Chapter 2
Christian Hermeneutics

> It is thus difficult to see how the product of the text can be severed into divine and human components, each reflecting independent intention--one human and the other divine. Therefore, to understand the intention of the human author is to understand the intention of the divine author --Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics

This chapter presents an overview of hermeneutics as practiced by Christian scholars, while Chapter 3 gives an overview of Rabbinic methods of Scripture exegesis. While there are a number of distinct contrasts between Christian and Jewish hermeneutics, there is also a definite overlap on several core issues, as seen, for example, in the seven *middoth* of Hillel and the 13 *middoth* of Rabbi Ishmael.

Introduction

In a recent article on Isaiah 7:14, John Walton begins with the following paragraph:

> Not many would contest the statement that Isa 7:14 is one of the most significant passages in the discussion of the NT use of the OT or of the issue of the hermeneutics of prophecy and fulfillment. It could also be considered a major test case for the question of the extent to which hermeneutics needs to be subordinated to exegesis or exegesis to hermeneutics.[1]

Walton definitely opts for the former approach, namely, subordinating hermeneutics to exegesis. He is right that this is an important issue related to the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. However, before discussing this question of priority and Walton's position, it is helpful to review the traditional understanding of hermeneutics among conservative Christian scholars and also several alarming trends among current evangelicals that call into question some of its particulars. Emphasis is placed on those issues relevant to the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.

Historical Understanding of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is essentially a part of biblical studies. Although the study of the Greek and Roman classics also requires certain principles and rules for the interpretation of these texts, *hermeneutics* is a special application of this general science of linguistics and meaning tailored to interpreting the Bible. Within a biblical context, then, *general hermeneutics* generally refers to the principles and rules applicable to the entire Bible, while *special hermeneutics* refers to that set of specialized principles and rules applicable to specific parts or genres of Scripture, such as prophecy, poetry, etc.[2]

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1   John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" *JETS* 30 (September 1987):289.
2   Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.; original publication date, 1885), p. 17; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970; the first edition was published in 1950), p. 11. However, some modern writers use these two

Milton Terry, author of one of the classic works on biblical hermeneutics, defines the discipline as "the science of interpretation."[3] He also points out that hermeneutics is to be distinguished from other branches of theological study, namely, *biblical introduction*, *textual criticism*, and *exegesis*. Of these three branches, he offers the following definitions:

> Biblical Introduction...is devoted to the historico-critical examination of the different books of the Bible. It inquires after their age, authorship, genuineness, and canonical authority, tracing at the same time their origin, preservation, and integrity, and exhibiting their contents, relative rank, and general character and value. The scientific treatment of these several subjects is often called the "Higher Criticism."[4]

As pointed out in Chapter 1, "higher criticism" today is generally called "historical criticism." Terry describes "textual criticism" as follows:

> Textual criticism has for its special object the ascertaining of the exact words of the original texts of the sacred books. Its method of procedure is to collate and compare ancient manuscripts, ancient versions, and ancient scripture quotations, and, by careful and discriminating judgment, sift conflicting testimony, weigh the evidence of all kinds, and thus endeavour to determine the true reading of every doubtful text. This science is often called the "Lower Criticism.[5]

In principle, once historical criticism and textual criticism do their job, hermeneutics can begin. Terry's expanded definition of hermeneutics is as follows:

> Hermeneutics...aims to establish the principles, methods, and rules which are needful to unfold the sense of what is written. Its object is to elucidate whatever may be obscure or ill-defined, so that every reader may be able, by an intelligent process, to obtain the exact ideas intended by the author.[6]

But there's another step in the process. Hermeneutics consists simply of principles and rules. The next step is exegesis:

> Exegesis is the application of these principles and laws [of hermeneutics], the actual bringing out into formal statement, and by other terms, the meaning of the author's words. Exegesis is related to hermeneutics...as practice is to theory.[7]

The final step is exposition. Although the term is sometimes used synonymously with exegesis, a distinction is often drawn:

> Exposition...denotes a more extended development and illustration of the sense [derived from exegesis], dealing more largely with other scriptures by comparison and contrast.[8]

Thus according to Terry, the procedure of biblical interpretation involves five steps in roughly this order: historical criticism, textual criticism, reference to an established body of principles and rules called hermeneutics,

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terms differently. According to Silva, in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 25, *general hermeneutics* refers to the principles and rules that apply to the interpretation of any texts (what has been called here the *general science of linguistics and meaning*), and *biblical hermeneutics* refers to the specialized application of these general principles and rules to the interpretation of biblical texts (what has been called here simply *hermeneutics*).

3   Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 17.
4   Ibid., p. 19. Note that this definition is similar to E. J. Young's definition cited by me in Chapter 1, footnote 35, where the rationalist/naturalist presupposition is not made part of the practice of "higher criticism."
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid.
7   Ibid.; brackets added.
8   Ibid.; brackets added.

exegesis, and finally exposition.

Some sixty years later, Bernard Ramm defines hermeneutics in much the same way, namely, as a science and art:

> Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation. As such it forms one of the most important members of the theological sciences.[9]

Ramm also delineates essentially the same sequence of steps as did Terry:

> The study of the canon determines the inspired books; the study of the text determines the wording of the books [textual criticism]; the study of historical criticism gives us the framework of the books; hermeneutics gives us the rules for the interpretation of the books; exegesis is the application of these rules to the books; and Biblical theology is the result.[10]

Note that according to these traditional views of hermeneutics, a system of hermeneutics must be in place prior to applying the process of exegesis. It is hermeneutics that provides the principles and rules that are applied during the process of exegesis. "Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics."[11]

The Conservative System of Hermeneutics

Since hermeneutics consists of a set of rules forming a system, there have, in fact, been a number of differing systems in the history of the church.[12] However, rather than review this history, it is sufficient here simply to present an overview of what Ramm defines as the "conservative Protestant system of hermeneutics."[13] For clarity, this overview is presented in the form of an outline and summarized, for the most part, in my own words.

I. Inspiration: The Foundation

The divine inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of this system of interpretation. This implies that a new dimension for interpretation is added when the Bible is the object. This dimension has three characteristics. Together they draw a distinction between the application of the rules of hermeneutics to the Bible as opposed to any of the classics.

    A. The spiritual aspect

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9   Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 1.
10   Ibid., p. 10; brackets added.
11   Ibid., p. 11.
12   Ramm, ibid., pp. 23-92, gives a good survey of the history of Christian hermeneutical methods, while Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, in addition to pp. 163-74, devotes the entire third part of his book, pp. 603-738, to reviewing this history, both Jewish and Christian. Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 257-72, also reviews this subject.
13   The inclusion of the word *Protestant* in Ramm's title, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, reflects primarily the fact that conservative Protestantism takes the Bible as *sola fidei regula* (sole rule of faith), whereas the position of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Oriental Church views the Bible as *prima fidei regula* (primary rule of faith); other rules of faith would be the moral unanimity of the Fathers, the ancient Creeds, the decisions of the ecumenical counsels, and Oral Tradition (p. 1). Accepting these additional authorities plays a role in the final interpretive decisions that are made regarding a biblical text. In addition, Catholic scholars have historically applied the "Four Fold Theory" for biblical interpretation: historical meaning, moral meaning, allegorical meaning, and eschatological meaning (p. 119). By contrast, the hermeneutical system proposed here assumes that a biblical text has but a single sense. However, as Ramm himself points out (p. 122), contemporary Roman Catholic scholarship often follows the Protestant model presented here, at least, I would add, in conservative circles. Therefore, I think the phrase "conservative system of hermeneutics" is sufficient. The summary outline here is based primarily, but not exclusively, on Ramm's presentation. For a full discussion of the details and defense of this system, see pp. 93-162.

The interpreter must have a deep reverence for God and rely on his Spirit to guide and direct the application of the the rules of hermeneutics.

B. The supernatural aspect

The possibility and presence of miracles, including predictive prophecy, is assumed.

C. The revelational aspect

During the period of revelation, it is possible that later revelation can add depth and specific significance to the meaning of words.

Those who take inspiration as a presupposition in the hermeneutical system do two things: first, put forth a concerted effort "to discover the true rules of interpretation,"[14] and second, reject all methods based on rationalistic presuppositions, which "indulge in the wholesale reconstruction of texts, histories, and documents."[15] In addition to conservative Protestants, Ramm points out that there are

> ...a considerable number of erudite scholars of the Jewish and Catholic faiths that have not capitulated to rationalism in criticism. Cf. Felix A. Levy, "Contemporary Trends in Jewish Bible Study," *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow* (Willoughby, editor), pp. 98-115; and, James Harrel Cobb, "Current Trends in Catholic Biblical Research," *ibid*., pp. 116-128.[16]

II. Edification: The Goal

Determining the meaning of a biblical text is not an end in itself. It is to promote a knowledge of God, the wisdom that leads to salvation, and instruction in righteousness.[17]

III. The Method of Hermeneutics

A. Theological Perspectives

This method of hermeneutics is based on certain theological presuppositions.[18]

1. The Perspicuity of Scripture

Lack of sufficient knowledge of ancient languages, the historical setting of a passage, or the immediate environment in which it was spoken or written can today make a passage difficult to interpret. However, in general what was spoken and written was intended to be understood by the contemporary audience.

