

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 6, Early Interpretation

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We've been talking in the last session about the history of interpretation, and we'll continue to do that for a couple of sessions, again, moving rather quickly through the main characters and the main features of the history of interpretation. And the main purpose is to demonstrate, number one, that no one picks up the biblical text and interprets for the first time. We all stand as part of a long tradition that actually goes all the way back to the Old Testament itself, where Old Testament authors picked up and utilized and interpreted and applied biblical text for their own readers, to demonstrate and to understand that we are not the first ones to pick up and read a text.

But second, along with that, to demonstrate the influence and how the way we approach scripture and interpret it, whether we realize it or not, is often indebted to and influenced by, whether positively in terms of what we employ or even what we avoid negatively, the way we approach scripture is often indebted to a long history of engaging the biblical text. We ended by looking at New Testament authors and how New Testament authors frequently picked up and utilized Old Testament text with the conviction that Jesus Christ himself was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He was the climax of God's revelation to his people.

A very interesting text in that regard is Hebrews chapter 1 and verses 1 and 2, where at the very beginning of the book, the author, in a sense, establishes how the Old Testament was read, at least by himself, but I think other New Testament authors, where the author of Hebrews says, in the past, God spoke to our forefathers, who would be the prophets and Old Testament authors, through the prophets at many times in various ways, but in these last days, in the time of fulfillment, he has spoken to us by his Son. So Jesus Christ is seen as not removing or eclipsing or setting aside

the Old Testament, but as bringing it to fulfillment, as the climax and the true intention of what the Old Testament was pointing to. And so the New Testament authors wrote and read the Old Testament with the assumption that Jesus was the climax and the fulfillment of God's revelation to his people.

And we said that probably stemmed from Christ himself, where several places, especially a text like Luke 24, Jesus demonstrates, or he argues, unfortunately Luke doesn't record what Jesus said, but simply records that Jesus explained from the entire Old Testament how all scripture was fulfilled in him, how all scripture pointed to him. Even later on, Paul will say that when he's summarizing the gospel in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he says, I pass on to you what was passed on to me, that is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the scriptures. So New Testament writers operated with the assumption that the Old Testament was to be understood as pointing to Christ and to be interpreted through the lenses of fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We also said that the New Testament reveals a number of ways of demonstrating that from what we might call more literal, more straightforward prediction and fulfillment, all the way to more kind of analogical or typological type fulfillments. So for example, an example of a more literal type of fulfillment can be found in Matthew chapter 2 and verse 5, in the early section of Matthew, the narrative of the birth and the early childhood of Jesus Christ, chapter 2 and starting with verse 5. I'll back up. This is part of the story where the Magi come to King Herod in Jerusalem to ask where this Messiah is, where he has been born, and Herod has to go to some of his scribes to find out.

So he calls the people's chief priests and the teachers of the law together, and he asks them, where is the Christ, this Messiah, to be born? Because obviously King Herod wants to exterminate him because it's a threat to King Herod's throne. He

can't have another king acclaimed to his rulership, there can't be another Christ or Messiah king to compete with his throne. So he asks them, where is this Christ to be born? Because again, he wants to find out so he can kill him.

Verse 5, in Bethlehem in Judea, they reply, for this is what the prophet has written, and now comes a quotation from Micah chapter 5 and verse 2, but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel. Although there may be a couple of other things going on with this text, at least at a basic level the author sees, and at least the scribe saw, a rather straightforward literal fulfillment. That the Messiah would be born in the city of Bethlehem, a city of rather little means would become great in reputation because the Messiah would come from there.

So chapter 2, verse 5 and 6 of Matthew probably provide one possible example of a more straightforward literal reading of fulfillment of a biblical text. We often think of, when we think of fulfillment, we think of a prophecy or prediction that then gets fulfilled according to the way, pretty much the way it was predicted, and this is as close as we get to that. But interestingly, other examples in Luke chapter 4, Luke chapter 4 and verses 18-21.

