another group of people elsewhere in our world, or across the centuries of time into an ancient world.

1.3.2.1 Hebrew. The language of Hebrew served as the foundation for the documents of the Old Testament, but we are looking only at one form of the language over the centuries.[54] The language of the Old Testament is classified today as either Classical Hebrew or Biblical Hebrew. Archaeological evidence affirms its existence from about the tenth century BCE until the end of the Second Temple period in 70 AD. In the last decades of the first Christian century the language made huge shifts in grammar, vocabulary, and especially pronunciation into Mishnaic Hebrew.[55] Inside the Old Testament it is never called Hebrew; rather it is שפת כנע, 'the language of Canaan' (cf. Isaiah 19:18) and יהודית 'Judaean, Judahite' language (cf. 2 Kings 18:26, 28). Only later in

[54]The forms of Hebrew over time:
Biblical Hebrew
Mishnaic Hebrew
Medieval Hebrew
Ashkenazi Hebrew
Sephardi Hebrew
Yemenite Hebrew
Hebrew Language Revival
Modern Hebrew
["Biblical Hebrew," wikipedia.org]

[55]"The term Mishnaic Hebrew refers to the Hebrew dialects found in the Talmud, excepting quotations from the Hebrew Bible. The dialects can be further sub-divided into Mishnaic Hebrew (also called Tannaitic Hebrew, Early Rabbinic Hebrew, or Mishnaic Hebrew I), which was a spoken language, and Amoraic Hebrew (also called Late Rabbinic Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew II), which was a literary language only." ["Mishnaic Hebrew," wikipedia.org]

the Hellenistic era do terms translatable as Hebrew surface in reference to the language.[56] Some evidence indicates the existence of regional dialects so that, for example, the language was spoken differently in the northern kingdom than in the southern kingdom during that period of history. It has been written very differently over time, and the modern way of writing biblical Hebrew is very different from the written form of the language around the period of the Babylonian exile when the Old Testament text as we have it came into finalized form.[57] As a Semitic language, it is written from right to left and uses a variety of structures for what we call grammar.[58] Hebrew, first in the biblical form and then in the Mishnaic form, ceased to be a living language around 200 AD. It became a literary language rather than a spoken language.[59] The later forms of Medieval, Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Yemenite Hebrew were primarily literary forms and spoken only to a very limited degree. It underwent a revival of sorts beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, and evolved into Modern Hebrew, which is spoken toward in Israel.[60]

The vocabulary of the Hebrew Old Testament contains about 8,000 words and around 2,000 of these are only used one time. The estimates are that the language possessed around 30,000 separate words totally. The vocabulary of Mishnaic Hebrew is substantially larger because of the greater variety of topics treated. The language possesses a very vivid manner of picturing reality and in expressing ideas. The translation bridge from

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[56]"In the Hellenistic period Greek writings use the names *Hebraios, Hebraïsti* (Josephus, Antiquities I, 1:2, etc.), and in Mishnaic Hebrew we find עברית'Hebrew' and לשון עברית'Hebrew language' (Mishnah Gittin 9:8, etc.). The origin of this term is obscure; suggested origins include the Biblical Eber, the ethnonyms Ḫabiru, Ḫapiru, and ʿApiru found in sources from Egypt and the near east, and a derivation from the root עבר 'to pass' alluding to crossing over the Jordan river. Jews also began referring to Hebrew as לשון הקדש 'the holy tongue' in Mishnaic Hebrew" ["Biblical Hebrew," wikipedia.org]

[57]"Biblical Hebrew has been written with a number of different writing systems. The Hebrews adopted the Phoenician script around the 12th century BC, which developed into the Paleo-Hebrew script. This was retained by the Samaritans, who use the descendant Samaritan script to this day. However the Aramaic script gradually displaced the Paleo-Hebrew script for the Jews, and it became the source for the modern Hebrew alphabet. All of these scripts were lacking letters to represent all of the sounds of Biblical Hebrew, though these sounds are reflected in Greek and Latin transcriptions of the time. These scripts originally only indicated consonants, but certain letters, known as *matres lectionis*, became increasingly used to mark vowels. In the Middle Ages various systems of diacritics were developed to mark the vowels in Hebrew manuscripts; of these, only the Tiberian system is still in wide use." ["Biblical Hebrew," wikipedia.org]

[58]"Biblical Hebrew had a typical Semitic morphology, placing triconsonantal roots into patterns to form words. Biblical Hebrew distinguished two genders (masculine, feminine), three numbers (singular, plural, and uncommonly dual). Verbs were marked for voice and mood, and had two conjugations which may have indicated aspect and/or tense (a matter of debate). The tense or aspect of verbs was also influenced by the conjugation ו, in the so-called waw consecutive construction. Default word order was verb–subject–object, and verbs inflected for the number, gender, and person of their subject. Pronominal suffixes could be appended to verbs (to indicate object) or nouns (to indicate possession), and nouns had special construct forms for use in possessive constructions." ["Biblical Hebrew," wikipedia.org]

[59]"Hebrew probably ceased to be a living language (in the sense of a community mother tongue) around the year 200 C.E. as the result of the Bar Kokhba disaster, when the population of Judea was decimated and the survivors fled northward to the Galilee.

