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Dictionary of

# Hermeneutics

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A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions

**Advance Professor's Preview  
Unedited Manuscript**

Not for sale or reprint

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## **Inside the completed book you'll find ...**

- Logical organization, similar to how a typical hermeneutics class is taught.
- Concise definitions of terms and expressions.
- Brief discussions of the different schools of interpretation, prominent theologians in the discipline of biblical interpretation, and different interpretative approaches and methods of Bible study.
- A fully-searchable CD-ROM for quick, easy reference.

# 1

## Terms and Expressions

### Allegorize

To interpret a text as if it were an allegory or as if allegorical. Cf. ALLEGORY, ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL, and ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION.

### Allegory

A metaphor extended into a story (Kaiser and Silva, 94). The elements of the story take on meanings that are quite different from the ordinary literal sense of the words.<sup>1</sup> With this definition parables in the OT and NT would qualify as allegory (Duvall and Hays, 179).<sup>2</sup> Most scholars make a distinction between admitting the existence of allegory in Scripture and the allegorization (see ALLEGORIZE) of the Scriptures themselves (Ryken, 145–48). Those who use the allegorical approach usually identify it with eliciting Scripture’s so-called deeper spiritual meaning (McQuilken, 38–40).<sup>3</sup> Cf. TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION.

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“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well” (Prov. 5:15) is an allegory admonishing marital fidelity.

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<sup>1</sup> A famous allegory is John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which his experiences are told to convey his spiritual life.

<sup>2</sup> There is continual debate over whether parables should be treated as allegories. Biblical scholars have long resisted the idea of allegorization, viewing it as arbitrary and fanciful interpretation. Leland Ryken makes an effort to answer the objections to this identification in *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic Books, 1984), 199–203.

<sup>3</sup> In the history of biblical interpretation, both Jewish and Christian, the allegorical approach was very common. It is often paired with “typology,” which also has a comparative element (“this” represents “that”). However, whereas typology is grounded in history and the analogies are more natural and suggestive (e.g., Moses’ lifting of the bronze serpent [Num. 21: 4–9] and the crucifixion of Jesus [John 3:14f]), the analogous connections made by allegory are remote and often strange. Thus, Philo of Alexandria could see in the description of the four rivers of Eden (Gen. 2:10–14) a discourse on four virtues. Similarly, Clement of Alexandria saw Moses’ prohibition against eating unclean animals a warning to shun various

**Extensive Footnotes engage students for deeper study.**

## Analogy of faith (Lat. *analogia fidei*)

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“What you heard from me, keep as *the pattern of sound teaching*, with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).

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To interpret Scripture in consultation with a recognized standard or expression of Christian orthodoxy. Early church fathers referred to that standard as the “rule of faith” (Lat. *regula*

*fidei*), which could be identified with apostolic teaching (oral or written), the Scriptures, or creedal statements of faith. The Protestant Reformers argued that “Scripture alone” (*sola Scriptura*) was that authoritative standard, and that interpretation is best done by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, maintains that Scripture and various forms of church tradition (creeds, writings of church fathers, the decisions of church councils) must be consulted when determining doctrine (Ramm 1970, 36, 55f; Kaiser, 134f).

Easy-to-identify cross-referenced terms.

## Analogy of Scripture

A corollary principle to the ANALOGY OF FAITH. The Reformers argued that the Bible was its own best interpreter. Luther held that the Scriptures possessed sufficient clarity so that the devout and competent believer could understand its meaning without consulting outside sources of tradition. When confronted with an obscure passage, priority should be given to the passage that is clear. Thus, “Scripture interprets Scripture” is a statement of the priority given to the Bible in determining matters of faith and practice.

## Application

Refers to that part of the hermeneutical task which seeks to explain how the meaning of the text (derived through EXEGESIS) can become “meaningful,” i.e., impact the reader-interpreter’s present situation. Cf. SIGNIFICANCE.

## Authorial intent

Refers to what an author intended to say when he wrote a text. The expression raises the hermeneutical question of where meaning is to be found. The three proposed locations are the author, the text, and the reader.<sup>4</sup> Cf. REVELATION.

vices. Good discussions of the historical origins of allegorical interpretation can be found in Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890), 58–60, and Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 24–45.

<sup>4</sup> For a well-reasoned defense of locating the meaning of text with authorial intent see Robert H. Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 (September 2001): 451–66.

## **Authoritative** (See also CANON, CANONICAL)

In biblical studies or hermeneutics refers to something that has authority and establishes a norm that is binding on a particular community. For example, the authoritative writings of the Christian Church are the Scriptures, or Bible.