2. Revelation is Accommodated

God accommodated his revelation to the human mind so that man can assimilate it. In this sense,

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14 Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 95.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 95, n. 1.
17 Cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-17.
18 The use of theology in biblical hermeneutics does not mean that one interprets a text to make it teach or be consistent with a certain theological view and system. This would be an example of *eisegesis* (Greek, *to lead into*) rather than *exegesis* (*to lead out of*). As Kaiser points out in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 44-45, if one does this, "at this point, one's theology has overridden one's exegetical skills, and the theology is being imported into the text *ab extra* (or from the outside) and laid as a grid over the text." As Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 115, points out, the danger "is that in the interpretation of Scripture the [theological] system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system."

revelation has an anthropomorphic character. For example, a preeminent position is in some instances described as sitting at "the right hand of God."[19] Since God is Spirit,[20] this anthropomorphic language is used to aid our understanding.

3. Revelation is Progressive

Various important topics and concepts revealed by God are often developed in more depth with additional new details by future revelation. As Kaiser states, "No portion of Scripture selected for exegesis and interpretation stands alone, but each is a part of a unified purpose and the ongoing progress of the history of redemption."[21]

4. Scripture Interprets Scripture

Clear passages can be used to help interpret obscure passages. However, in my view there is a qualification that must be added. This principle can be misapplied by using the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament. I take this practice to be illegitimate hermeneutics, and it is discussed later in this chapter in the section "The Role of the New Testament."[22]

5. The Analogy of Faith

This principle (in Latin, *analogia fidei*) reflects the general harmony of the teachings contained in Scripture. Texts cannot be in contradiction with each other, and on a doctrinal level, there is only one system of theology in the Scripture. Again, there is a qualification that I would add. As with the previous principle, this one has also been used incorrectly, especially in Old Testament exegesis. It is valid to use antecedent Scripture to help interpret a given Old Testament text, but it is quite invalid to impose a New Testament text onto an Old Testament text as a guide to its interpretation. Again, see the section later in this chapter, "The Role of the New Testament."

6. The Unity of the Meaning of Scripture

A passage of Scripture has only a single sense or meaning. This principle obviates much of the allegorical interpretation placed on the Old Testament by the early Church Fathers.

B. The Philological Principle

The word *philology* is sometimes used to mean linguistics, the study of language, including morphology, semantics, and syntax. However, it can also be used more broadly, as here, to mean the study of written historical sources, including therefore both history and linguistics, to determine the meaning of a passage or piece of literature. The philological principle proposed here is most often called the *grammatical-historical method*.[23] Its goal is to determine the meaning and intent of the original author.[24]

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19   See, e.g., Ps. 110:1, cited in Acts 2:35 and Heb. 1:13; cf. also Mark 16:19; Heb. 12:2.
20   Cf. John 4:24. God does not have hands in the sense that we have hands.
21   Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 66.
22   See also Kaiser's discussion of Scripture interpreting Scripture in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 247-49.
23   Sometimes written "*grammatico-historical* method." According to Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 203, the phrase, "grammatico-historical" is believed to have originated with Karl A. G. Keil, who had written a book on hermeneutics in 1810. (Note: this Keil is to be distinguished from Carl Friedrich Keil whose Old Testament commentaries are combined with those of Franz Delitzsch to form the well-know "Keil and Delitzsch" set.)
24   It must not be assumed that the grammatical-historical method always results in complete success. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 98-99, admits that the interpreter does not know the meaning of everything Scripture. He then cites the Talmudic rule, "Teach thy tongue to say, I do not know." Continuing, "That there are passages that are puzzling and have to date yielded to the skill of no interpreter must be candidly admitted." Citing William Lindsay, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1867), to explain part of the reason, "The obscurity of ancient documents is far more frequently occasioned by our ignorance of multitudes of things, then so familiarly known, that a passing allusion only

As the common name of this principle implies, it defines a twofold investigation of an ancient text: "grammar" and "history." These terms can be defined as follows.

1. "Grammatical" or "Literal"

As the name "grammatical-historical method" was originally used in the early nineteenth century, "grammatical" did not refer simply to the "grammar" or grammatical structure of a text. Rather, it implied what is now generally meant by the term "literal," namely, the simple, plain, direct, ordinary, or natural sense of a text based on its "grammar" in the modern use of the word.[25] Thus the grammatical-historical method is sometimes called the *literal* method of interpretation to distinguish it from allegorical and mystical methods. In Jewish hermeneutics, this "literal" meaning is called פְּשָׁט (*peshat*). Therefore, the grammatical-historical method is used to determine the literal meaning of a text and then to analyze it in view of the historical context, or background, of the passage.[26] The first part of this task, determining the literal or "grammatical" meaning of the text, requires the analysis of the following linguistic aspects.

a. Words

The meaning, or variety of possible meanings, of the words used in a text must be determined. To determine the meaning of words, words must be studied etymologically, comparatively, culturally, in light of corresponding words in cognate languages, and in the way they are translated in ancient translations of the text, if any. The term, *usus loquendi* (Latin for *usage in speaking*) is often used in this context and means "current usage of words as employed by a particular writer, or prevalent in a particular age."[27]

b. Grammar (per se)

Under this heading would come the inflection of words in general and the conjugation of verbs in particular. Grammar, then, as strictly defined, deals with syntax: the rules by which sentences are constructed. Ramm also includes the use of context within a document to aid in the determination of a text's meaning.

c. Literary genre

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was needed to present a vivid picture, than any difficulties connected with the language itself." Silva, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 284, states quite simply, "At times the definitive solution may be beyond the interpreter's reach, but one makes every effort to discover what the author meant." Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 47, adds additional insight that would apply when the interpreter is on the right track: "This is not to argue that the interpreter is able to gather all the special nuances that a speaker or writer may have intended. It is to contend only that there is enough that is jointly shared to make it possible to speak of *adequate* knowledge of what the sender intended to communicate. Few, if any, would argue that what has been received by the listener or interpreter is a *comprehensive* knowledge of the sender's thoughts with all of its nuances, much less a *comprehensive* knowledge of the total subject" (emphasis original).

25   Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 34-35.

26   Note that "literal" interpretation does not preclude figures of speech or symbolic language; it does mean that the figure or symbol must be intended by the author. In the second edition of Ramm's book, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956), he adds this note on how figures of speech are related to literal interpretation: "The literal meaning of the figurative expression is the proper or natural meaning as understood by students of language. Whenever a figure is used its literal meaning is precisely that meaning determined by grammatical studies of figures. Hence figurative interpretation does not pertain to the spiritual or mystical sense of Scripture, but to the literal sense." It might also be added that if one claims a certain passage uses figurative language, he must be prepared to name the figure (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, synecdoche, zeugma, paranomasia, personification, metonymy, etc.).

27   Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 181.

The genre of a given document is important to the process of interpretation. Is it history (e.g., Genesis, Acts), a dramatic epic (e.g., Job), poetry (e.g., Psalms), wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs), or apocalyptic (e.g. the Book of Revelation)? Special notice of figures of speech, parables, fables, riddles, etc. would also come under this heading.

2. Historical

Under this heading would come an investigation of both the historical context in which a document was written and the nature of the culture that produced that document. Geography is also sometimes relevant. Today, scholars generally agree that the cultural and geographical background of the New Testament was Palestine, not Greece. Rabbinics was more important than the Greek classics, and knowing Aramaic was often more important than knowing classical Greek.

Terry defines the grammatical-historical method of interpretation as follows:

Its fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey. It applies to the sacred books the same principles, the same grammatical process and exercise of common sense and reason, which we apply to other books. The grammatico-historical exegete...will investigate the language and import of each book....He will master the language of the writer, the particular dialect that he used, and his particular style and manner of expression. He will inquire into the circumstances under which he wrote, the manner and customs of his age, and the purpose or object which he had in view.[28]

He further explains,

The grammatico-historical sense of a writer is such an interpretation of his language as is required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history. Sometimes we speak of the literal sense, by which we mean the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences. By this term we usually denote a meaning opposed to the figurative or metaphorical. The grammatical sense is essentially the same as the literal, the one expression being derived from the Greek, the other from the Latin. But in English usage the word grammatical is applied rather to the arrangement and construction of words and sentences. By the historical sense we designate, rather, that meaning of an author's words which is required by historical considerations.[29]

The Current Hermeneutical Crisis

The previous section summarized the hermeneutical approach to interpreting a biblical text used in conservative Christian circles up to the 1970s. Indeed, Ramm wrote that "The true philological spirit...in Biblical interpretation has as its goal to discover the original meaning and intention of the text."[30] Unfortunately, as natural and straightforward as that approach to hermeneutics sounds, the situation is not quite as simple today. Kaiser makes this statement in his relatively recent book on hermeneutics:

However, the changes in the way texts are understood have been nothing less than earthshaking in the short time since Ramm wrote his volume. Almost every assumption that Ramm made has been challenged and tested by the winds of modernity and postmodernity.[31]

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28   Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 173.
29   Ibid., p. 203.
30   Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 115.
31   Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 9; on pp. 9-11, the authors reprint the Preface to the first edition of *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (1994). In the Preface to the second edition (2007), the authors state, "Since 1994, when the first edition appeared, those issues have not gone away, but rather have intensified. But the literature and the helps available have also increased."