"Judging from the literary evidence, however, the survivors were not really aware of what was happening to them linguistically, for the Aramaic which they spoke as a family language was symbiotically linked to the Hebrew they continued to use for more formal purposes. Hebrew and the several varieties of Aramaic, quite distinct from each other as languages in every other way, now were treated as mere styles of one community language. These same speakers, nonetheless, always regarded the Syriac variety of Aramaic to be a separate language."

[Gene M. Schramm, "Languages: Hebrew" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 204.]

[60]"The revival of the Hebrew language was a process that took place in Europe and Palestine toward the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, through which the language's usage changed from the sacred language of Judaism to a spoken and written language used for daily life in Israel. The process began as Jews started arriving in Palestine in the first half of the nineteenth century and used Hebrew as a *lingua franca*.[1] However, a parallel development in Europe elevated Hebrew from primarily a sacred liturgical language into a literary language[2] which played a key role in the development of nationalist educational programs.[3] Modern Hebrew, along with Modern Arabic, have been official languages since the British Mandate for Palestine and the later Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948. More than purely a linguistic process, the revival of Hebrew was utilized by Jewish modernization and political movements, and became a tenet of the ideology associated with settlement of the land, a safe homeland, Zionism[4] and Israeli policy.

"The process of Hebrew's return to regular usage is unique; there are no other examples of a natural language without any native speakers subsequently acquiring several million such native speakers, and no other examples of a sacred language becoming a national language with millions of "first language" speakers."

["Revival of the Hebrew Language," wikipedia.org]

biblical Hebrew to most modern western languages is very great, and thus variations in translations will inevitably occur.

    1.3.2.2 Koine Greek. The original language of the New Testament is Koine Greek. The term Koine is derived from the Greek adjective κοινός meaning common or general. This form of ancient Greek came into existence as a simplified form of the earlier Attic Greek, i.e., classical Greek.[61] It became the language of the eastern Mediterranean world largely from the influence of Hellenization resulting out of the conquests of Alexander the Great in th fourth century BCE.[62] It evolved into Byzantine Greek, i.e., Medieval Greek, and also served as foundational to Modern Greek. The Demotic form of modern Greek is the official language of Greece today since 1976, and has close connections to ancient Greek.

Koine Greek went through both evolutionary stages and possessed regional dialects. For example, the form of Koine Greek found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in the third century BCE, is a very early form of what is commonly called Biblical Greek today. This is Koine Greek with varying levels of influence from Hebrew and Aramaic. The Greek of the New Testament is a later form of Biblical Greek with less influences from both Hebrew and Aramaic. The form of biblical Koine Greek with the least Semitic influence is Patristic Greek, the language of the Greek speaking church fathers from the second century AD on. Biblical Koine Greek will be very different from Literary Koine Greek as found in writers such as Plutarch and Lucian of the beginning Christian era. The more literary forms of Koine Greek reflect in varying degrees the Attaticizing influence. The atticists were the language 'purists' from the first century BCE onward who vigorously sought to revive the earlier Attic, or Classical, form of Greek. This found limited success and mostly in the written literature, rather than in the oral expressions.

The most complex language to ever exist in the western world is Classical Greek. Koine Greek is some simpler than Classical Greek, but in comparison to modern western languages it is very complex. This makes it harder to learn, but the positive aspect is that a person using Classical Greek could express his ideas enormously more precisely and clearly than is possible in any modern western language. Through the addition of prefixes and suffixes on all substantives and verbal expressions along with adjectives, a system of idea expression that clearly defines subject - verb - object relationships is created and enables the Greek writers to use an endless pattern of sequencing of words for fine nuances of idea expression. This stands in sharpest contrast to modern English which by eliminating the vast majority of these spelling variations has locked itself into set sequences of words in order to signal grammatical connections in sentences.