Again to set the stage, Jesus then goes to Nazareth, this is the early after Jesus' temptation, now Jesus, remember Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by Satan, now he begins his ministry, according to Luke then, he goes to Galilee, then he goes to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom, and he stood up and read. And perhaps this would have been the reading for the day in the synagogue, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him, unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news of the poor, he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the

blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And again, this is a promise or prediction in Isaiah of what would happen when, again when God restored his people, now Jesus literally seems to see himself fulfilling this.

The Spirit of the Lord has come upon him, which we saw taking place back in the temptation and baptism of Jesus, when the Spirit came as a dove, now Jesus says, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he's been anointed to proclaim the good news to the poor, which is exactly what he does, to recovery of sight for the blind, release the oppressed, etc., all of which he does in the rest of the Gospel of Luke, Luke's record of Jesus' ministry. So Luke chapter 4, an example of a quotation from Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1 and 2, probably now seen rather literally as a prediction promise that gets fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. But as I said, there are other types of fulfillment that New Testament authors see happening in the Old Testament as they read the Old Testament text in light of Christ.

Sometimes I'm convinced, and I find this happening often, the connection between the Old and New Testament, especially when you find New Testament authors quoting Old Testament text and saying they're fulfilled, but there doesn't really seem to be a connection. When you look at what's going on in the original context and what the Old Testament authors seem to be saying and how the New Testament author uses it, sometimes there doesn't seem to be a straightforward connection. And although this is not the only possibility, one that I find often taking place is what could be called more of a typological or analogical connection.

That is, an event or person in the past in the Old Testament provides a model or type of something that now takes place, a person or event in the New Testament. And the idea is, the assumption that seems to underlie it is not so much that the Old Testament author was actually prophesying and predicting this, but instead the New Testament authors, because they operated with the conviction that God, the same

God that was at work under the Old Covenant with His people, who delivered them, and who was redemptively, historically at work with His people under the Old Covenant, the same God was now in a greater way, and in fulfillment of the Old Covenant, was now acting again to redeem and restore His people in a greater way through the person of Christ in the New Covenant era of salvation. Because of that conviction, New Testament authors could often see obvious correspondences and analogies, again because they're convinced what God did under the Old Covenant has now escalated, it's now been repeated in a far greater way in fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

And so they're not necessarily saying the Old Testament author was predicting this, but that within the text and the event or person it attests to, we see a pattern or model or type that is now being repeated and filled up, as it were, in a greater way in the person of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant salvation that He brings. We'll deal with this text a little more, but this may be the explanation for, again to go back to Matthew 2 for Matthew chapter 2 and verse 15, 14 and 15, especially verse 15. We've already seen in the beginning part of chapter 2 of Matthew 5 and 6 that Jesus could be seen as rather literally fulfilling a text, that is, the King, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judah, but now we see a very different reference to the Old Testament.

In chapter 14, the angel appears, I'm sorry, chapter 2 and verses 13, the angel appears to Moses, I'm sorry, to Joseph, and it's not incidental that I mentioned Moses because this chapter 2 is actually modeled on the New Exodus motif. We'll talk about that later on when we talk about the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. But Joseph, now an angel appears to him and tells him to take the child because Herod is now on the war path and looking to exterminate this rival to his throne, this Messiah.

Now an angel appears to Joseph and says, take the child and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So verse 14 says, they got up, he takes the child during the night and leaves for Egypt. Then verse 15, and they stay there until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet out of Egypt, I have called my son. Chapter this, this quotation is actually a quotation from Hosea chapter 11 and verse 1. And we'll deal more with this text as well when we talk about the use of the Old Testament in the New later on in this course. But the thing I want to mention now is when you go back to Hosea chapter 11 and verse 1, without Matthew 2, I'm convinced that most of us would never read this as a reference to Jesus Christ and Joseph taking his family to Egypt and then bringing him back once Herod has died.