According to Kaiser,[32] what began the upheaval in hermeneutics was a paper published by two literary critics, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in 1946.[33] The effective result was a new concept of the relationship between the author of a text and the meaning of that text. Authorial intent no longer defined the meaning of his text. Somehow, a text once written and delivered became autonomous from its author with regard to its meaning. According to this new mode of thinking, sometimes called the "New Criticism," the central problem with previous approaches to determining the meaning of a text was called the "intentional fallacy." In other words, it is a fallacious approach to define meaning as the author's intent.

In the Sixties, three additional publications profoundly influenced the study and practice of hermeneutics.

- In 1960 Hans-Georg Gadamer published his book, *Truth and Method*. His main thesis is that truth cannot be found by a reader's attempt to determine the author's meaning because every interpreter works within his own knowledge, culture, and historical setting.

- In 1965 Paul Ricoeur published his book, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. His main thesis is that committing a message to writing fundamentally alters the nature of communication. The meaning is no longer determined by the understanding of the original audience. Each new audience reads its own situation into the text and the meaning derived is no less valid than that derived by the original audience.[34]

- In 1967 E. D. Hirsch published his book, *Validity in Interpretation*. His purpose was to counter the new trends introduced by Wimsatt and Beardsley, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. He reaffirmed the historical view that the meaning of a text is determined by the author's intention: "To banish the original author as a determiner of meaning [as contemporary critics did] was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to interpretation."[35]

Since this latter view is central to my hermeneutical approach to Old Testament texts and is the view defended by Walter Kaiser, his four-point summary is cited here:[36]

1. Verbal meaning is whatever someone (usually the author) has willed to convey by a particular sequence of words and that can be shared by means of linguistic signs.

2. The author's truth-intention provides the only genuinely discriminating norm for ascertaining valid or true interpretations from invalid and false ones.

3. The first objective of hermeneutics is to make clear the text's verbal meaning, not its significance. Meaning is that which is represented by the text and what an author meant to say by the linguistic signs represented. Significance, by contrast, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, concept, situation, or any other possible number of things.

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32 My summary of these events is based on Kaiser's excellent review of them in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 29-33.
33 Ibid. p. 30. The article cited by Kaiser is W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946); the paper was reprinted in William K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1958).
34 In another of his books, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 47, Kaiser offers a rather humorous but quite appropriate comment about theories such as those of Gadamer and Ricoeur: "All of this introduces difficulties not only for interpreting Scripture, but even for interpreting the articles currently being written on hermeneutics. Why should those writers waste so much time trying to communicate the idea that there is a plurality of meanings which are locked into a hermeneutical circle? It would seem that these contemporary authors would like to borrow the single meaning and the traditional linear-movement hermeneutic just long enough to establish their own theses. Then they would like to invalidate the further use of the single-meaning procedure in interpreting other documents such as Scripture, for they regard application of the single-meaning procedure as a hopelessly antiquated approach to interpretation."
35 E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 5; brackets added.
36 Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 32.

4. The meaning of a text cannot change, but its significance can and does change. If meaning were not determinate, then there would be no fixed norm by which to judge whether a passage was being interpreted correctly.

Kaiser offers the following concluding statement:

> These are the major figures in the development of contemporary hermeneutical theory. The impact each has already had on our generation of interpreters--not to mention the future generations of interpreters of all types--has been nothing short of a major revolution in the way we assign meaning to written materials, including the Bible. Hardly any sphere of the interpretive process has escaped major restructuring and rethinking since the decade of the 1960s. The life of the interpreter will never be what it was prior to the last half-century.[37]

Current Hermeneutical Models

One can note perhaps three major results of the previously reviewed "revolution" in contemporary hermeneutics:

1. There are now multiple systems of interpretation within literary scholars in general, within biblical scholars, and even within evangelical or conservative circles.

2. The unique status of the Bible as both the inerrant word of God and the product of human authorship no longer plays a critical role in many of the newer hermeneutical approaches to interpretation, with the former characteristic often ignored.

3. The role that authorial intent should play in the interpretation of his text, if any, has been brought into serious question.

Result 1: Multiple Methods

Regarding result number one, it is beyond the scope of this book to define all the various hermeneutical models and views as currently practiced. Only those within a biblical context have any relevance to this book, but even within this sphere, there are now multiple hermeneutical models or views. Reducing them down to a well-defined list is difficult. Kaiser lists four:[38]

- The proof-text method
- The historical-critical method
- The reader-response method
- The syntactical-theological method

A recent book lists five methods, and has a representative of each present a paper defining and illustrating that method:[39]

- The historical-critical/grammatical view (Craig L. Blomberg)
- The literary/postmodern view (F. Scott Spencer)
- The philosophical/theological view (Merold Westphal)
- The redemptive-historical view (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.)
- The canonical view (Robert W. Wall)

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., pp. 33-35.
39 Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

In a more restricted overview, Elliot E. Johnson has published an article from an evangelical standpoint entitled "Dual Authorship and the Single Intended Meaning of Scripture."[40] In it he critiques two responses to the hermeneutical problem of how many meanings a Scripture passage can have and then presents his own alternative. He uses the following names for these three views:

- Single meaning[41]
- One literal meaning and several spiritual meanings
- One single meaning that includes related submeanings

However, the situation is more complicated than simply defining views that are difficult to delineate with all their varieties and nuances. That would be a lengthy task in itself and is beyond the scope of this book. The additional complication is that at this present point in time it is also difficult to differentiate between liberals and conservatives among those who work specifically in the field of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. This fact draws attention to result number two in the above list.

Result 2: Uniqueness of the Bible

Historically, evangelicals have held to a high view of Scripture. Vern Poythress puts this view quite simply and succinctly:

> In all cases...the result was that the literary product (specifically, the autograph [of a biblical text]) was *both* what God says *and* what the human author says (see e.g., Deut 5:22-33, Acts 1:16, 2 Pet 1:21).[42]

The extent to which liberal approaches to hermeneutics have been accepted by evangelical scholars focuses primarily on this very issue of the uniqueness of the Bible as the word of God. The book edited by Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, is a case in point. In a review of this book, Professor William Dennison makes the following observation:

> Has it not been said that evangelical theology in the post-Enlightenment era, with its emphasis on cultural relevance and the authenticity of human experience, is only one step away from a critical-liberal view of Christianity? To what extent has evangelical hermeneutics adopted modern critical methods? Well, if there is any question about how much critical thinking has infiltrated evangelical scholarship, one needs to look no further than the essays that appear in this volume--the lone exception being the stellar presentations by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.[43]

Indeed, Gaffin himself in his response to the other four views states,

> All five views are oriented toward considering the biblical documents as historically conditioned and culturally situated. All clearly recognize that they are to be understood in terms of their human authorship. What is not so clear, however, is how the other contributors regard the Bible's divine authorship (or inspiration, to use the classical term), in other words, how each contributor views the Bible as God's word. It seems appropriate in a symposium like this to raise this issue because it brings us into the area of hermeneutical foundations, namely, the underlying commitments inevitably present and

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40   Elliot E. Johnson has published an article from an evangelical standpoint entitled "Dual Authorship and the Single Intended Meaning of Scripture," *BSac* 143 (July-September 1986):218-27).

41   This is the view promoted by Walter Kaiser and accepted by me. I consider Johnson's objections to it to be weak and answerable. As an example of his own view in action, Johnson applies it to Isaiah 7:14. Several objections to his hermeneutical approach are therefore given at various points in the exegesis of this verse later in this book.

42   Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," *WJT* 48 (Fall 1986):242 (emphasis original; brackets added).

43   William D. Dennison, review of *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, in *New Horizons* (July 2013), p. 20.

controlling for any view of interpretation.[44]

In reading the lengthy and technical section, "A Brief History of the Development of Biblical Hermeneutics," by the editors, Porter and Stovell, I found no mention of which of the many new approaches, trends, and practices described fall within the sphere of an evangelical commitment to the Bible as the word of God.

Dennison gives the following assessment of Gaffin's response to the other four views:

> His response to the other positions may be one of the most helpful and penetrating articulations of the authority of Scripture that we have witnessed in decades. By revealing that the other viewpoints are not based upon the absolute authority of the Word of God and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, Gaffin exposes their frailty.[45]

Yes, commitment to the divine authority and inerrancy of the Bible is the foundation to legitimate hermeneutics. Therefore, in contrast to all these recent developments, the traditional conservative approach to hermeneutics has always recognized this foundational principle. Thus Bernard Ramm wrote,

> The divine inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of historic Protestant hermeneutics and exegesis.[46]

Similarly, Terry in his classic work, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, devotes an entire chapter to "The Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures" and opens it with this remark:

> Our appreciation of the Holy Scriptures will necessarily be influenced by our views of their claims as divinely inspired. Critical and exegetical study will be more or less serious and painstaking as the student feels a deep conviction that he is handling the very word of God.[47]

Terry's next chapter develops the "Qualifications of an Interpreter." He cites three: intellectual, educational, and spiritual. In discussing the spiritual qualification, he has this to say:

> First of all, the true interpreter needs a disposition to seek and know the truth. No man can properly enter upon the study and exposition of what purports to be the revelation of God while his heart is influenced by any prejudice against it, or hesitates for a moment to accept what commends itself to his conscience and his judgment.[48]

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44   Porter and Beth M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, p. 177.

