

## 2. Hermeneutics and the Need for Interpretation.

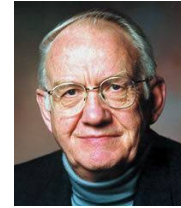
*Hermeneutics defined; the challenges of time, culture, distance, and language; the Word of God—the divine factor. The Biblical Canon. Levels of meaning and multiple readings.*

### God's Word, the Bible, and Us

- **We accept the Bible “to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (AoF 8)**
  - “translated” means convey and transmitted as much as translated from one language to another
  - It has come to us through human means, in human language, in human cultural and historical contexts
- Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard on **the inspiration of the Holy Spirit** (for an interesting but useful evangelical view)
  - Convinces the reader the Bible is true
  - Gives a faithful reader to apprehend, but not fully comprehend, its meaning
  - Leads to the conviction to embrace (and follow) its meaning

## While We Are Contextualizing . . .

- **Always contextualize our secondary sources and authorities!**
  - Look up the authors to learn their qualification *and their biases*
  - Learn to evaluate and weigh their positions
- The example of Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*
  - Gordon Donald Fee: an American-Canadian Christian theologian and an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God; currently serves as Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College in Vancouver
  - Douglas Stuart: Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an interdenominational Evangelical Seminary
  - *How do you who are Latter-day Saints respond to their “Mormons as cultists” passing reference?*



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## Useful Suggestions from Fee and Stuart

- **Aim of interpretation is not “uniqueness”**
  - *Unique interpretations are often wrong!*
- **Every reader is an interpreter**
  - *Some just do not realize how and why they are interpreting!*
- **Seek for the “plain meaning” of the text**
- **Nature of scripture**
  - Eternal relevance
  - Historical particularity—God “speaks” through human words and in human history and culture

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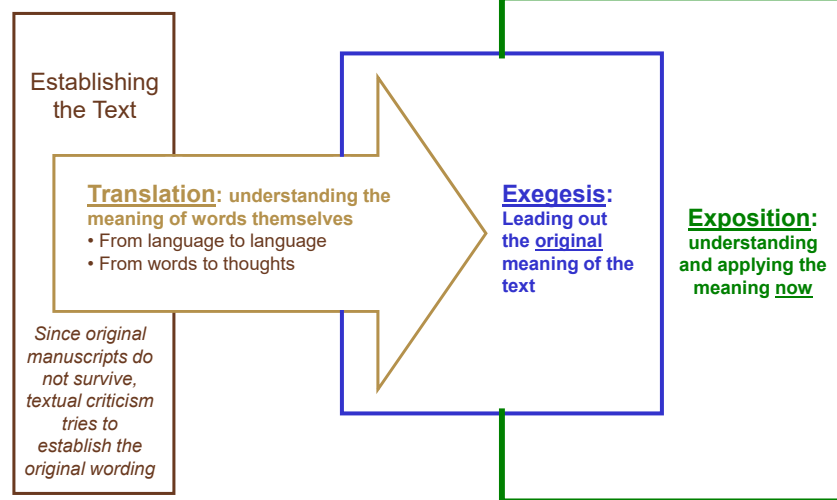
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## “Interpreting” the Scripture

- **Hermeneutics:** how to interpret and understand texts
  - From a Greek word meaning “translate” or “interpret”
  - An art *and* a science
- **Exegesis:** reconstructing the presumed original meaning From the Greek “to lead out” or explain
  - **Definition:** “the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of a text” (Gorman, 8)
  - A close reading and careful examination of a passage, section, or book to understand its meaning in its original context
    - as opposed to “reading into” the text what we think it means—*eisegesis!*
  - “*Them, there, then . . .*”
- **Exposition:** (responsible eisegesis, more in lecture 21)
  - application of the meaning to contemporary believers
  - “*Us, here, now . . .*”
    - *What does it mean to us as readers?*
  - 1 Nephi 19:23, “likening” scripture to ourselves
    - Done more properly *after* exegesis!

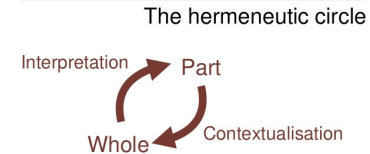
## Hermeneutics

### Understanding the Meaning of Scripture Then and Now



## Hermeneutical Circle

- Ancient rhetoric and hermeneutics: the circle is that of the whole and its parts—we can only understand the parts of a text, or any body of meaning, out of a general idea of its whole, yet we can only gain this understanding of the whole by understanding its parts.
- In contemporary hermeneutics: **we always understand or interpret out of some presuppositions.**
  - In regard to biblical studies, **beliefs often inform (or shape) how we read the Bible, often done in a way that confirms our beliefs**
  - *The problem with proof texting*
- **Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)**
  - What is important is not how we get out of the hermeneutical circle but how we got in it!
  - *Be conscious and honest with what our beliefs and presuppositions are*



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## Hermeneutical Approaches

- **Hermeneutics of faith**
  - literal (or grammatical) truth
  - suspension of disbelief/poetic faith
  - metaphorical truth
- **Hermeneutics of suspicion**
- **Two Textual Horizons**
  - horizon of the origins of the text
    - **Text as a window** into contemporary one, sometimes two or more ancient communities
  - horizon of the reader
    - **Text as a mirror**