In fact, Hosea 11 and 1 doesn't appear to really be a prophecy at all. It's more of a recitation of the deeds of God in rescuing and delivering and caring for his people. So Hosea 11 and 1 is not a prophecy of a coming Messiah.

It's a reference to when God delivered his people out of Egypt back in the book of Exodus. Now the question is how does Matthew get off in finding this fulfillment in Jesus Christ? Well probably instead of seeing this as a prediction or having some double meaning or a hidden meaning that now Matthew uncovers, is it possible that Matthew is reading this text typologically? That he finds in the same way that God acted to rescue and deliver his people from threat now under the Old Covenant, now he is acting in a greater way to deliver his people starting with the Messiah Jesus Christ from threat as well as he now begins to save and deliver his people under the New Covenant salvation. So I think the relationship between Hosea 11 and Matthew 2 is more of a typological or analogical.

That is the same God who was working to deliver and rescue his people is now acting again in a greater way in the person of Jesus Christ. In the same way God kept his son, the people of Israel and delivered them, kept them safe and rescued them in the first Exodus, now in a new Exodus God is acting again to rescue his greater son Jesus Christ who now basically will fulfill what Israel failed to accomplish as his people. So we could point to other examples of that where apparently New Testament authors saw a typological or analogical connection between the New Testament and events and persons especially Christ and the Old Testament and certain events and persons and seeing the New Testament as the fulfillment, the climax of that pattern.

Again the fundamental assumption behind this is that Jesus Christ has brought the long awaited age of fulfillment. What the Old Testament texts were pointing to and awaiting has now been brought to fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore Old Testament or New Testament authors could find types and patterns being picked up and repeated in light of the conviction that the same way God acted in the Old Covenant to rescue and deliver his people in a significant redemptive historical event is now repeating itself in a new redemptive historical event founded in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now sometimes New Testament authors may reflect typical or common methods of rabbinical interpretation. Remember we looked at a couple, the lesser to the greater or connecting texts together via connections of even vocabulary that two Old Testament texts might be brought together because they have referred to a similar theme or have referred to a similar word or have similar vocabulary. For example we've already looked at we've already looked at Jesus statement in Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6 and verse 26 Jesus is telling his disciples his kind of the nucleus of the new people of God not to worry about life what they will eat or drink in the context of the well known Sermon on the Mount.

And then Jesus says in verse 26 look at the birds of the air they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are? So notice that argument from the lesser to the greater if God would care for the birds of the heaven certainly he will care for his people who seek his kingdom and his righteousness as the rest of the text goes on to tell us. But another interesting example in the New Testament Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 5 where the author as we said the author is demonstrating the superiority of Jesus Christ over the old covenant scriptures not that they were bad or inferior or useless but simply that now Jesus is the fulfillment the climax therefore he is the climactic revelation of God to his people.

Now the author is demonstrating that by appealing to a number of Old Testament texts especially showing Jesus is superior to the angels who were part of the old covenant and part of the giving of the law. In chapter 1 and verse 5 notice this he says for to which of the angels did God ever say and here's the first quotation you are my son today I have become your father or again I will be his father and he will be my son. That first quotation you are my son today I become your father is taken from Psalm chapter 2 which is one of those Psalms that is usually considered a royal Psalm that often gets applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

But the second text when the author of Hebrews says or again I will be his father and he will be my son this is part of the covenant formula when God spoke to David and made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel chapter 7 verse 14 I will be his father that is the king who sits on David's throne and he will be my son. Probably these two texts whether the author of Hebrews did this or whether early Christians did this because these two texts appear to be combined elsewhere most likely much like the rabbis at times brought Old Testament texts together based on word associations and similarities of vocabulary most likely both of these came together because of the similar wording and the similar theme of father and son and the covenant formula

and the author now brings these together and again finds their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. So this may be an example of two Old Testament texts linked together by the word father and son and perhaps because of the covenant formula as well.