## **Canon** (Gk. *kanon*)

Transliteration shows students origins of terms.

Is most often used to designate the collection of biblical books that Christians accept as uniquely authoritative for defining Christian faith and practice. From the literal meaning of “reed” the term took on the figurative sense of a measuring rod, or ruler, to the general sense of a norm, or standard. In the Early Church, the term was used to refer to the doctrinal and ethical teachings of the apostles that defined the Christian faith. It was not applied to the OT and NT until the fourth century (Dunbar, 300). Thus “canon” designates the boundaries of God’s inspired Word or written revelation (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 92), which are not the same for all Christian traditions.<sup>5</sup> (See APOCRYPHA below.)

While the term raises a host of issues about what various church traditions regard as authoritative in defining their faith,<sup>6</sup> the application to hermeneutics is foundational. Biblical hermeneutics seeks to interpret only those scriptures regarded as canon. Some scholars like Brevard Childs argue that the canon should shape our interpretation of the Scriptures and is the most appropriate context for doing biblical theology.

## **Apocrypha**

Derived from the Greek word meaning “hidden,” refers to a collection of books in the SEPTUAGINT (Gk. version of the OT), and the Latin Vulgate. They are accepted as canonical Scripture by Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. However, they are rejected as noncanonical and omitted from the Protestant and Jewish canons of Scripture.

<sup>5</sup> Most notably Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy accept the books of the APOCRYPHA as part of the inspired CANON of Scripture.

<sup>6</sup> “For example, Roman Catholicism sees various expressions (both oral and written) of church tradition as authoritative. Among these would be the creeds and decisions of the *Magisterium*, the teaching office of the Church. Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes that liturgy and worship hold an authoritative role in defining orthodoxy. Methodism’s *quadrilateral* doctrine recognizes that along with the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience must be consulted.” For a broader discussion of these traditions, see J. D. Woodbridge and T. E. McComiskey, *Doing Theology in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

## Canonical

Designates those biblical writings recognized by the Christian church as the inspired canon of Scripture. Scholars writing on the history of the formation of the biblical canon will apply the word in one of three ways: (1) to the character, or quality, that expresses the apostolic faith; (2) to the authoritative status a writing has; (3) to the inclusion of a writing in the delimited canon of Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

Terms illustrated with Scripture examples.

## Commissive language

From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.  
—Gal. 6:17, NASB

Refers to language the goal of which is motivation to action or decision, to express emotions, or to evoke an emotional response. It is usually placed over against “referential language,” which is

used to dispassionately describe something by conveying information (Stein 1994, 73).<sup>8</sup> See REFERENTIAL MEANING.

## Conceptual parallel

But [He] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.  
—Phil. 2:7, NASB

Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same. —Heb. 2:14, NASB

Occurs when two or more passages or verses address the same subject, concept, or idea without using the same words. For example, Philippians 2:7,8 and Hebrews 2:9–15 both describe the incarnation of Christ, but

with different terminology.

## Connotative meaning

“And with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, KJV), i.e., the wounds and marks of Christ’s sufferings on the cross.

Refers to verbal meaning that is a departure from the ordinary literal sense of a word to a special use or application of that word in a specific context or association. See CONTEXTUAL MEANING and

DENOTATIVE MEANING.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent survey of this issue, see Theodore Donner, “Some Thoughts on the History of the New Testament Canon,” *Themelios* 7 (1982): 23–27.

<sup>8</sup> The two terms are not mutually exclusive, for people can pass along information while using “commissive language” and the information conveyed by “referential language” can stir up an emotional response. See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 74.



# 2

## Historical Schools/Periods of Interpretation

### Alexandrian School

Flourished in Alexandria, Egypt, from the third to fifth century AD.<sup>1</sup> It is most often associated with the ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION of Clement of Alexandria<sup>2</sup> (ca. 155–215) and ORIGEN (185–254), who were indebted to the Jewish philosopher PHILO. Origen is credited with giving systematic development to the allegorical method in his work *De Principiis* (Book IV). The Alexandrian school had two key motivations behind allegorizing the OT: (1) to make it compatible to elements of Greek philosophy and (2) to show that NT teaching could be found in the OT, the Old Testament. (Ramm 1970, 31–33; Mickelsen, 32).

Concise definitions lay a foundation for understanding biblical interpretation.