The modern Bible translator has an entirely different set of challenges with the New Testament than with the Old Testament. The Biblical Greek expression in the New Testament states ideas at a level of precision utterly impossible to maintain in translation. Depending on which modern language is the target translation language, between fifty and eight-five percent of the meaning in the Greek text is lost in translation, no matter how good the translation is. As I used to tell my first semester Greek students over the forty years of teaching the language, "There is a Bible in the Greek New Testament that you don't know exists. Your study of Greek will open it up to you in exciting ways you can't imagine now." And about half way through the second semester when we began using the Greek New Testament in class affirmation after affirmation would come from the students.

The challenge in this study is to develop some interpretive skills that will reduce this huge loss of meaning in the translation process. In **Lesson Five: Bible Translations**, we will develop skills that will substantial reduce this meaning loss. Of course, there's no ultimate way to eliminate the loss without learning the biblical languages, but a colleague of mine at Gardner-Webb University, Dr. Sophia Steibel, and I developed an approach years ago for freshmen Bible survey students that can make a huge difference.

CONCLUSION

The end of each study will focus attention on the biblical text of Third John. We will engage in learning activities intended to re-enforce the concepts of each lesson with application to this text of the New Testament. The goal is for most of the class time to be spent working on this biblical text with intentional efforts to connect it <u>back to the stud</u>y materials.

[61]The article "Koine Greek grammar," wikipedia.org does a good job explaining the simplifications of Koine from Attic Greek.

[62]For the really 'eager beaver' reader, a very helpful treatment of the evolution of the Greek alphabet as foundational to a lot of the grammar etc. is available at "History of the Greek alphabet," wikipedia.org. It is somewhat technical, but not overly so. If you have some background training in the field of linguistics, this will be a most helpful article.

1.3.3 Application to Third John

The Greek Text: (Taken from the Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th rev. ed.)

1 Ὁ πρεσβύτερος Γαΐῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ, ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

2 Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὔχομαί σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐοδοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχή. 3 ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς. 4 μειζοτέραν τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.

5 Ἀγαπητέ, πιστὸν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους, 6 οἳ ἐμαρτύρησάν σου τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐνώπιον ἐκκλησίας, οὓς καλῶς ποιήσεις προπέμψας ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ· 7 ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον μηδὲν λαμβάνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν. 8 ἡμεῖς οὖν ὀφείλομεν ὑπολαμβάνειν τοὺς τοιούτους, ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

9 Ἔγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ᾽ ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς. 10 διὰ τοῦτο, ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, καὶ μὴ ἀρκούμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις οὔτε αὐτὸς ἐπιδέχεται τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοὺς βουλομένους κωλύει καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐκβάλλει.

11 Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἑώρακεν τὸν θεόν. 12 Δημητρίῳ μεμαρτύρηται ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ ὑπὸ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας· καὶ ἡμεῖς δὲ μαρτυροῦμεν, καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἡ μαρτυρία ἡμῶν ἀληθής ἐστιν.

13 Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι ἀλλ᾽ οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν· 14 ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν, καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

15 Εἰρήνη σοι. ἀσπάζονταί σε οἱ φίλοι. ἀσπάζου τοὺς φίλους κατ᾽ ὄνομα.

Translations: (English)

New American Standard Bible (NASB):

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than[63] this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

5 Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and[64] especially when they are strangers ; 6 and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to[65] support such men, so that we may[66] be fellow workers[67] with the truth.

9 I wrote something to the church ; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept[68] what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words ; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God ; the one who does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself ; and we add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink ; 14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face.

15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your

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[63] 3 John 1:4 Lit *these things, that I hear*

[64] 3 John 1:5 Lit *this*

[65] 3 John 1:8 Or *receive such men as guests*

[66] 3 John 1:8 Or *prove ourselves to be*

[67] 3 John 1:8 Or *for*

[68] 3 John 1:9 Lit *us*

soul. 3 I was overjoyed when some of the friends[69] arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends,[70] even though they are strangers to you; 6 they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; 7 for they began their journey for the sake of Christ,[71] accepting no support from non-believers.[72] 8 Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

9 I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends,[73] and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him,[74] and you know that our testimony is true.

13 I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; 14 instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face.

15 Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.

New Living Translation (NLT):
1 This letter is from John, the elder.[75]
I am writing to Gaius, my dear friend, whom I love in the truth.

2 Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit. 3 Some of the traveling teachers[76] recently returned and made me very happy by telling me about your faithfulness and that you are living according to the truth. 4 I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth.

5 Dear friend, you are being faithful to God when you care for the traveling teachers who pass through, even though they are strangers to you. 6 They have told the church here of your loving friendship. Please continue providing for such teachers in a manner that pleases God. 7 For they are traveling for the Lord,[77] and they accept nothing from people who are not believers.[78] 8 So we ourselves should support them so that we can be their partners as they teach the truth.