The desire of the New Testament authors again is to and actually to also summarize the material from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran community and rabbinic interpreters and all the way back to Old Testament authors the desire over and over again is to understand scripture but also to demonstrate its relevance for the contemporary readers and their situation and in one sense many of these examples are nothing less than what good preachers and expositors attempt to do today is not just provide a dry exposition of an explanation of the text but to demonstrate its ongoing relevance its application its significance for contemporary readers. So biblical interpretation goes back in fact all the way back even to the Old Testament where Old Testament authors later Old Testament authors sometimes pick up earlier Old Testament texts and reinterpret reassert them for subsequent generations we see that interpretive activity continuing through the New Testament authors through rabbinic interpretive methods the Dead Sea Scrolls. But now I want to move on to jump ahead a little bit and consider beyond the Old and the New Testament to look at just very briefly early methods of interpretation and I want to start with the Apostolic Fathers again just briefly that is the early church founders and leaders after the writing of the New Testament documents that period roughly 100 to 150 A.D. the Apostolic Fathers actually belong to a larger period from about 100 to 600 A.D. sometimes called the Patristic period so if you see those terms Patristics or early church fathers often the Patristics is the broader period of 100 to 600 A.D. roughly I think but the church fathers is a more limited period of time from 100 to roughly 150 A.D. But the significance of this is the early church fathers give us a glimpse into biblical interpretation of the period immediately following the writing of the New Testament so many early church leaders and early church fathers names such as

Clement or Polycarp or Ignatius produce writings where they actually appeal to Old and New Testament texts and interpret them therefore giving us examples of early biblical interpretation.

Often what they're doing is they're frequently defining and defending the Christian faith especially against false teaching that has arisen and so they are often interpreting biblical texts to show how they should be understood and how they support Christian beliefs as opposed to Gnosticism or some other heretical teaching. There are actually two characteristic features of the interpretation of the church fathers that I want to look at. One of them is what is often known as typological interpretation a more extreme form of the typological or analogical approach we looked at with New Testament authors but typological interpretation the other is more allegorical interpretation and we'll briefly describe those and give a couple of examples for example typological where the church fathers would often find references in especially the Old Testament and find correspondences in the life of Christ and in the teaching of the New Testament.

For example one early writing called the Epistle of Barnabas in chapter 12 in the first seven verses sees the outstretched arms of Moses in Exodus 17. You have that story of where Moses stretches out his arms as the Israelites are fighting I think the Amalekites and as long as he has his arms stretched out they are victorious but the Epistle of Barnabas sees that as a type of the death of Christ where he literally had his arms stretched out and nailed to the cross. So again he's found a reference starting with the assumption that Jesus Christ fulfills all the Old Testament he's found a reference to Jesus stretched out arms and the reference to Moses arms being stretched out in Exodus chapter 17.

Another a more famous one that perhaps you've heard of and you're familiar with is the example in another document called First Clement. First Clement chapter 12 and

verse 7 refers to the scarlet thread of Rahab remember the Old Testament story of the spies that are Rahab is to keep the spies from danger and she's to hang out a scarlet thread in her window and First Clement is the book that took this scarlet thread of Rahab mentioned in the Old Testament as a type of the blood of Christ the scarlet or red blood of Christ and so he saw the author First Clement saw the scarlet thread that Rahab hung in her window as actually a type of her foreshadowing the salvation that would come through the blood of Jesus Christ. So you'll find there's all kinds of other examples especially in those two books of typological type interpretations that many of them to us seem rather extreme where some little detail in the Old Testament is seen as foreshadowing some detail in the life of Christ.