### Allegorical interpretation

A method of interpretation where the interpreter looks beyond the historical (literal, plain) sense of the words to a hidden so-called spiritual meaning. Although the literal sense is not denied, the allegorical meaning is regarded as more important. One can readily see the influence of Platonic dualism here, where the physical is contrasted with the spiritual. Thus, Clement taught that Scripture had a twofold sense, corresponding to the body and soul of a human being. ORIGEN, his successor in the ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL, using the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, posited three meanings of Scripture, corresponding to body, soul, and spirit. The literal sense is identified with the body, and is clearly inferior to the soul and spiritual meanings, which are only accessible through

<sup>1</sup> For a concise history of the Alexandrian School and a sympathetic discussion of its method as practiced by Clement and Origen, see Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 52–62.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent resource for investigating historical figures related to the field of biblical hermeneutics, see Donald K. McKim, ed., *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

allegorizing.<sup>3</sup> Origen would probably prefer to call his method “spiritualizing,” and at times his exegesis is a mixture of **TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION** and **ALLEGORY**. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Origen saw **ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION** as true exegesis and the only way to uncover the deeper spiritual truths of Scripture (Mickelsen, 32; Ramm 1970, 33; Grant and Tracy, 55–56).

To be fair, Clement and Origen both developed rules and principles governing allegorical interpretation.<sup>4</sup> They did not see Scripture as capable of any meaning imaginable. However, because they saw the Bible as a spiritual book, symbolic and full of allegory,<sup>5</sup> the allegorical method gave rise to fanciful interpretations never imagined by the author or his intended audience.<sup>6</sup>

### Antiochian School

A school of interpretation begun in Syrian Antioch and dating back to Theophilus of Antioch (ca. AD 115–188).<sup>7</sup> However, the founding of a later Antiochian School is credited to either Lucian of Samosata at the end of the third century AD (d. ca. AD 394). Adherents of this school rejected the **ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL** in favor of an approach that is known as the **GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL METHOD** of biblical interpretation and historical meaning of Scripture. However, they also rejected the hyperliteralism of the Jewish community

<sup>3</sup> Origen saw these three senses as also relating to three levels of spiritual maturity. The simple Christian benefits from the “flesh,” or literal, sense of Scripture; the “more advanced” profits from the “soul” sense of Scripture and the “perfect” is edified by the spiritual sense. See Origen *De Principiis* 4.2.4, cited by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 219.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard L. Ramm gives a concise summary of these principles in *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 31–33. Grant and Tracy give several key quotes of Origen in justifying his abandoning the literal sense to pursue an allegorical one. See *Short History*, 57–59.

<sup>5</sup> Ramm cites Jean Danielou’s observation that for Origen “the Bible was one vast allegory, a tremendous sacrament in which every detail is symbolic.” See *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> A classic example often cited is Origen’s interpretation of the story of Rebekah’s drawing water for the camels of Abraham’s servant Eliezer (Gen. 24). Origen maintained that this taught that we must come to the wells of Scripture if we would meet Christ. In the story of the triumphal entry where Jesus enters with the donkey *and* its colt, Origen sees the truth that the doctrine of Christ is supported by both the Old and New Testaments! See Mickelsen, *Interpreting*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> For an insightful and informative introduction to this school, by discussing separately the views of its major proponents, see David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 103–28.

# 3

## Prominent Figures in Hermeneutics

### Aquinas, Thomas (ca. 1225–1274)

The premier theologian of the medieval period whose *Summa Theologica* gave rational systematic expression to the Christian faith and eventually defined orthodoxy for the Catholic Church. Although Aquinas argued that the Bible has symbolic meanings and was committed to the fourfold sense of Scripture (see QUADRIGA), he insisted on the primacy of the literal sense from which symbolic or spiritual meanings are derived. He identified the literal sense with the meaning intended by the author and the meaning upon which doctrine is to be founded. Thus, Aquinas is a transitional figure who marks the end of the total dominance of allegorical interpretation and anticipates the literal emphasis of the Protestant Reformation (see Grant and Tracy, 88–91; McQuilken, 38; Hubbard, 39). See MIDDLE AGES.

Provides students background information on those who influenced the study of Scripture.

### Augustine (354–430)

A church father and the most dominant figure in theology and biblical interpretation before THOMAS AQUINAS. His *De Doctrina Christiana* is a handbook of hermeneutics and homiletics. In it he develops a theory of signs that is an ancient precursor to semantics or philosophical linguistics (see SEMIOTICS), an exploration of how language works in communication through signs, sounds, and speech that is foundational to hermeneutics. Augustine was driven to allegorical interpretation out of an apologetic concern for defending Christian orthodoxy (the rule of faith) against the heretical Manicheans, known for their extreme literalism (Grant and Tracy, 78–80; Ramm 1970, 35).