45   Dennison, review of *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, p. 21. Gaffin is a Reformed theologian and retired professor from Westminster Theological Seminary, where strict adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith is required; the other four authors are not Reformed theologians at all. However, the infiltration of hermeneutical methodologies that do not presuppose the divine origin, authorship, and authority of the Bible does indeed extend to historically conservative Reformed circles, as is documented and discussed by Richard Pratt, Jr., "Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics," *Reformed Perspective Magazine* 8 (November 5-11 2006) at http://thirdmill.org (pages are not numbered). He writes, "Unfortunately, for several generations now biblical scholars in our branch of the church have pursued advanced studies under the tutelage of critical scholars. As a result, viewing Scripture as a human creation has found its way in varying degrees into our circles as well." Pratt considers it to be a serious situation: "I'm proposing to you that one of the most serious issues arising in our circles these days is which will be the melody line for us. Is the Bible fundamentally divine or is the Bible fundamentally human?" Moreover, the infiltration of liberal thinking is not limited to theories of hermeneutics: "The idea that the Scriptures are entirely historically reliable is so far from plausible in critical circles that anyone who claims such a notion is simply dismissed as ignorant or dishonest. Unfortunately, in recent years a very similar attitude has risen among our own scholars."

46   Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 93. Even among some liberals, it has been recognized that presuppositions about the Bible affect interpretation. A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 66, observes, "Earlier liberalism was under the illusion that it was objective. Bultmann saw clearly that the interpreter must surrender any pretense of neutrality and come to the text fully recognizing his own attitude and the framework of thought in which he operates."

47   Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 137.

48   Ibid., p. 156.

The critical models that have infiltrated evangelicalism are not based on these qualifications, though the practitioners within evangelical circles may still hold to the divine authority of the Bible.

It is beyond the scope of this book to argue the case for a hermeneutical model that is based on the foundational principle of the divine authorship and authority of the Bible and to critique those models that do not. It is also beyond the scope of this book to enumerate, define, and critique those models that do recognize this foundational principle. Rather, it is the purpose of this book to focus on the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 and its context. Divine authorship is simply a presupposition to the hermeneutical model defined and applied here.[49]

Result 3: The Role of Authorial Intent

In the current milieu of hermeneutical models, even evangelical scholars who explicitly base their method of hermeneutics on acceptance of the divine authorship of the Bible have brought the role of the intent of the human author into serious question. This issue is the most important of the three results for the exegesis and interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. The next two sections address this issue.

The Meaning of Meaning

The word "meaning" itself can be used in several different senses,[50] and these senses are related to key concepts in hermeneutics.[51]

Meaning as the Referent

The *referent* is the object or event to which a word, expression, or symbol refers. At times determining the "meaning" of a text--that is, the authorial intent--is dependent on knowing the referent. There is a good example in Acts 8:30-35

> Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:
>
> "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
> AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,
> SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
>
> "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;
> WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?
> FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."
>
> The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus

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49 The grammatical-historical method, being rule-based, at first appears to imply that it is an objective procedure for interpreting a biblical text. If that were truly the case, then a presupposition of divine authorship would not be necessary for an interpreter to apply this method to determine the intent of the human author. However, as both Terry and Ramm state, such an assumption is necessary. For a recent paper that explains in some detail why the presupposition of divine authorship and authority is necessary to a proper application of the grammatical-historical method to a biblical text, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Presence of God Qualifying Our Notions of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation: Genesis 3:15 As a Test Case," *JETS* 50 (March 2007):87-103.

50 Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 10, states that "the very meaning of meaning itself is extremely complex and is debated vigorously by evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike."

51 Again, I am indebted for this summary to Walter Kaiser for his excellent treatment in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 35-46.

to him.

The wording of Isaiah 53:7-8 is relatively straightforward. Yet one could very well ask, as did the Ethiopian eunuch, "What does this text mean?" The question, worded more explicitly, is, "Who is the referent?"

For an example more relevant to this book, it is patently obvious that a central issue in determining the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 is identifying the referent of הָעַלְמָה (the ʿalmah; meaning discussed at length in Chapter 10) and her בֵּן (son); they are not explicitly named in the text.

Meaning as Sense

Meaning as *sense* is what the author wills to convey by a word, a sentence, a paragraph, or the entire discourse, often concerning a referent. For example, the sense of Isaiah 53:7 is quite easy to determine from the words used: the referent was oppressed and afflicted. According to Kaiser, "The *sense* of the use of...words, as they make up the sense of the whole passage, is the second most important meaning to gain once the *referent* has been identified."[52]

Meaning as Intention

By *intention* is not meant the feelings, desires, or emotions of the author.[53] Instead, it is an expansion on the concept of meaning as *sense*. "Intention" here refers to the *truth assertions*, often called *truth-intentions*, the author wants to express through the words, phrases, and sentences he used to construct the passage. In other words, what are the truths he intended to convey in his passage? This is another sense in which the phrase "*meaning* of the passage" might be used.

An author's intention, those truth assertions he wishes to make, can effect the interpretation of a passage in a number of ways. For example, his intention determines whether certain words or descriptions are to be taken literally or figuratively. Also, his intention determines the referent to which a word, expression, or symbol refers.

One feature of biblical hermeneutics complicates the issue of authorial intent. Are there two separate intents that must be considered--human as well as divine? On this question, evangelicals differ, even those well within the circle of conservatism.[54] However, the position taken in the system of hermeneutics promoted by Walter Kaiser

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52 Ibid., p. 38.
53 Phillip B. Payne makes this mistake in his paper, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention." *JETS* 6 (September 1977):244-45: "The Bible authors' intentions are an elusive matter for many reasons. We will consider only four reasons here: (1) 'Intention' can be understood at many levels; (2) an author may have more than one reason for making a statement—his intention, in other words, may be complex; (3) intention is a complex category involving mental states that are in a constant flux; intention may suggest subconscious as well as conscious factors; and (4) it is difficult to demonstrate what the intentions of the Biblical authors were, since we are separated from them by many centuries and their thoughts are known to us only through their writings." See also his earlier and shorter paper, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Author's Intention." *Trinity Journal* 6 (Spring 1977):16-22. In Kaiser's critique of Payne's paper, he argues that Payne uses an "enlarged definition of 'meaning,'" by including both "intention" and "significance" under the single rubric of "intention" (*The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1985], p. 209, n. 25).
54 For example, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., under whom I studied and a scholar of unimpeachable credentials as one of the foremost defenders of the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture, writes that "the implication [of 1 Pet. 1:10-11] is that the Holy Spirit was in these Old Testament authors, and that He guided them into composing words of infallible truth sure of fulfillment, even though the human authors themselves did not fully know all that these divinely guided words actually signified. Because of verses like these, in interpreting Scripture we must seek to establish not merely the intention of the human author who wrote the words, but also (and more important) the intention of the divine Author who guided in the composition of those words" (*Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1974], p. 26). Also, James W. Scott, managing editor of *New Horizons*, (Orthodox Presbyterian Church), in his paper,

and by me in this book answers this question with a resounding no.

> In the case of the writers of Scripture, there was such a divine-human-concursus (that is, a "running together" in the realm of thought) that the Spirit of God was able to take the truths of God and teach them in words to the writers of Scripture.
>
> The great teaching passage for this declaration comes from 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. Verse 13 stresses that the writers of the Bible received not the words taught by human wisdom but "*words taught* by the Spirit." That is, the Spirit of God did not mechanically whisper the text into the writer's ears, nor did the authors experience automatic writing. Instead, they experienced a *living assimilation* of the truth, so that what they had experienced in the past by way of culture, vocabulary, hardships, and the like was all taken up and assimilated into the unique product that simultaneously came from the distinctive personality of the writers. Just as truly, however, it came also from the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit stayed with the writers not just in the conceptual or ideational stage, but all the way up through the writing and verbalizing stage of their composition of the text. That is what Paul claimed for himself and his fellow prophets and apostles. It is thus difficult to see how the product of the text can be severed into divine and human components, each reflecting independent intention--one human and the other divine. Therefore, to understand the intention of the human author is to understand the intention of the divine author.[55]

The view taken by me in this book is that the meaning the human author understood and intended to convey in his text *is* the divine meaning and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority.[56]

"The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, With Special Reference to Peter Enns, Part II: The Interpretation of Representative Passages." *WTJ* 71 (Fall 2009):248, affirms in bold terms the point made above in the section, "Result 2: Uniqueness of the Bible": "So if Scripture is truly God's very word, then it follows that apparent errors in it are not real errors. The factual truth of Scripture, then, ought to be a fundamental hermeneutical principle. Any interpretation that implies any error in Scripture must be wrong." With this statement I fully agree. However, notice that in contrast to the position taken by Kaiser and by me, Scott also says, "The divine meaning of Scripture is determined by the language of the text itself, with all of its assumptions and implications, *as understood in its full context, which is the mind of God as it comes to expression in the totality of Scripture* (and general revelation)--not by some calculation of what the human author (or his audience), within the supposed confines of his culture, probably thought it meant" (Part II, p. 247; emphasis added). This statement is imprecise and too open-ended. It leaves open the possibility that the human author in at least some cases might not know what his own text meant. Scott makes a similar statement in his earlier paper, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, With Special Reference to Peter Enns, Part I: Inspiration and Its Implications," *WTJ* 71 (Spring 2009):169: "The meaning of the biblical text, strictly speaking, is the meaning of its author, God. We really don't know how much of that meaning was intended or understood by the human writer." He does attempt to qualify this statement: "We may be *reasonably confident*, then, that the writer *ordinarily* had a good grasp of the divine meaning, *though not always fully understanding the revelations that he was passing on* (as indicated by 1 Pet 1:10-12)" (pp. 169-70; emphasis added). However, the words, "ordinarily" and "reasonably confident" do not inspire much confidence! This is especially the case when Scott goes so far as to say, "The human writers held many views, some of them quite erroneous, but the significance of inspiration is that out of the mix of ideas in their minds, only true statements were written down. And because of their limited knowledge, misunderstandings, and sin, what they understood of those true statements may not always have been correct" (Part I, p. 170). Continuing in his critique of Peter Enns, Scott writes, "The confusion begins when Enns equates the "original meaning" of the OT text with the meaning intended by the writer, whereas in fact it is the meaning intended by the primary author, God. The meaning revealed by God in the NT is at least part of God's original meaning, whether the writer knew that or not" (Part I, p. 172). In opposition to all this, the position taken in this book is that the meaning the human author understood and intended to convey is, in fact, the divine meaning and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority. For an analysis of 1 Pet. 1:10-12, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 18-23, and his older paper, "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology." *JETS* (Spring 1970):93-96.