A more common way of interpreting biblical text that began to become popular all the way through to until the Reformation period in the 15th 16th century and with Martin Luther and John Calvin and their approach to interpretation the method that it dominated until then was the allegorical method a very popular way of interpreting the Old Testament particularly and what happened is some person or something in the Old Testament a person an event an object an institution was given a deeper level of meaning a deeper spiritual meaning so usually a physical person object event was then given a spiritual a deeper spiritual meaning which was often seen as its true meaning. So for without giving any specific examples the epistle the epistle of Barnabas that I already mentioned with the outstretched arms of Moses finds detailed allegorical meaning in a number of details from the Old Testament law in particular. It's also important to recall during this time church tradition began to play an important role in hermeneutics and would continue to do so and again it wasn't until Martin Luther and John Calvin in the Reformation especially Luther that would react to that but church tradition began to play an important role and appeal to what the church believed.

One dominant approach to biblical interpretation in the early centuries of the church during the first few centuries of Christianity's existence was associated with Alexandria of Egypt and that was the allegorical method. One of the most well-known practitioners of that was Philo Philo is well known for interpreting the Old Testament text especially narrative allegorically probably demonstrating how it actually supports Greek philosophical ideas at times but he would go through and interpret the Old Testament narrative allegorically again finding references to physical literal events and persons finding a deeper allegorical second level of meaning behind that. The most well-known allegorizer I guess that's a word was origin from one hundred eighty five to two hundred and fifty four AD so late second century into the third century.

Origin was most well known for interpreting the Old Testament allegorically Old Testament in particular you can read more about his hermeneutical method in his first principles you can google that and find translations of that online but a very interesting and instructive about how he his approach to hermeneutics and interpretation. Origin started with the idea especially found in Pauline works that just as the human consists of body soul and spirit again you find that phraseology in Paul's letters in a couple of places but just as human beings consist of three parts body soul and spirit he says so does scripture. Scripture has a three fold meaning that corresponds to body soul and spirit that is scripture has a literal meaning a physical literal meaning that would correspond to body it also has a moral meaning that would correspond to soul and then it also has a theological meaning that would correspond to spirit.

Now this was important for origin it's interesting that origin isn't just concocting this out of thin air number one it was an important methodology in the day and in some sense he might simply be a child of his day but on the other hand he also tied allegory into inspiration if the biblical text is inspired there's certainly more than just

the surface physical meaning but there must be more to it so he saw allegory as the natural corollary of the text of scripture being inspired. Furthermore he also intriguingly origin saw allegory as a sign of one's intellectual and spiritual maturity so one who was actually one who was spiritually mature but also intellectually astute was able to allegorize the text. It's interesting we think the opposite someone that allegorizes the text today we think is an adult or has lost their mind and frequently that is the case there are all kinds of crazy things can take place but origin and the one who can interpret it literally and exegete it correctly that's the one who is spiritually and intellectually mature.

Origin saw it the other way around interestingly. So for example an example from Genesis chapter 19 and verses 30 through 38 the story of Lot having sexual relations with his daughters I believe allegorically interestingly to make sense of this text because again for origin this seemed to be a rather craft what value can there be in a story of Lot's sexual exploits what value can there be spiritually and theologically in that. So according to origin Lot allegorically represented the human mind.

Lot's wife the reference here is to Lot's sexual relations with his wife but Lot's wife represented the flesh and pleasure and Lot's daughters represented pride. So he took each of the persons and allegorized them to give them some spiritual meaning to basically give the text value. Probably and again I don't want to go into any more details as to why he does it or how he does it but just to demonstrate what origin was trying to do and what the allegorical method entailed in the story of Lot and his wife and his daughters in Genesis 19.

The classic example of allegory probably comes later from St. Augustine's interpretation of the parable and actually the parables proved to be very ripe for this sort of allegorical explanation and continued on for quite some time. But here's you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan where where a person is on the road

and is jumped by robbers and beaten and left half dead and a priest comes by and a Levite comes by two Jewish leaders and significant persons yet they fail to stop for various reasons and help the person who's beaten and lo and behold the Samaritan comes by a most unlikely hero and takes this person bandages him up takes him to an inn and pays for his up his stay in his upkeep and St. Augustine read this allegorically and gives us the one of the more classical examples of an allegorical interpretation. So here it is basically when the parable says a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho on the road to Jericho where he gets beaten this man is Adam.