### Quadriga

Denotes the fourfold method of interpretation of Scripture that was firmly established and widely practiced in Catholic exegesis from the

fourth century (Augustine) to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. By this method a Scripture was seen to have four different meanings: literal, tropological (moral), allegorical (mystical, includes typological), and anagogical (prophetic or eschatological).

### Barth, Karl (1886–1968)

The Swiss pastor-theologian credited with giving birth to NEOORTHODOXY with the publication of his commentary on Romans in 1919. Influenced by the existentialism of SOREN KIERKEGAARD, he stressed a revelational encounter with the Word of God. In this he reemphasized the authority of the Scripture as the Word of God (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 47). However, he did not regard the Bible as revelation *itself*, only the *witness to* revelation and the medium through which God speaks his Word today. While his theological contribution was monumental to the movement, he did not significantly add to the development of hermeneutical theory. Nevertheless, his work provoked hermeneutical reflection and anticipated some of the interpretive features of RUDOLF BULTMANN and the NEW HERMENEUTIC, especially regarding the role given the interpreter's subjectivity in the interpretive process.<sup>1</sup>

### Bultmann, Rudolf (1884–1976)

Professor of New Testament (1921–51), Germany, best known as one of the pioneers of **Greek words enhance and reinforce descriptions.** *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, (1921). However, known as an existential theologian who advocated a **known as DEMYTHOLOGIZATION**, which he believed was essential if the gospel proclamation (**kerygma**) was to be preached to moderns (Bray, 429).

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Bultmann's approach was his historical skepticism. Because the *kerygma* is existential in nature, it cannot rest on facts of history.<sup>2</sup> According to this point of view, history can establish almost nothing of certainty about the historical Jesus. And even though historical-critical studies are necessary, their results are irrelevant with respect

<sup>1</sup> Bernard L. Ramm describes the reader's response to the paradoxical truth of Scripture: "We do decide for them. We do embrace them. But we do not embrace them with a rational act, but with the inwardness of faith, with the passion of faith, with subjectivity." See *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 56.

<sup>2</sup> Duncan Ferguson describes Bultmann's method as an attempt to leap over history to an understanding mediated through existential identification and involvement with the text and its message. He writes, "The real issue for faith is not what happened *then* but what happens *now* in the moment of existential decision. . . . The meaning of the *kerygma* is not to be sought in uncovering the historical Jesus, which is impossible anyway, but in the awareness

# 4

## Interpretive Approaches and Methods

### Types of Biblical Criticism

#### Form criticism (F-C)

The attempt to get behind the written biblical text to a preliterate period when individual units of oral tradition first circulated before becoming part of a literary text. Form critics categorize these units by their literary form, which they believe reflect community needs and situations. They hypothesize that as these units of tradition circulated they were adapted and shaped by the needs of differing communities. Furthermore, they believe that by careful analysis of this shaping process, one can not only identify the original life setting (see *SITZ IM LEBEN*) that gave rise to a particular form, but also reconstruct the history of the early Christian movement.<sup>1</sup> The father of F-C is the OT scholar Hermann Gunkel. In the NT, a pioneering figure of F-C is RUDOLF BULTMANN.

#### Higher criticism / critics (See Historical criticism)

#### Historical criticism (H-C)

The attempt to determine the historical and literary details behind a text that explain its composition (Erickson, 88). Sometimes called “higher criticism,” it deals with a whole range of historical and literary considerations, including authorship, date of composition, intended audience, sources used, authenticity of content, historical purpose or occasion, literary unity, genre,

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<sup>1</sup> One of the clearest explanations of F-C, its theory, goals, and method, is found in Millard Erickson’s *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 89–98. See also Stephen H. Travis, “Form Criticism,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 153–64.

and style (Ramm 1970, 9).<sup>2</sup> One goal of H-C is to write a chronological narrative reconstructing the pertinent events and revealing wherever possible the interconnection of the events themselves.<sup>3</sup>

## Literary criticism

A flexible term applied to a wide range of concerns within biblical criticism. It is used to refer to “higher” criticism (see HISTORICAL CRITICISM). More narrowly it has been applied to SOURCE CRITICISM and its concern to identify the literary sources used in the composition of a writing. It is commonly used to refer to the analysis of the Bible as literature in its formal literary characteristics: language, style, genre, form, and structure. Recent use has expanded its reference to various modern literary approaches, such as RHETORICAL CRITICISM, NARRATIVE CRITICISM, and POST-STRUCTURALISM (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 428–40; Soulen 1981, 113; McKim 1996, 67).