9 I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. 10 When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.

11 Dear friend, don't let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God.[79]

12 Everyone speaks highly of Demetrius, as does the truth itself. We ourselves can say the same for him, and you know we speak the truth.

13 I have much more to say to you, but I don't want to write it with pen and ink. 14 For I hope to see you soon,

[69]Gk. *brothers*

[70]Gk. *brothers*

[71]Gk. *for the sake of the name*

[72]Gk. *the Gentiles*

[73]Gk. *brothers*

[74]Gk. lacks *for him*

[75]3 John 1:1 Greek *From the elder*.

[76]3 John 1:3 Greek *the brothers*; also in verses 5 and 10.

[77]3 John 1:7 Greek *They went out on behalf of the Name*.

[78]3 John 1:7 Greek *from Gentiles*.

[79]3 John 1:11 Greek *they have not seen God*.

and then we will talk face to face.

15[80] Peace be with you.

Your friends here send you their greetings. Please give my personal greetings to each of our friends there.

Translations: (Spanish)

La Biblia de las Américas

1 El anciano al amado Gayo, a quien yo amo en verdad.

2 Amado, ruego que seas prosperado en todo así como prospera tu alma, y que tengas buena salud. 3 Pues me alegré mucho cuando algunos hermanos vinieron y dieron testimonio de tu verdad, esto es, de cómo andas en la verdad. 4 No tengo mayor gozo que éste: oír que mis hijos andan en la verdad. 5 Amado, estás obrando fielmente en lo que haces por los hermanos, y sobre todo cuando se trata de extraños; 6 pues ellos dan testimonio de tu amor ante la iglesia. Harás bien en ayudarles a proseguir su viaje de una manera digna de Dios. 7 Pues ellos salieron por amor al Nombre, no aceptando nada de los gentiles. 8 Por tanto, debemos acoger a tales hombres, para que seamos colaboradores en pro de la verdad.

9 Escribí algo a la iglesia, pero Diótrefes, a quien le gusta ser el primero entre ellos, no acepta lo que decimos. 10 Por esta razón, si voy, llamaré la atención a las obras que hace, acusándonos injustamente con palabras maliciosas; y no satisfecho con esto, él mismo no recibe a los hermanos, se lo prohíbe a los que quieren hacerlo y los expulsa de la iglesia.

11 Amado, no imites lo malo sino lo bueno. El que hace lo bueno es de Dios; el que hace lo malo no ha visto a Dios. 12 Demetrio tiene buen testimonio de parte de todos y de parte de la verdad misma; también nosotros damos testimonio y tú sabes que nuestro testimonio es verdadero.

13 Tenía muchas cosas que escribirte, pero no quiero escribírtelas con pluma y tinta, 14 pues espero verte en breve y hablaremos cara a cara. 15 La paz sea contigo. Los amigos te saludan. Saluda a los amigos, a cada uno por nombre.

Nueva Versión Internacional

1 El *anciano,
al querido hermano Gayo, a quien amo en la verdad.

2 Querido hermano, oro para que te vaya bien en todos tus asuntos y goces de buena salud, así como prosperas espiritualmente. 3 Me alegré mucho cuando vinieron unos hermanos y dieron testimonio de tu fidelidad,[81] y de cómo estás poniendo en práctica la verdad. 4 Nada me produce más alegría que oír que mis hijos practican la verdad.

5 Querido hermano, te comportas fielmente en todo lo que haces por los hermanos, aunque no los conozcas.[82] 6 Delante de la iglesia ellos han dado testimonio de tu amor. Harás bien en ayudarlos a seguir su viaje, como es digno de Dios. 7 Ellos salieron por causa del Nombre, sin nunca recibir nada de los *paganos; 8 nosotros, por lo tanto, debemos brindarles hospitalidad, y así colaborar con ellos en la verdad.

9 Le escribí algunas líneas a la iglesia, pero Diótrefes, a quien le encanta ser el primero entre ellos, no nos recibe. 10 Por eso, si voy no dejaré de reprocharle su comportamiento, ya que, con palabras malintencionadas, habla contra nosotros sólo por hablar. Como si fuera poco, ni siquiera recibe a los hermanos, y a quienes quieren hacerlo, no los deja y los expulsa de la iglesia.

11 Querido hermano, no imites lo malo sino lo bueno. El que hace lo bueno es de Dios; el que hace lo malo no ha visto a Dios. 12 En cuanto a Demetrio, todos dan buen testimonio de él, incluso la verdad misma. También nosotros lo recomendamos, y bien sabes que nuestro testimonio es verdadero.

13 Tengo muchas cosas que decirte, pero prefiero no hacerlo por escrito; 14 espero verte muy pronto, y entonces hablaremos personalmente.