Jerusalem then allegorically stands for the city the heavenly city of peace. So Jerusalem isn't the physical city doesn't go the Jerusalem now stands for the heavenly city from which Adam fell. Jericho allegorically stands for the moon and therefore signifies Adam's mortality.

The robbers that beat this man allegorically stands for the devil and his angels. The fact that they stripped him means they stripped him of his immortality. They beat him means they persuaded the man to sin.

Again the man allegorizes Adam. So you can see this parable is starting out as kind of a commentary on the creation narrative. They left him half-dead means allegorically that he died spiritually therefore he's half-dead.

The priest and the Levite stand for the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament. Interestingly that's the one point most people wouldn't dispute today. The Samaritan is said to mean guardian therefore the Samaritan is Christ himself.

That would have been rather shocking to a Jewish reader that despised Samaritans. The Samaritans stand for Christ himself. The fact that he bandages wounds means the binding and restraining of sin.

The oil symbolized the comfort of hope. The wine symbolized the exhortation to work with a fervent spirit. The donkey symbolized the flesh of Jesus incarnation.

Interestingly the inn symbolized the church. The next day after he takes him to the inn the very next day refers to the resurrection. The day after the resurrection the two silver coins allegorically stand for the promise of this life and the life to come.

And then the innkeeper is the Apostle Paul. So that's how St. Augustine made sense of this parable by taking the different elements of the parable and actually finding a deeper level of meaning an allegorical meaning that he finds elsewhere in the Old New Testament. We'll talk about parables later on but I'm simply giving you an example of the allegorical approach which became the dominant approach in early biblical interpretation.

Now let me say it's important to understand though this approach certainly is susceptible to a lot of subjectivity and certainly susceptible to abuse. And while we may look at what the early church fathers and early interpreters did and want to rightly avoid that and especially excesses and extremes it's important to understand too that there there's still it's still important to understand that we do something very similar to what they were doing when we attempt to make the text relevant. The allegorical method was not just some arbitrarily playing with the text of scripture and trying to extract all kinds of strange meanings but was an attempt to make the text relevant.

How is one going to make a story of Lot and his relationships with his wife and daughters? How is one going to make that relevant spiritually and theologically? How does one make a story like the Good Samaritan relevant to the day? Allegory whatever we may think of it at the very least is instructed because it reminds us that interpretation has always been aimed at demonstrating the relevance of God's Word for for modern readers however much it may have been overdone by early interpreters of scripture. And we could we could look at other examples of interpretation by the early church fathers and in the patristic era but the two points I want to make is number one the dominant approach became allegorical interpretation allegory allegorizing the biblical text. As we're going to see later there's there's actually a difference between allegorizing and interpreting an allegory that is allegorizing something that is not intended to be treated that way as opposed to interpreting a text that is meant to be taken allegorically.

But early interpretation was characterized by what became kind of a dominant approach up until the Reformation of treating an Old Testament text especially allegorically finding a hidden level of meaning finding a deeper meaning within within the text. The second feature of early interpretation that began to to begin to get steam and begin to get rolling was a focus on early church tradition interpreting in light of the tradition of the church and the theological beliefs of the church and interpretations that supported and reflected the church's theology. So allegorical interpretation and and also giving preference to church tradition now becomes a dominant to dominant hermeneutical or or interpretive approaches to the Old New Testament.

To skip ahead and again there's there's a lot we could say about other periods of church history and other important individuals in interpretation but again we'll skip ahead and touch on some of the major movements in the history of interpretation. So I want to skip ahead to the the Reformation of the 16th century and again

previously as we said interpretation focused on church tradition church tradition loomed large in in the interpretation of not only church fathers but even beyond that and then the allegorical method of interpretation. In a sense the hermeneutics or the interpretive approach of the Reformation grew out of a dissatisfaction and with and reaction to both of these tendencies.