**Lower criticism / critics** (see TEXTUAL CRITICISM)

## Narrative criticism

Traditionally the approach that seeks to explore the genre of narrative and its aesthetic literary quality in regard to characterization, plot development, thematic content, style, symbolism, figural language, etc. (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 432–33). How-  
ment of modern literary criticism, which is not  
with the narrative text itself but as the i-  
reader (Tate, 94–95).

Broad terms are broken down into sub-entries for further clarification.

### Implied author

In modern NARRATIVE CRITICISM, the distinction is made between the “real author,” who actually wrote the text, and the “implied author,” who is a limited reflection of the author in the text. For example, the biblical author of more than one book reveals different portraits of

<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, “Historical Criticism,” in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Marshall, 126–38.

<sup>3</sup> Note that implicit is a test of the historical accuracy (or authenticity) of the recorded events. Combined with naturalistic presuppositions, modern historical criticism rejects much of the supernatural accounts in Scripture and tends to be skeptical about the historical reliability of the Bible in general. See Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 27–32.

# 5

## Literary Genres

Extensive Scripture passages provide context for each genre.

### Apocalypse (Gk., “uncovering, revelation”)

A kind of ancient prophetic literature, Jewish and Christian, that claims to be God’s revelation of his coming judgment and deliverance at the end of history (this “present age”).<sup>1</sup> Most of the apocalyptic writings that exist today were written from about 200 BC to AD 200. However, biblical apocalypses have their roots in OT prophetic literature and can be found in portions of Daniel (7–12), Ezekiel (38–39), Isaiah (24–27), and Zechariah (9–14). The most notable NT apocalypse is the Book of Revelation, which has epistolary elements as well (Duvall and Hays, 273–76).

Apocalyptic literature is marked by a number of distinctive characteristics,<sup>2</sup> the most challenging of which is its use of symbolic language and imagery. In an apocalypse the “seer” is given a revelation through an angelic messenger in a dream or vision. What he sees through prophetic vision belongs to an

<sup>1</sup> Some distinctions in terminology are helpful: “apocalypse” refers to the genre of literature; “apocalyptic” (as a noun and adjective) refers to the eschatological framework and perspective within a select group of writings; “apocalypticism” refers to the sociological ideology (and historical movement) that marks the literature as distinct. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Pub. Co, 2000), 219. An extremely helpful discussion of apocalyptic literature, its thematic content, and literary characteristics can be found in George E. Ladd, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 1979, 151–61. Ladd not only discusses universal characteristics of apocalyptic literature, but shows how OT and NT apocalypse diverge from non-canonical apocalypses. Apocalyptic literature has been examined from both a literary and social perspective. As literature, it is described in terms of its internal thematic content and stylistic elements. As a social phenomena, it is regarded as a historical movement that reflects a distinct way of looking at the world from the particular socio-religious setting that produced or shaped that perspective. For an introduction to these two complementary approaches to apocalyptic literature, see J. J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, FOTL 20 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 2–24.

<sup>2</sup> Among those most commonly listed are (1) visionary motif, the source of revelation; (2) use of symbolic language; (3) pseudonymity, false claim of authorship (certainly not true of Revelation [1:4] and OT biblical apocalypses, unless traditional authorship is rejected); (4)

other world, a heavenly sphere of existence.<sup>3</sup> The symbolic images have hidden meaning and must be decoded before the message can be understood. Extensive historical and cultural exposure to various interpretive methods can uncover much of the meaning behind apocalyptic prophecy. The surface can seem strange, even bizarre and unintelligible (Goldsworthy, 218–21).

Students gain exposure to various interpretive methods.

**Futurist**

The interpretive approach to Revelation that views most of the events recorded in the Apocalypse (esp. 6–21) as awaiting a future fulfillment.

**Historicist**

The interpretive approach to Revelation that views the events recorded in the Apocalypse as depicting events occurring throughout the entire Church Age.

**Idealist**

The interpretive approach to Revelation that does not view the events recorded in the Apocalypse as literal or historical (whether past, present or future), but symbolic pictures of the perennial struggle between good and evil.

**Preterist**

The interpretive approach to Revelation that views the events recorded in the Apocalypse as past, depicting historical events in the first century of the Church.

### Comedy

Not a funny or amusing story but one with a happy ending. That is, a biblical comedy has a characteristic plot in which problems or crises develop

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pessimistic tone, the present and future paints a bleak picture; (5) eschatological, emphasis on God bringing about an end to history (this age); (6) deterministic, God is in control of history, which is moving toward a divinely appointed end; (7) dualism, contrasting opposites are seen in two distinct ages, the present age and the age to come, and two rival supernatural powers, God and Satan (note that in biblical apocalypses, Satan is not an adversary equal to God, although his moral and spiritual antagonist. He remains a creature and ultimately under God's dominion and control).