15 La paz sea contigo. Tus amigos aquí te mandan saludos. Saluda a los amigos allá, a cada uno en particular.

Nueva Traducción Viviente

1 Yo, Juan, el anciano,[83] le escribo esta carta a Gayo, mi querido amigo, a quien amo en la verdad.

2 Querido amigo, espero que te encuentres bien, y que estés tan saludable en cuerpo así como eres fuerte

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[80]3 John 1:15 Some English translations combine verses 14 and 15 into verse 14.

[81]3 Juan 1:3 *fidelidad*. Lit. *verdad*.

[82]3 Juan 1:5 aunque no los conozcas. Alt. aunque para ti sean extraños.

[83]3 Juan 1:1 En griego *El anciano*.

en espíritu. 3 Hace poco regresaron algunos de los maestros itinerantes,[84] y me alegraron mucho cuando me contaron de tu fidelidad y de que vives de acuerdo con la verdad. 4 No hay nada que me cause más alegría que oír que mis hijos siguen la verdad.

5 Querido amigo, le eres fiel a Dios cada vez que te pones al servicio de los maestros itinerantes que pasan por ahí aunque no los conozcas. 6 Ellos le han contado a la iglesia de aquí de tu cariñosa amistad. Te pido que sigas supliendo las necesidades de esos maestros tal como le agrada a Dios; 7 pues viajan en servicio al Señor[85] y no aceptan nada de los que no son creyentes.[86] 8 Por lo tanto somos nosotros los que debemos apoyarlos y así ser sus colaboradores cuando enseñan la verdad.

9 Le escribí a la iglesia acerca de esto, pero Diótrefes —a quien le encanta ser el líder— no quiere tener nada que ver con nosotros. 10 Cuando yo vaya sacaré a relucir las cosas que hace y sus infames acusaciones contra nosotros. No sólo se niega a recibir a los maestros itinerantes, sino que les dice a otros que no los ayuden y, cuando los ayudan, él los expulsa de la iglesia.

11 Querido amigo, no te dejes influir por ese mal ejemplo. Imita solamente lo bueno. Recuerda que los que hacen lo bueno demuestran que son hijos de Dios, y los que hacen lo malo demuestran que no conocen a Dios.[87][e]

12 Todos, incluso la verdad misma, hablan bien de Demetrio. Nosotros también podemos afirmar lo mismo de él, y ustedes saben que decimos la verdad.

13 Tengo mucho más que decirte, pero no quiero hacerlo con pluma y tinta, 14 porque espero verte pronto, y entonces hablaremos cara a cara.

15 La paz sea contigo.

Tus amigos de aquí te mandan saludos. Por favor, dales mis saludos a cada uno de nuestros amigos de ahí.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

1. Literary Forms:
    1) What basic genre is Third John?

    2) What implications does the genre have for interpretation?

2. Literary Setting:
    3) In which part of the New Testament is Third John?

    4) What are the implications of this setting?

3. Literary Structure:
    5) Every ancient letter possessed most all of the following sections.
    Can you identify these elements in 3 John?
       Praescriptio (Who sent it; who received it; greetings): vv. _____
       Proem: (prayers of thanksgiving and intercession): vv._____
       Body: (main content of the letter):vv._____
       Conclusio: (final elements of greetings; health wish; travel plans, prayers; doxologies etc.): vv._____

    6) Compare the paragraph divisions of verses 5 through 12 to determine the basic points of the letter body.

4. **History: External**
    7) Reporter questions:[88]

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[84]3 Juan 1:3 En griego *los hermanos*; también en 5 y 10.

[85]3 Juan 1:7 En griego *Ellos salieron por causa del Nombre.*

[86]3 Juan 1:7 En griego *de los gentiles. (Gentil[es]*, que no es judío).

[87]3 Juan 1:11 En griego *no han visto a Dios*.

[88]Although it is not the best Bible dictionary (these are not available free online), the *Easton's Bible Dictionary* at http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/ is adequate for our purposes. Check the materials for Third John for answers. Additionally, wikipedia.

Who sent it?
To whom was it sent?
Where was it sent from?
Where was it sent to?
When was it sent?
Why was it sent?

5. History: Internal

8) List all the references you can find of the 'time markers'. That is, indications of points of time and movements through time. These may be single words, or phrases. For example, "when some of the friends arrived" in verse 3.

9) List all the references you can find of the 'place markers'. That is, words and phrases referring to locations either of a specific nature like cities, or of a general nature. For example, "journey" in verse 7.

10) From the above information summarize what you understand about Third John at this beginning point of interpretation.