We'll see that the Reformation could generally before we just look very briefly at two individuals Martin Luther and John Calvin the Reformation could be characterized as an interest in studying the Bible itself in the original languages both Hebrew and Greek and also even an awareness of of the literary types of the text the desire to understand the text in light of their original historical context. Those seem to begin to characterize the approach of the Reformers to biblical interpretation again in in reaction to and with dissatisfaction with the previous approach of giving focusing on simply on a church tradition and then allegorizing of biblical text. One thing that obviously lies behind this approach too is now with the Reformation the Bible now is no longer only in the hands of the church leaders but now is in the hands of the common person so it can be understood.

One of the the important implications of and focuses of the Reformation was the perspicuity of scripture that is it can be understood by the common person. One does not need church tradition or authority to interpret it but one can understand it in light of one can learn the original languages such as Hebrew and Greek one can understand the text it should be understood not in light of church tradition but in light of its original context etc etc. Martin Luther then Martin Luther the one of the more well known of the Reformation movement was known for interpreting both the Old and New Testament again not seeing church tradition as the locus of interpretation and the locus of biblical authority but the Old and New Testament text itself and so this was a direct challenge to how hermeneutics or how biblical interpretation had gone on up until this time.

Also Luther advocated a single literal meaning or literal sense in the biblical text again and direct contrast to allegorical approaches that would find multiple meanings. Remember origins, body, soul, and spirit that was even expanded to four meanings not just three four possible allegorical meanings but now how Luther reacts to that says no there's a single literal sense to the Old New Testament text. Luther also emphasized the grammar and the history and the role that they play in interpretation.

Interpretation must take into account the historical context of the biblical text it must also be consistent with the grammar though it's interesting when you read Luther he did not completely divest himself of allegorical tendencies. He still at times he did follow allegorical and typological approaches that resembled earlier approaches to interpretation. And in fact it's interesting Luther had such an impact that his some of his commentaries especially his commentaries on Romans and particularly in Galatians are still seen as valuable contributions to our understanding of Galatians.

In fact modern understanding of Paul modern interpretation of Paul can basically be divided between Luther and and what is known as the new perspective and where we fall in relationship to that. So Martin Luther had a profound impact on biblical interpretation and and now how the text is approached and as I said his his commentary particularly in Galatians is still seen even where one might disagree with some of the details is still seen as a model of exegesis and interpretation of a biblical text in light of its historical and grammatical context. The other person to emphasize that I want to just introduce you to very briefly is John Calvin.

John Calvin also rejected allegory and instead sought to ground his interpretation in the biblical text. You know John Calvin more for his Institutes of the Christian religion

but within that we find Calvin discussing principles of interpretation. We'll see in just a moment John Calvin also wrote commentaries on biblical text but he did so seeking to ground meaning and interpretation in the biblical text and rejected therefore allegorical interpretations that would find multiple and spiritual meanings underneath or behind the text.

Calvin also championed a more grammatical and historical approach to interpretation that is taking a text and putting it in its historical context as far as who was the author what was the situation of the readers what was the author intending to communicate and examining the the grammatical elements of the text the grammatical structure of the text in order to arrive at the meaning of the text. Calvin also understood and advocated that the Bible itself is its own best interpreter again perhaps in response to the preference for giving preference to early church tradition and to the authority of the church. Now Calvin says no the Bible is its own best interpreter or scripture interprets scripture.

We still see that today I still think we see the influence of that today in some of our Bibles with that have in the margins or in footnotes parallel passages that would point you to other texts that that would be parallel and would help you understand the text that you're reading or dealing with. So Calvin was very clear that the scripture is its own best interpreter scripture interprets scripture and and primarily what he meant by that is is the meaning the correct meaning resides in the text itself and the final arbitrator of meaning is the biblical text not church authority or church tradition. In fact Calvin also wrote commentaries that are still highly valued today.