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Collins sees the revelation of otherworldly reality via angelic mediation as essential to the genre of an apocalypse. His definition reads, "Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality." See J. J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia*, 14 (1979): 9. Cited by G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 219.



# 6

## Literary Devices

"I especially appreciate the chapter on literary devices since these terms are hard to track down in one place. Even professors often need help with them!"

--David Clark, Ph.D., professor of New Testament, Vanguard University

### Parallelism

A structure of two or more poetic lines or verses that are conceptually related to each other. The poetic lines cohere and work together to develop a shared thought, sometimes by repetition, contrast, or addition (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 225–36). Because of the structure of thought, it is helpful to read line by line rather than sentence by sentence (Duvall and Hays, 337–38).

The most characteristic feature of Hebrew poetry, parallelism falls into three basic types: antithetic, synonymous, and synthetic (Fee and Stuart 1982, 162). However, scholars sometimes break down one or more of these types into additional types in order to more precisely describe the development of thought.

#### Antithetic parallelism

A type of parallelism wherein the thought of the second or subsequent line contrasts with that of the previous line (Fee and Stuart 1982, 180; Kaiser and Silva, 89).

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A wise son brings joy to his father,  
but a foolish son grief to his mother. —Prov. 10:1

---

#### Chiasm

A literary technique that uses a form of parallelism wherein the words, phrases, or concepts given in successive lines are inverted in the following lines (Kaiser 1981, 225f). This technique was considered a

---

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, A  
born of a woman, born under law, B  
to redeem those under law, B'  
that we might receive the full rights of sons. A'  
—Gal. 4:4,5

---

most dignified and stately form of presentation and therefore was reserved for solemn and important portions of Scripture (Bullinger, 374).<sup>1</sup>

### Climactic parallelism

---

Sing to the LORD a new song;  
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
Sing to the LORD, *praise his name.*  
—Ps. 96:1–2a

A repetition of the same thought in four lines. The lines are arranged in ascending fashion (the alternate name of “staircase parallelism”), sometimes ending with a culminating thought (Kaiser and Silva, 92).

Examples help students quickly understand literary devices.

### Emblematic symbolism

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As water reflects a face,  
so a man’s heart reflects the man.  
—Prov 27:19

A common rhetorical feature of Hebrew poetry involving parallelism: one line gives a literal or factual statement and the other line a simile or metaphor (Kaiser 1981, 223).

### Synonymous parallelism

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I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,  
your sins like the morning mist. —Isa. 44:22

A strengthening or reinforcing of a line by a line that follows it, usually restating the first line’s thought in some fashion but without significant addition or subtraction of thought (Kaiser and Silva, 88–89).<sup>2</sup>

### Synthetic parallelism

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He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber.  
—Ps. 121:3  
Praise be to the LORD,  
for he showed his wonderful love to me.  
—Ps. 31:21

A second line further developing the thought of the first (consequently, also called “developmental” parallelism) (Duvall and Hays, 338). However, sometimes there is a series of parallel lines with similar structure but no real development of thought (see Ps. 148:7–12).

<sup>1</sup> It no doubt also served as a memory aid when reciting something orally.

<sup>2</sup> A related parallelism is that of “continuation,” where what initially appears to be a simple repetition of the original thought actually advances it. For example, see Isa. 40:9: “You who bring good tidings to Zion, *go up on a high mountain.* You who bring good tidings to

# Rhetorical / Literary Devices

## Alliteration

The repetition of the same or a similar sound, usually the initial consonantal sound, in two or more neighboring words or syllables. The purpose of alliteration is to create a notable sequence of sounds. Native speakers of

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And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. —1 John 5:4, NASB

*Kai haute estin he nike he nikesasa ton kosmon—he pistic hemon.*

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English will likely remember the alliteration in the children’s tongue twister: “Sister Susie sells seashells by the seashore.” However, alliteration in the Bible is discernible only to those who read the Scriptures in the original biblical languages.

## Assonance

The repetition of the same or similar vowel sound in a sequence of words. As with ALLITERATION, the purpose of assonance is to create a notable sequence of sounds that gives emphasis to the words (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 221). For example, in English you can express the thought of being unwilling to compromise your wishes by saying, “It’s my way or the highway.”<sup>3</sup> As with alliteration, assonance is lost in translation and so is discernible only by taking note of the original biblical languages.