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## Canonical or Theological Interpretation

- The danger of “**Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS)**” (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 50–52)
  - A return to pre-Enlightenment forms of scripture interpretation (e.g., the approach of the Church Fathers)
  - **Scholars stand “over” the text, examining it**, TIS positions the interpreter “under” the scripture
  - Places the authority of scripture not in the Word of God (written, spoken, or inspired) not in the word itself but **in how church fathers, the creeds, or a church community understands the meaning**
  - Hmmm . . . .
- **What place is there for “doctrinal context” for Latter-day Saints**
  - Perhaps we should see ourselves as “beside” the text, **with God, the Holy Ghost, and prophets and apostles guiding us . . .**
  - **How about Joseph Smith’s New Translation (Inspired Version, JST)?**
    - “translation” in the early nineteenth century has broader meanings than today—could include transmission, revisions, and renditions
    - Begun in 1831, largely completed by 1833, but Joseph Smith did not consider it “finished” at his death in 1844
    - Types of changes: restoration of lost text; inspired commentary, correction, additions, and expansions; common sense changes, grammatical changes and clarifications, harmonization
    - Always use *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, edited by Faurling, Jackson, and Matthews
  - **See discussion if exposition in lecture 21**

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## Some Challenges of Biblical Interpretation

- **Distance of Time**
- **Cultural Distance**
- **Geographical Distance**
- **Distance of Language**
- Other cautions (more when we discuss exegesis)
  - Be careful about reading into a text things that the author or time did not know or experience (examples in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 51–53)
  - Example of Matthew having Isaiah but not Book of Mormon texts

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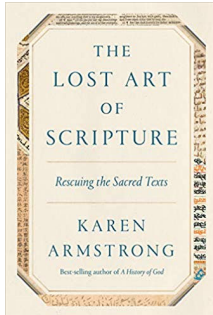
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## Karen Armstrong, *The Lost Art of Scripture*



- **A Control on Strict Exegesis and “The Plain Meaning” of the Text**
- “Scripture is flexible, evolving, contextual and more like performance art than a book”
- Many texts began as texts that were composed and transmitted orally
  - the sound of the inspired words would always be more important than their semantic meaning
- “A work of art, be it a novel, a poem or a Scripture, must be read according to the laws of its genre”
  - The Gospels, for instance, are more theology than history
- Historically scriptures were regularly repurposed to provide comfort or insight for new challenges

## The Canon of the Hebrew Bible

- **Kanōn**: “reed,” “ruler,” “measure”
  - What is accepted and normative for a faith community
- Deuteronomy 4:2, referred to the fifth book attributed to Moses (**the Torah** or Pentateuch) or to *all* the instruction received by Moses (both Written and Oral Torah)
  - To these were added the historical books and the writings of the prophets (the **Nevi'im**) and the literary, often poetic books (**Ketuvim**)
  - Role of Ezra the scribe
  - Evidence from Sirach, Josephus, the Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls
    - The problem of the Apocrypha, present in the Septuagint but rejected as authoritative by later Jews
- **Council of Jamnia?**
  - Old orthodoxy: c. 70-90 C.E. a council at Yavneh set the Hebrew Bible at 24 books (39 in the Protestant OT)
  - The council probably just discussed books already deemed canonical

## Marcion and the Development of a New Testament Canon

- **Marcion** was an “irregular” early Christian teacher (he had strong gnostic tendencies) put together his own list of acceptable books:
  - Rejected the Law and hence the OT
  - Accepted one gospel, Luke (the *euangelion*)
  - Accepted a larger Pauline corpus (*apostolikon*), 13, than the 10 usually accepted up to that time
  - His views of Acts are unclear
- *His efforts may have stirred teachers and leaders of the “Great Church” to begin coming up with their own lists.*
  - By c. A.D. 160 **Irenaeus**, for instance, became a strong advocate for **four** gospels, not just one
  - By c. A.D. 200, **Origen of Alexandria** was using **the LXX** and **most of the current 27 NT books**, although there were *still disputes about Revelation, Hebrews, and most of the “Catholic” epistles*

## The Muratorian Canon

- No longer extant, this list of accepted books is witnessed by **the so-called “Muratorian Fragment,”** a seventh century Latin document
  - The original was Latin, or perhaps Greek
  - Refers to Pius I, bishop of Rome, dating it to **c. A.D. 170**
- **Accepted four Gospels, Luke and John being specifically named; “Acts of all Apostles”; 13 Pauline Epistles; and Jude**
- **Does not accept Epistle to the Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, or James**
  - explicitly rejected the supposedly Pauline letters to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians; largely rejects the Apocalypse of Peter

## Eusebius on Scripture (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25)

- **Accepted**
  - “holy quartet of the gospels”
  - Acts
  - Paul’s epistles
  - 1 John
  - 1 Peter
- **Uncertain**
  - Revelation
- **Rejected**
  - Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Revelation of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, *Didachē*, Gospel of the Hebrews

## Developing Canon in East and West

- **27-book NT canon suggested by the festal letter of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria in A.D. 367**
- **Formalized by Council of Carthage in A.D. 397**
- Qualifications for Canonicity (see Brown, *INT* 3–15)
  - **Apostolic origin, real or putative**
  - **Importance of addressed communities**
  - **Conformity with the rule of faith**