55 Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 41-42; italics original. Kaiser adds this qualification (p. 42): "One must quickly add, however, that this is not to say that the full expansion of the divinely intended referents were limited to those that the author saw or meant. It was only necessary that the writer have an adequate understanding of what was intended both in the near and the distant future, even if he lacked a grasp of all the details that were to be embodied in the progress of revelation and history."

56 Authorial intent is broader than it might first appear. "Because the Bible purports to be a word from God, the task of locating meaning is not finished until one apprehends the purpose, scope, or reason (indeed, the theology) for which that text was written" (ibid., p. 35).

<u>Meaning as Significance</u>

E. D. Hirsch in his highly significant book, *Validity in Interpretation*, makes the following distinction:

> It is not the meaning of the text which changes, but its significance...This distinction is too often ignored. *Meaning* is that which is represented by the text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable....Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. Failure to consider this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutical theory.[57]

What can change about a text is its significance; its meaning is fixed. In the case of interpreting biblical texts, however, this implies that the task of the interpreter does not end with his exegetical work and his conclusion as to the author's intent or truth assertions. The interpreter must go on to suggest the significance of the text to his own contemporary readers. How are these significances or "applications" to be determined? Can they be anything we want? The answer is almost certainly no. A proposed contemporary significance of a text must also have its own type of validity. There would seem to be two ways to judge such validity.

First, there must be a necessary connection to the original author's intent. As Kaiser points out,

> The legitimate significance in all contemporary applications of that passage is to be found in the identification of all valid relationships that exist between the intended sense of the author and any suggested contemporary issues, readers, and interpreters.[58]

Second, subsequent revelation must be taken into account. Vern Poythress makes the following point:

> Any passage [of Scripture] is to be read in the context of the entire Bible (the completed canon). God intended from the beginning that his later words should build on and enrich earlier words, so that in some sense the whole of the Bible represents one long, complex process of communication from one author....
>
> If we neglect [this] approach...we miss the advantage of having the rest of the Bible to control the inferences that we may draw in the direction of applications.[59]

Interpretation of Prophecy

<u>Dual Sense</u>

There are a number of specialized hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of prophecy.[60] With respect to

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57   Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 8.
58   Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 46.
59   Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," pp. 267-68, 272; brackets added. In his conclusion to his paper, Poythress adds the following: "In complex personal, social and political situations, we may not always be sure what the correct applications are. But applications genuinely in accord with God's word are part of God's intention. Hence, in a broad sense, they are part of what God is saying to us through the Bible as a whole. God continues to speak today. When we read the Bible aware that it is God's word, we understand that he is speaking to us now. We are constrained to obey, to rejoice in him, and to worship."
60   See, e.g., Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Chapter XXI, "Prophecy and It's Interpretation"; Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, Chapter X, "The Interpretation of Prophecy"; and Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, Chapter 12, "What about the Future? The Meaning of Prophecy."

Messianic prophecy, however, the most important issue is whether a prophetic text can have a dual sense (also called *double sense*, *deeper sense*, *dual meaning*, or *double meaning*). This question is often related to the New Testament use of the Old Testament because the New Testament writers prima facie appear to allow themselves great latitude in the way they use Old Testament passages. Thus if dual sense is accepted, the "son" in Isaiah 7:14 can refer both to a son born in the time of Isaiah and Ahaz and also to the birth of the Messiah, as noted by Matthew. How did Matthew know this second meaning? According to the argument for dual sense, the answer is only through divine revelation. This argument is discussed in more detail in Chapter 13 of this book.[61]

At this juncture, it is sufficient to note that Milton Terry devotes an entire chapter to refuting the concept of a dual sense for prophecy.[62] With specific reference to Isaiah 7:14, he states that "Isa. vii, 14 was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt. i, 22), and no expositor has ever been able to prove a previous fulfillment."[63] The bulk of the chapters in this book pursue a detailed exegetical study of Isaiah 7:14 and its context in the attempt to determine *the actual intent of Isaiah* when he made the statement to Ahaz. As stated in the previous section, "The Meaning of Meaning," my starting point is that the meaning Isaiah understood and intended to convey is the only meaning that has divine authority; there can be no other additional meaning with such authority. Thus with Terry I reject the concept of dual sense. However, as I point out in the next major section of this chapter, "The Role of the New Testament," I also believe the citation by Matthew in the New Testament should *not* be used in the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14.

Sensus Plenior

A newer concept closely related to dual sense is that of *sensus plenior*, Latin for *fuller sense*. According to Catholic scholar, Raymond Brown, the first use of the term, *sensus plenior*, was by Fr. Andrea Fernández in the late 1920's, although some theologians around the turn of the previous century were suggesting a sense of Scripture much like what is now called the *sensus plenior*.[64] Brown defined the distinction between the literal sense and the *sensus plenior* of a text as follows:

> Let us, then, keep the term "literal sense" for that meaning which by the rules of historico-critical exegesis we can determine as the author's message for his time. Let us apply the term SP [*sensus plenior*] to that meaning of his text which by the normal rules of exegesis would not have been within his clear awareness or intention but which by other criteria we can determine as having been intended by God."[65]

Brown gives a more extensive definition in his article, "Hermeneutics," in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*:

> [*Sensus plenior* is] the deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, that is seen to exist in the words of Scripture when they are studied in light of further revelation or of

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61 Duel sense is discussed in the section "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment" of Chapter 13.
62 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Chapter XXVII, "No Double Sense in Prophecy." See also Kaiser's critique of this concept in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 207-209.
63 Terry, ibid., p. 494. Terry attaches a footnote to this sentence as follows: "It is not impossible, however, that such an event occurred in the days of Ahaz, and served, in a way, as a type of the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary. But upon this supposition the language of the passage would have no double sense, and its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus would be like the fulfillment of Hos. xi, 1 in the return of the child Jesus out of Egypt."
64 Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior," *CBQ* 15 (April 1953):141.
65 Raymond E. Brown, "The *Sensus Plenior* in the Last Ten Years." *CBQ* 25 (July 1963):268-69; brackets added. When discussing the concept of a *sensus plenior*, it is sometimes said that the human author "wrote better than he knew." According to Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 110-111, this phrase was first associated with *sensus plenior* by Joseph Coppens, "Levels of Meaning in the Bible," in *How Does the Christian Confront the Old Testament* (1968). Kaiser also recommends an "insightful" article by Otto Friedrich Bollnow, "What Does It Mean to Understand a Writer Better Than He Understood Himself?" *Philosophy Today* 23 (September 1979):16-28. In Kaiser and Silver, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 198, Kaiser writes, "They [the prophets] did not preach words that had no meaning for them until modern New Testament exegetes interpreted it for the first time. God did not inspire the writers of Scripture at the cost of bypassing their rational faculties."

development in the understanding of revelation.[66]

By contrast, he defines literal sense as "the sense which the human author directly intended and which his words convey."[67]

Bruce Vawter offers this critique of a *sensus plenior*:

> If this fuller or deeper meaning was reserved by God to Himself and did not enter into the writer's purview at all, do we not postulate a Biblical word effected outside the control of the human author's will and judgment...and therefore not produced through a truly *human* instrumentality? If, as in the scholastic definitions, Scripture is the *conscriptio* [Latin, *composition*] of God and man, does not the acceptance of a *sensus plenior* deprive this alleged scriptural sense of one of its essential elements, to the extent that logically it cannot be called scripture at all?[68]

Much more could be said about the controversy in biblical hermeneutics over a *sensus plenior*, but it would be beyond the scope of this book.[69] Suffice it to say here that in the case of both dual sense and *sensus plenior*, there is no known method of exegesis by which the second sense or the fuller sense of a biblical text can be determined apart from a subsequent revelation. Of course, that is precisely what defenders of these dubious senses argue: the hidden meaning, fuller meaning, or deeper meaning was given by God through direct revelation. The problem with such an explanation is that predictive prophecy loses its apologetic value.[70] Yet it is abundantly clear that the New Testament cites the Old Testament polemically to establish the case for Jesus as Messiah.[71] These apologetic arguments would be nonsense if the normal methods of exegesis could not support a Messianic interpretation. As Kaiser emphasizes,

> It is in those texts [used for the purpose of argumentation] more than any other that we would expect the meaning of the OT text to be the same as the NT meaning. If this meaning could not be the agreed platform from which the discussion began, then what was the sense in appealing to OT texts that could be arbitrarily inflated [as it would appear to those to whom the argument is being presented] with meaning to carry all sorts of subjective interpretations?[72]

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66 Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. II, p. 616, cited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology," p. 93, n. 6; brackets added. In Catholicism, the need for further revelation to unveil the *sensus plenior* can come from Sacred Tradition, which, as reconfirmed by Vatican II, is of equal authority as biblical revelation (see "Dogmatic Constitution of Revelation," Chapter II, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation, in "*The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), Nihil Obstat: Felix F. Cardegna, Imprimatur: Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, p. 117.