## Asyndeton (Gk., “without conjunctions”)

Refers to the omission of conjunctions that ordinarily join coordinate words or clauses in a list or sequence of thoughts. The terseness of expression usually adds effect to the words. Often the elements in the asyndeton lead up to a climactic thought, which the asyndeton serves to emphasize (Bullinger, 37); e.g., “I came, I saw, I conquered.”

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Saul said to the Kenites,

“Go,

depart,

go down from among the Amalekites,

so that I do not destroy you with them.”

—1 Sam. 15:6, NASB

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Jerusalem, *lift up your voice with a shout*” (cited and discussed in William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Waco, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1993], 232).

<sup>3</sup> An informal expression by which the speaker insists on having his own way and those who do not like it can leave in the most direct fashion (the highway being one such route).

## Diatribes

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Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time*?—2 Cor. 1:17, NASB

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A lengthy speech that has a harsh and bitter tone, filled with sarcasm, criticism, or denunciation. However, as a subgenre, it refers to a method of instruction in which the instructor enters into dialogue with opponents (real or imagined) who raise hypothetical questions or objections. These are then addressed and answered (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 356). In his letters Paul often anticipates his opponents' criticism of him in the form of a question which he then responds to.

## Double entendre (Fr., “double meaning”)

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In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not *comprehend* it.  
—John 1:4,5, NASB

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A word or expression capable of two interpretations or meanings, both of which would fit the immediate literary context. The two senses would also produce true statements (Bullinger, 805). This device is relatively rare in Scripture and assumes that the audience is well aware of the dual sense of the text. However, which sense the author intended, if he had both meanings in mind or if he purposely intended to be ambiguous, is impossible to know with certainty. The text box illustrates this device in John 1:5 where “comprehend” translates *katalambano*, which can mean to “lay hold of” or “overtake” in the sense of subdue or overpower (Mark 9:18; John 12:35; 1 Thess. 5:4), or metaphorically to “seize” or “grasp” something, i.e., to understand it (Acts 4:13; 10:34; Eph. 3:18).

## Epizeuxis (Gk., “duplication”)

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“Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth.” —Gen. 6:17, NASB  
They . . . woke Him up, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” —Luke 8:24, NASB

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A very common literary device whereby a word is repeated for strong emphasis. The repeated word must be used in the same sense (Bullinger, 189).

## Inclusio (or “inclusion”)

A rhetorical device that utilizes the repetition of words, phrases, or expressions to mark off the beginning and ending of a section (Kaiser and Silva, 75). The repetition serves to bracket the passage and emphasize and draw

# 7

An entire section dedicated to additional terms from fields of biblical studies and theology in order to provide background for biblical interpretation.

## Related Terms from Other Disciplines

### Biblical Studies—Introduction / Background

**Abyss** (Gk. *abyssos*, “deep/ bottomless pit”)

A transliteration of the Greek, appearing nine times in the NT.<sup>1</sup> When translated it appears most often as “the bottomless pit” and carries the sense of some place very deep beneath the surface of the earth.<sup>2</sup> In the NT it designates a place assigned to demons, but to which they were unwilling to be sent (Luke 8:31). It is also the place of the dead (Rom. 10:7). The Book of Revelation describes it as the place from which the “beast” ascends to earth, bringing war and destruction (Rev. 11:7; 17:8), governed by the “angel of the Abyss,” called Abaddon (in Hebrew) and Apollyon (in Greek). It is also the place where Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3) before the occurrence of the Great White Throne Judgment described in Rev. 20:11–15.

### Amanuensis

Designates a scribe who writes from dictation or copies a manuscript. Tertius was Paul’s amanuensis for the letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:22). In all probability Paul used an amanuensis to write his epistles but often penned the closing greeting himself (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Phile. 19).

### Aramaic (language)

A Semitic language related to Hebrew but not derived from it. It was the language of state diplomacy used by the Assyrian, Babylon, and Persian empires. Portions of the OT are in Aramaic (e.g., Dan. 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; and Jer. 10:11).

<sup>1</sup> See Luke 8:31; Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew *tehôm* (“deep place”) with the Greek *abyssos*, which is parallel to the “face of the waters.” The oceans are viewed as the fathomless deep on which the earth rested. Ironically, the demons within the Geresene demoniac of Luke 8 entreat Christ to send them into a herd of pigs rather than into the “abyss,” but wind up in the sea. One wonders if Luke’s choice of detail is his way of using tragic irony—pointing to the sea as the entrance to the abyss.

It was used by the Jews in the time of Jesus, who probably spoke in Aramaic.<sup>3</sup>

## Archaeology

The scientific study of the material remains of human society, culture, and activity, especially as it applies to antiquity. It is most often associated with the excavation of ancient sites of human occupation to uncover fossils, relics, artifacts, tools, monuments, buildings, etc., i.e., all physical evidence that reveals how people lived.

## Armageddon (Gk. *Harmagedōn*)

A geographical location mentioned only in Rev. 16:16. Its exact location is disputed and uncertain. A popular identification is with the “hill of Megiddo” (Heb. *har Megeddon*), some 50 miles northeast of Jerusalem, which was the site of significant OT battles (e.g., Jud. 4, 7). In the Book of Revelation it marks the final battle in the “war of the great day of God” (16:14) between Christ and the Antichrist. This has led some scholars to see it not as a literal place but a symbol of God’s final triumph over evil. The term is broadly used in secular literature of a final catastrophic battle between the forces of good and evil that marks the end of the world (G. E. Ladd, *BDT*, 50).

## Artemis

A goddess in Greek mythology and patroness-protector of the city of Ephesus (Acts 19). Known as Diana to the Romans, Artemis was a fertility goddess who presided over childbirth. The Ephesian idol depicts a many-breasted woman, a symbol of sexual fruitfulness. She is depicted in Greek literature as a hunter and lover of nature (Ferguson, 18, 162–63).

## Asceticism

The practice of strict (and often extreme) self-denial in order to advance one’s spiritual development. Such practice usually includes the denial or delay of certain physical needs or desires in order to devote oneself to spiritual matters. Asceticism, as sometimes practiced by Gnostic groups in the Early Church, proceeded from a Greek notion that the body, being material, is inherently evil and the root of sin. Humans also possess a spirit which is good. Therefore, ascetic practices served to promote spirituality by destroying sin and

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<sup>3</sup> See Nehemiah 8, where after Ezra read the book of the Law, it had to be translated, presumably into Aramaic. Moreover, certain Aramaic words appear in the Gospels along with their translations. E.g., *Talitha kum* (“Little girl, I say to you, arise!”—Mark 5:41); Golgotha (“place of the skull”—Matt. 27:33); *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* (“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”—Mark 15:34).

ing sin and bodily desires. Such a belief is foreign to biblical teaching which presents human personhood as a unity and integration of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). In principle the NT teaches spiritual discipline that includes self-denial.<sup>4</sup> However, it does not teach asceticism as a means of overcoming sin or the desires of the flesh (Col. 2:20–23) (Mattke, *BDT*, 52–53).

## **Asherah**

The Canaanite mother-goddess closely associated in the OT with idolatrous worship of Baal (Jud. 3:7; 6:25),<sup>5</sup> but not to be confused with Ashtoreth, another Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war (Jud. 2:13; 10:6; 1 Kings 11:5). The name is also used of the carved images (Asherim) used to worship Asherah. Israel was repeatedly called to tear down, destroy, or burn these images (Ex. 34:13; Deut. 12:3; 1 Kings 15:13).

## **Assyria**

The powerful nation situated northeast of Israel, whose capital was Nineveh. Assyria took the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity ca. 722 B.C. and was itself conquered by Babylon in 612 B.C. Assyria plays prominently in the history of Israel recorded in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, as well as the prophetic books of Jonah and Nahum.

## **Autographa** (Gk. *autographos*, “written by one’s own hand”)

The original manuscript of a biblical text as written by its inspired author. While the Church possesses no autographs of a biblical text, the work of textual criticism compares and analyzes all manuscript copies of a text in an attempt to determine what was written in the autograph.<sup>6</sup> The tremendous quality and volume of manuscripts available to the modern textual critic has resulted in the

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus endorsed the practice of fasting (Matt. 9:15) and even celibacy “for the sake of the kingdom” (Matt. 19:12). Paul acknowledged that celibacy was a noble and beneficial “gifting” for some, but not for all (1 Cor. 7:7-9). Couples might even temporarily postpone sexual relations to concentrate on prayer but are warned against prolonged abstinence that would lead to temptation (7:5).

<sup>5</sup> It may be that Asherah was viewed as the consort (wife) of Baal. However, in the Ras Shamra texts, Asherah is a goddess of the sea and consort of El, the chief Canaanite god. See T. C. Mitchell, “Asherah” in the *NBD*, 95.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the text of Scripture is incredibly reliable and unparalleled in its authenticity compared to any other piece of ancient literature. See F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), and Walter Kaiser, Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001). For an extremely informative description of the work of NT

# Dictionary of Hermeneutics

A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions

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