67 Brown, "Hermeneutics," p. 607, cited by Kaiser (see footnote 66).

68 Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, p. 115, cited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, p. 209; brackets added.

69 See, e.g., Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 108-14, as well as Kaiser's other book, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the* New, pp. 208-12.

70 This explanation also has a second problem: it in effect removes exegesis as a method for interpreting the Bible and replaces it with a process that must continue *ad infinitum*. Delbert L. Wiens, "Response," *Direction* 6 (July 1977):49, argues as follows: "The doctrine of the *sensus plenior* tends to undermine all attempts at exegesis despite the claim that God himself will interpret his previous revelations in yet another revelation. The NT interprets the OT. But do we now dare to interpret the New? By what principle may we be confident that God's latest revelation contains no *sensus plenior*?" If it does, then exegesis will not plumb its "depths." Another revelation is necessary, with regard to which the same question can again be raised. The chain is unending.

71 See, e.g., Acts 18:24-28: "Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures....And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah]." Examples could be multiplied in both the Gospels and Acts.

72 Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, p. 17; brackets added. In this book's conclusion, he again emphasizes the point: "We have attempted to focus primarily on those NT citations of the OT that had an apologetic reason for their appearance in the NT, that is, those that wished to show that what was being preached by the apostles was not in every case some brand new idea, but an idea that had been anticipated in the OT when judged by any fair

However, the problem is much deeper than that. To remove from predictive prophecy its apologetic value, which must be based on a text's literal or normal sense, calls into question arguments used in the Old Testament by God himself. God's challenge to the lifeless idols is based on the clear meaning and predictive nature of prophecy:

> Declare the things that are going to come afterward,
> That we may know that you are gods;
> Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.[73]
>
> Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it;
> Yes, let him recount it to Me in order,
> From the time that I established the ancient nation.
> And let them declare to them the things that are coming
> And the events that are going to take place.
> Do not tremble and do not be afraid;
> Have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*?
> And you are My witnesses.
> Is there any God besides Me,
> Or is there any *other* Rock?
> I know of none.[74]
>
> Declare and set forth *your case*;
> Indeed, let them consult together.
> Who has announced this from of old?
> Who has long since declared it?
> Is it not I, the LORD?[75]
>
> I declared the former things long ago
> And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them.
> Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.
> Because I know that you are obstinate,
> And your neck is an iron sinew
> And your forehead bronze,
> Therefore I declared *them* to you long ago,
> Before they took place I proclaimed *them* to you,
> So that you would not say, "My idol has done them,
> And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them."[76]

These texts (unless they have some other meaning not discernible to us through these words of Isaiah!) make it clear that the Lord himself intends predictive prophecy to be understandable so that it can demonstrate his deity to any who have heard or read the prediction when it comes true.

To summarize: my position is that the meaning known to the human author of an Old Testament text, and that which he intends to convey in his text, is the only meaning of that text that has divine authority.

Generic Prophecies

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interpretation of the OT grammar and syntax. If we limit our discussion to this one class of citations, it is our contention that the NT did not find, nor did they attach new or different meanings to the OT verses they used" (p. 226).

73   Isa. 41:23.
74   Isa. 44:7-8.
75   Isa. 45:21.
76   Isa. 48:3-5.

There is another concept related to the interpretation of predictive prophecy that is valid and must be distinguished from dual sense and *sensus plenior*. It is *multiple fulfillment*. I agree with Walter Kaiser:

> While we deny the presence of "multiple sense," "double sense," or the like, we do affirm that there is "multiply fulfillment."[77]

The concept of "multiple fulfillment" is quite distinct from "multiple sense," but since confusing the two concepts is easy, Willis J. Beecher uses a much better and more descriptive label, namely, *generic prophecy*. He defines the concept as follows:

> ...a generic prediction is one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole--in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of the parts.[78]

Kaiser describes generic prophecy this way:

> It is as if the prophet, on receiving the divine oricle, looked out over the future horizon and was divinely enabled prophetically to see both one or more near results as well as a distinctive, but more distant climactic fulfillment, with both the near and distant results of that word so generically linked that the words possessed one meaning in a collective whole.[79]

With a bit more detail, he offers this description:

> A generic prophecy...is one that envisages an event as occurring in a series of parts, often separated in time, yet expressed in such a way that the language of the OT may legitimately apply either to the nearest, remoter or climactic event. Thus, the same word, with the same sense or meaning of the OT author, may apply at once to the whole complex of events or to any one of its parts in any particular era without destroying what the author had in mind when he first gave that word.[80]

Finally, concerning messianic prophecies, Kaiser writes as follows:

> We would conclude that the truth-intention of the present was always singular and never double or multiple in sense. Yet, by design that same prophetic word often embraced and encompassed an extended period of time by describing protracted events, giving characteristics that belong to several periods of time, or, in the messianic line it would link a whole string of persons, who in their office, function, or person pointed to the last person in the series who shared those same features specifically prophesied about the Davidic forerunners.[81]

Thus both the climactic fulfillment and the series of harbingers form a "generic wholeness" and therefore are

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77 Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 208.
78 Willis Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Baker Book House, 1975; original publication date, 1905), p. 130. Beecher listed this definition as one way the term "generic prophecy" can be applied.
79 Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 70-71.
80 Ibid., p. 230.
81 Ibid., pp. 71-72. In Kaiser's article, "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic" (*EJ* 6 [Fall 1988]:66), he gives another wording of the definition of generic prophecy: "This [Beecher's definition] is not to argue for a double sense or multiple meaning; instead, this definition seeks to represent the biblical facts which demand that the near and the distant were, in some real sense, linked to the prophetic revelatory vision from God."

generically and corporately part and parcel of that single meaning of the original prophetic word.[82] Similarly, Ramm states that "if the Scriptures had many meanings interpretation would be equivocal, but manifold fulfillment of a generic prophecy preserves the one sense of Scripture."[83]

All this is relevant to Isaiah 7:14 because Kaiser, certainly one of the foremost advocates of authorial intent as the only meaning of a biblical text with divine authority, considers this verse to be a generic prophecy. On his interpretation. the near event is the birth of Hezekiah, a king in the Davidic line, and the climactic event is the birth of the Messiah, the climactic son of David. This application to Isaiah 7:14 has some serious problems and is discussed at length in Chapter 13.[84]

The Role of the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament often cite texts from the Old Testament.[85] In relation to the hermeneutical issues discussed in this chapter, these citations can be organized as follows:

- Non-predictive citations[86]
- Non-Messianic predictive citations[87]
- Messianic predictive citations[88]

Within the framework of the New Testament, Matthew's citation of Isaiah 7:14 in 1:22-23 places it in category three. However, the same hermeneutical principles must apply to both categories two and three, that is, to all predictive prophecy cited in the New Testament. There are two hermeneutical issues raised by these citations of predictive prophecy:

- What were the hermeneutical methods used by the writers of the New Testament when they cited and interpreted Old Testament predictive prophecy?

- Should the conclusions drawn by the New Testament writers on a given passage of Old Testament predictive prophecy direct, form the basis of, or in any way influence the exegetical procedure used today in the interpretation of that Old Testament text?

Whole books can be and have been written on the first question.[89] The second question is more germane to this

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82 The paradigm example of this prophetic phenomenon is "the day of Yahweh," which is mentioned a number of times in the prophets and said to be "near" or "at hand" with reference to different events over a period of four centuries! The day of Yahweh is mentioned in Obadiah and refers to the judgment on Edom; in Zephaniah it refers to the judgment on Judah at the hands of Babylon; and in Joel it first refers to the contemporary locust plague (1:15; 2:1) and then also is used with reference to an eschatological event, the battle of Armageddon at the second advent (3:14). In the New Testament it is still mentioned as future (1 Thess. 5:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:10). For a discussion of interpreting the "the day of Yahweh" as a generic prophecy, see Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 83-85.
83 Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 252-53. As both Ramm, p. 253, and Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, p. 70, note, the concept of a generic prophecy is quite similar to the phenomenon Catholic scholars call *compenetration*. Ramm's concise definition is this: "In an Old Testament passage the near meaning and the remote meaning for the New Testament so compenetrate that the passage at the same time and in the same words refers to the near and the remote New Testament meaning." For a lengthy discussion of this concept, see Catholic scholar, Cuthbert Lattery, "The Emmanuel Prophecy: Isaias 7:14," *CBQ* 8 (October 1946):370-73. It is to be noted that the purpose of Lattery's paper is to apply compenetration to the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.
84 Chapter 13, subsection "Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Generic Prophecy" in the section "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment."
85 See, for example, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).
86 E.g., Matt. 19:4-5 citing Gen. 1:27; 2:4.
87 E.g., Acts 16:21 citing Joel 2:28-32.
88 E.g., Matt. 21:4-5 citing Zech. 9:9.
89 For example, Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans

book, and a number of evangelical scholars would answer it in the affirmative. For example, regarding Old Testament predictive prophecy, Ernest Kevan develops his approach as follows:

> Prophecy had to be spoken within the framework of the present and the past; that is to say, in the terms of the old dispensation. This determines its outward material forms. In all their statements about the kingdom of God, even when uttering the most spiritual and glorious truths regarding it, the vocabulary which the prophets employ is always that of the kingdom of God in the forms in which they knew it in their own day. Interpretation must first discover these "dispensational forms," namely, the historical and circumstantial factors of the prophecy, and then, and then only, can it make the necessary inferences.[90]

This theory leads Kevan to formulate the following rule:

> If the prophecies refer to things to be realized only in the New Testament dispensation, then it will be the interpreter's duty to strip from them the Old Testament form, which arose from the dispensation and time when the prophet lived, and look for their fulfillment in a way corresponding to the spirit of the New Testament dispensation and the altered conditions of the world.[91]

He also cites A. B. Davidson that in cases such as these (a change in dispensation), the "fulfillment will not take place in the form of the prediction, but in an altered form,"[92] leading Kevan then to add,

> In this way the fulfillment of what the prophet spoke may greatly transcend what he knew. The valuable and important principle to be learned from this is that a prophecy undergoes transmutation when it passes from one dispensation to another. The understanding of this "transmutation" must be guided by New Testament principles.[93]

His overall conclusion is that "when an Old Testament prophecy passes into the New Testament its *form* is transcended, and its *substance* is transmuted."[94] Despite giving lip service to the grammatical-historical method,[95] Kevan hastens to add that "to have discovered the grammatical sense of a passage is by no means to have exhausted it."[96] The result of this train of thought is found in the citations just given.

Of course, with such hermeneutical principles as these, when a prophecy finds its fulfillment in the New Testament era, there is simply no way that the Old Testament audience, or even the prophet himself, could have understood what the prophecy was predicting. This was even admitted by Kevan: "the fulfillment of what the prophet spoke may greatly transcend what he knew." This view does great harm to the doctrine of Scripture as it applies to Old Testament revelation.

But those who accept this approach sometimes carry it even further to include a *sensus plenior* within Old Testament predictive prophecy, a small step, really, because "transmutation" implies a different meaning. Erwin Penner favorably cites a few selections from Kevan's paper and then raises this question: "Is there a deeper

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Publishing Co., 1975).

90   Ernest F. Kevan, "The Principles of Interpretation," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 296. Note that Kevan does not use the word "dispensational" as one who holds to the theological system called *dispensationalism*. He explains that he uses it in the sense of "a manner of working; it points to the sovereign way in which God has been pleased to 'dispense' his grace to his people" (p. 295).

91   Ibid., p. 297.

92   Ibid. Unfortunately, Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 260, endorses this same position: "Again we must agree with [A. B.] Davidson that the coming of Jesus Christ gives us a new perspective for interpreting the Old Testament. The Old Testament was given in a specific *dispensational* form and if Old Testament truth carries over into the New Testament some of the dispensational form must be dropped...That is to say, the fulfilment of the prophecy is not to be expected to be in the exact form of the prophecy....Davidson's point is that with the advent of Christ *some change in the form of filfulment* must be expected" (emphasis original).

93   Kevan, "The Principles of Interpretation," 297.

94   Ibid., p. 298 (emphasis original).

95   Ibid., p. 293.

96   Ibid., p. 294.

(fuller) sense of Scripture?"[97] His answer is quite unambiguous:

> That there is a sense intended by the Holy Spirit which the human author did not intend, or know about, is understandable because God is the God of both Testaments and we cannot limit what he intended. Moreover, since God is the principal author of Scripture, and man only the instrument, then His intentions are the criteria by which the meaning of Scripture must be understood...However, this "fuller" sense lies beyond our immediate exegetical control...[98]

So in fact, according to this theory, there are two senses to Old Testament predictive prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament era: one sense is the prophet's intended sense, which can be derived from a grammatical-historical analysis of his text, and the "fuller" sense is the sense intended by the Holy Spirit, which cannot be determined by grammatical-historical analysis.

> For the modern exegete to ignore the NT hermeneutical perspective and to seek to interpret the OT on purely grammatical-historical grounds deliberately is to put on similar "blinders" that involuntarily restrained the Old Testament prophets from seeing the NT realities. Grammatical-historical exegesis of the OT, important as it is, is not enough for a true understanding of the OT.[99]

It might be interesting to see how advocates of this approach would explain Micah 5:2 cited in Matthew 2:3-6. (1) Micah clearly understood that a "Ruler over Israel" would be born in Bethlehem, (2) the Jewish scholars of the New Testament era universally believed that this Ruler, the Messiah, was to be born in Bethlehem,[100] and (3) Matthew believed that the Messiah had just been born in Bethlehem. Which terms in Micah 5:2 need to be "transmuted"?

This whole approach to Old Testament predictive prophecy, by Penner's own admission,[101] is easier to apply when the Old Testament prophetic text is actually cited in the New Testament. However, since Isaiah 7:14 is cited as "fulfilled" in the New Testament, the suggestions by Penner on what to do if the OT text is not cited is pursued no further here.

As already discussed, the position taken here is that the meaning the human author understood and intended to convey in his text is the divine meaning of that text and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority. This meaning must be determined only by the application of the grammatical-historical method exegesis. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use the New Testament as some sort of grid placed on the Old Testament text by which an interpretation is then determined. Doing so is called "reading the New Testament into the Old Testament."

Although it is valid to use antecedent revelation to inform the text being interpreted, importing subsequent revelation is quite another matter. As Mickelsen cautions, "The interpreter must not read back into earlier statements truths which he knows only from later disclosures."[102] The Reformation principle of *the analogy of faith* (*analogia fidei*) is often used to justify such a procedure. However, as Kaiser points out, the Reformers used this principle to deny that Roman Catholic Sacred Traditio was a valid interpreter of Scripture.[103] He then continues,

> But of late, some have incorrectly used the analogy of faith as an "open sesame" for the task of

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97   Erwin Penner, "Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy," *Direction* 6 (July 1977):44.
98   Ibid.
99   Ibid., p. 45.
100   Not only does Matthew attest to this, but according to Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1886), I:206, "As shown by the rendering of the *Targum Jonathan*, the prediction in Micah v. 2 was at the time universally understood as pointing to Bethlehem, as the birthplace of the Messiah. That such was the general expectation, appears from the Talmud, where, in an imaginary conversion between an Arab and a Jew, Bethlehem is authoritatively named as Messiah's birthplace."
101   Penner, "Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy," p. 46.
102   Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, p. 65.
103   Kaiser, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 71.

interpretation, wherein the New Testament text is paired, or laid over, an Old Testament text to supply a "Christian meaning" for a text that might otherwise, some say, have led us back to Judaism and the synagogue.

If texts such as those found in the New Testament, coming chronologically *later* than the passages now being exegeted [*sic*], are used to introduce new meanings unattested by the words, syntax, or grammar of that earlier text, then the charge would be that we are guilty of *importing* meaning rather than finding it or "leading it out" (exegesis) from legitimate meanings actually present in the text we are investigating.[104]

Rather than "analogy of faith," Kaiser prefers the term, "analogy of antecedent Scripture." The principle would work like this:

(1) [An] examination of explicit affirmations found in the text being exegeted [*sic*] and (2) comparisons with similar (sometimes rudimentary) affirmations found in passages that have *preceded* in time the passage under study. Thus the *hermeneutical* or *exegetical* use of the analogy of faith (if we may still use this terminology in exegesis as well as in systematic theology, where it might seem to be more appropriate) must be carefully controlled diachronically[105] (i.e., we must ever be aware of the various time periods in the sequence of the progress of revelation). So serious are we about this point that we would prefer to rename this procedure the "analogy of (antecedent) Scripture" when it is applied to exegesis in order to avoid any possible confusion in concepts.[106]

Which Comes First, Hermeneutics or Exegesis?

Introduction

This chapter began with a citation of the first paragraph in a paper by John Walton:

Not many would contest the statement that Isa 7:14 is one of the most significant passages in the discussion of the NT use of the OT or of the issue of the hermeneutics of prophecy and fulfillment. It could also be considered a major test case for the question of the extent to which hermeneutics needs to be subordinated to exegesis or exegesis to hermeneutics.[107]

Before addressing the question of which comes first, it is helpful to review the classic answer given earlier in this chapter.[108] According to Terry, writing in 1885:

• Hermeneutics consists of "the principles, methods, and rules which are needful to unfold the sense of what is written."[109]

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104 Ibid., pp. 71-72 (emphasis original; brackets added).
105 "Diachronic" means *pertaining to changes or development through time*.
106 Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 136 (emphasis original; brackets added). See also his entire discussion on pp. 134-40. In Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 72, Kaiser adds the following details: "In this approach, every time an author quoted or alluded to an earlier text, person, event, or teaching, those chronologically earlier texts would be the backdrop, and the Bible existent at that time could be heard or seen to contribute to these very same topics, persons, events, or teachings." Kaiser goes on to make this remark about a closely related concept, namely, biblical theology (p. 73): "It is a method of describing and teaching what the individual writers of the separate books in separate times and circumstances each contributed to the unifying plan and purpose of God as it was built up over the process of time and historical events." See also Kaiser's extended discussion of both the "analogy of faith" and "the analogy of Scripture" in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, Chapter 15, pp. 241-54.
107 John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" p. 289.
108 See the section "Historical Understanding of Hermeneutics" early in this chapter.
109 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 19.

- "Exegesis is the application of these principles and laws [of hermeneutics], the actual bringing out into formal statement, and by other terms, the meaning of the author's words. Exegesis is related to hermeneutics...as practice is to theory."[110]

Kaiser, writing in 1981, agrees:

> Hermeneutics may be regarded as the *theory* that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood...to be the *practice* of and the set of *procedures* for discovering the author's intended meaning.[111]

In view of these statements, it would seem that Walton's question is almost a nonissue. Hermeneutics by definition "precedes" exegesis because hermeneutics is the system of principles and rules used in performing the exegesis of a passage.

The Priority of Hermeneutics

However, a hint of what Walton has in mind might be found in his second paragraph:

> In evangelical commentaries and articles on the passage [Isaiah 7:14], exegesis is typically brought into subordination to hermeneutical considerations. So, for instance, if the commentator's hermeneutical stance would oblige him to see Matthew's use of Isa 7:14 as having a determinative effect on the interpretation of Isaiah, then exegesis is certain to find in the passage a reference to Jesus that was fully intended by Isaiah. I would like to spend my time first subjecting the passage before us to an exegetical analysis. Then we will use the results of exegesis to make some hermeneutical observations.[112]

Thus Walton's concern does, in fact, center on the role that a New Testament citation of an Old Testament predictive prophecy plays in the exegesis of that prophecy.

> ...in the issue at hand, if our perception of inerrancy is that it demands the interrelationship of meaning in passages where the NT uses the OT, yet we find numerous cases where sound exegesis does not provide such an interrelationship, how should we proceed? If we adjust our exegesis to conform to our perceived doctrinal need we are undercutting Biblical authority on the exegetical, objective level to supposedly support Biblical authority on the level of what we have formulated as the demands of inerrancy....We have done Biblical authority no favors. The loss exceeds the gain. If inerrancy is true-- and I believe it is--it will uphold Biblical authority most particularly on the exegetical level. We must merely consider ways to reformulate the doctrine without diluting it, so that our demands of it conform to exegetical results.[113]

There are at least three problems with Walton's concern here.

Problem 1. Although I have not exhausted the virtually limitless literature written on hermeneutics or on Isaiah 7:14, I have yet to find an author who accepts the inerrancy of Scripture who also insists that this doctrine "demands" a *specific* "interrelationship of meaning in passages where the NT uses the OT." Instead, it is acknowledged, as Walton himself does, that in New Testament citations of the Old Testament "there are instances of everything from strict exegesis to casual wordplay."[114] The issue is rather one of logic not inerrancy. If a New Testament author cites an Old Testament predictive prophecy as part of a polemic argument to prove that the event predicted has just occurred, then the interpretation the New Testament writer gives to the Old Testament text must be the meaning intended by the Old Testament author and discernible to the New Testament audience to be convinced by the argument. Then, and only then, would the doctrine of inspiration and

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110 Ibid.; brackets added.
111 Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 47; emphasis original.
112 Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" p. 289; brackets added.
113 Ibid., pp. 303-4.
114 Ibid., p. 303.

inerrancy surface and demand that the interpretation placed on the Old Testament text by the New Testament author be the exegetically determined meaning of the Old Testament author and his text. Again, consider the challenges Yahweh made to the idols noted earlier in this chapter in the section, *Sensus Plenior*.

Did Matthew cite Isaiah 7:14 as part of such a polemic argument to prove that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament Scripture? That is quite unlikely. The context of Matthew 1:23 deals with the betrothal between Joseph and Mary and also with Joseph's concern about her pregnancy. Matthew's text, 1:18-25, centers on the angel who spoke to Joseph at this time while he was sleeping. Isaiah 7:14 is cited as part of the explanation of Mary's condition. This section of Scripture does not deal with a polemic argument. Much of Chapter 14, the final chapter of this book, deals with Matthew 1:18-25 and its relationship to Isaiah 7:14. Note, however, the question that opened this paragraph does not have to be answered to perform an exegesis of Isaiah 7:14.

Problem 2. Walton speaks of an "exegetical, objective level" as if exegesis is wholly and completely objective. However, no matter how good the rules are, how well defined they are, or how well described their application to exegesis is, the practitioners are still human. Exegesis is certainly no more a science than physics, and the history of physics is certainly not devoid of mistakes made in the application of its investigations and procedures, later corrected by subsequent, perhaps more refined or more careful applications of those same procedures. It is no different with exegesis. There is another comparison between physics and exegesis that is important for the next problem with Walton's argument. Just as the science and practice of physics has certain presuppositions, so does exegesis. Although virtually all physicists accept the same set of presuppositions, that unfortunately is not the case with exegetes.

Problem 3. There is another sense in which exegesis is not wholly and completely "objective." Walton seems to think that it would be, as long as external, doctrinal "demands" are not made on it, apparently implying that exegesis can operate without any presuppositions. However, as already argued both in this chapter and chapter 1, that is certainly not the case. There are always presuppositions that influence the practice and allowed conclusions of exegesis. Rationalistic and naturalistic presuppositions certainly determine the result of certain exegetical investigations. Among conservative scholars, the divine authorship and inerrancy of the Bible similarly effect exegesis. However, this assumption does not place the "demand" on exegesis that worries Walton. Rather, it allows the Old Testament author to predict the future or describe a miracle, if an exegetical analysis of his text implies that this was his intent. Also, since exegesis can be performed imperfectly, the presupposition of inerrancy also serves to guard against the exegesis of one passage leading to an interpretation that directly contradicts another text. Perhaps the exegesis of both texts must be reconsidered.

Therefore, presuppositions clearly underlie the practice of exegesis. Siva concurs fully. After reviewing the history of biblical criticism, he states,

> This history also reminds us that theological commitments can hardly be separated from decisions about hermeneutical principles. Given the claims of the Bible and the religious expectations it places on its readers, theological neutrality is a mirage.[115]

Ramm comments similarly: "Certain very general theological assumptions govern the particular exegesis of Scripture."[116] In an earlier section above, "The Conservative System of Hermeneutics," these assumptions are listed and briefly explained under the subheading, "Theological Perspectives." In addition, there is the foundational assumption of the divine authorship and inerrancy of Scripture. These presuppositions plus the

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115 Silva, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 283,
116 Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 97. Kevan, "The Principles of Interpretation," p. 293, also admits as much. After noting that Frederic W. Farrar (*History of Interpretation*, 1886) "does not weary of reminding his readers of his opinion that the interpreter's view of the nature of the Bible and its inspiration largely determined the methods of interpretation," Kevan goes on to state, "Presuppositions there must be, but the difference between the presuppositions of conservative theology and the presuppositions of the other groups [just mentioned, namely, Cabbalists, Alexandrians, and rationalists] is that those of the former are provided by the Scripture itself where as those of the other groups are not....The basic principle of Biblical interpretation which emerges from this point of view is that the sense of Scripture is to be found in the grammatical meaning of the words."

actual rules and procedures involved in a grammatical-historical analysis of a text form the contents of a system of hermeneutics. Therefore, it follows almost by definition that the formation and study of hermeneutics precedes the activity of exegesis.

It is most important to note, however, that among those "theological perspectives" that are part of the system of conservative hermeneutics, there are two that can be abused, namely, "Scripture interprets Scripture" and "the analogy of faith." As my comments in the description of these two features indicate, I do not believe either allows placing the New Testament as a grid over the Old Testament text in order to determine its meaning. The meaning the human author understood and intended to convey in his text is the divine meaning of that text and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority. Therefore, this meaning must be determined only by the application of the grammatical-historical method exegesis. If these two items in the presuppositions to the exegetical process allow, or worse, demand, using the New Testament in this way, the problem lies within the set of presuppositions, and they need to be modified. Hemeneutics remains the theoretical foundation of exegesis, and Walton's concept of subordinating hermeneutics to exegesis, or performing exegesis before formulating hermeneutics, is meaningless.

Summary of the Methodology Used to Interpret Isaiah 7:14

To conclude this rather lengthy and complicated (though hopefully helpful) survey of hermeneutics and exegesis, it is appropriate to summarize the specific hermeneutical presuppositions and principles spread throughout chapters 1 and 2 that I use in the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.

- The Bible in its entirety is the result of supernatural divine revelation from God to the biblical authors and is inerrant.

- A biblical text has one meaning (or sense) and only one meaning.

- The meaning known to and understood by the human author, and which he intended to convey in his text, is in fact the single divine meaning of that text and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority.

- The only valid method to determine the intent of the original human author is grammatical-historical exegesis.

- The entire Book of Isaiah was written by the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah, and is not the redaction of multiple sources over several centuries.

- The New Testament citation of Isaiah 7:14 should not be used to guide in any way the application of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis of this text in the Old Testament or to influence the conclusions drawn therefrom.

I close this chapter by echoing the sentiments of Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg when he issued the second edition of his monumental work, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies* (1858):[117]

"The present *Christology* is based upon the heartfelt conviction, that we have a sure

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117 E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., trans. Theod. Meyer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858), IV:395.

word of prophecy, that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that in the Spirit they testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. May this revised edition help to strengthen a conviction, of such importance to the Church!"