Not too long ago actually it was a little bit ago at least from our perspective I was reading a textbook by a well-known scholar on the New Testament and and surveying commentaries on the New Testament and most of those he mentioned along with contemporary commentaries he mentioned commentaries by both Calvin

and Luther as still necessary for the preacher and scholars library. So John Calvin also wrote commentaries on virtually every book of the Bible except the book of Revelation which he didn't know what to do with and given some of the things I've read a lot of people would have done better to follow his lead by not writing in Revelation but he still wrote commentaries that are still valued today for the contribution they make to exegesis not only what they reveal about Calvin but even even for insight into the biblical text. So Luther and Calvin are examples of a reaction to the standard approach to hermeneutics that focused on church tradition and church authority as the arbitrator of meaning and an allegorical approach in response Luther and Calvin focused on the text itself as the locus of meaning scripture interpreting scripture abandoning the allegorical method of interpretation even if they didn't do so completely all the time focusing instead on the historical grammatical meaning of the text and both of them writing commentaries that still make a valuable contribution to exegesis and to interpretation.

In summary then and in response to the currents of interpretation of their day thus the contribution of the Reformation to hermeneutics of their day and even to our day perhaps I think could be summarized as the following. Number one is the priority of scripture as the the primary locus of meaning and interpretation that the primary locus of meaning or the primary contribution to meaning is not the authority of the church or merely church tradition or that is our theological and ecclesiastical traditions are to be subservient to the meaning of the biblical text. So the priority of the text as the true place where hermeneutics and interpretation takes place is one of the contributions of the Reformation movement.

A second one is the stress on the grammatical and historical meaning of the text. Again a number of hermeneutical textbooks still argue for what is called the grammatical historical meaning or a grammatical historical interpretation. Again that goes back to the Reformation.

Studying a text in light of its its grammatical context the Hebrew and Greek grammar and also studying a text by placing it in its historical context. Understanding the author and the readers and the situation the author was addressing. Also the emphasis on scripture being its own best interpreter.

That is that our interpretation of scripture must have a consistency must have a coherency that we don't come up with an interpretation that contradicts what what scripture says elsewhere. Again I think is a vestige of the Reformation. And then finally the clarity of scripture.

The fact that anyone can read it and understand it anyone can interpret it is again owes itself to the inter the legacy of the Reformation. Although sometimes we hear interpretations that we might not wish that were true but nonetheless the Reformation has taken the and put it back in the hands of the people to understand it and read it. And all of these I think still affect the way that we interpret and approach scripture today.

By emphasizing its clarity its understandability by emphasizing that it should be understood in its grammatical and historical context. By understanding that it should be interpreted consistently with other scripture and by making the scriptural text the biblical text. Giving it priority in our hermeneutics in our interpretation making it the locus of meaning of the biblical text.

So this this rather brief survey of the history of the interpretation of the Bible to this point has primarily been to demonstrate that again you stand when you pick up the biblical text and read it and interpret it you are part of a long story a long tradition of encountering the biblical text. No one does it simply out of the air. No one comes as we'll see later as a blank slate.

No one comes to it as a first time. Whether you recognize it or not you are influenced by others who have wrestled with the text and interpreted the text and tried to make it relevant who have gone on before you stretching all the way back to the Old Testament. What I want to do next in the next session is we'll take another rather quantum leap forward a couple hundred years and kind of switch gears and we'll begin to branch out and start to look at influences on interpretation that go outside of biblical interpreters.

As I said before one of the features of recent study and thinking about hermeneutics and how we understand has demonstrated that hermeneutics is no longer the province only of biblical interpreters but other disciplines as well. So we're going to branch out and look at some non-biblical influences on how we read and interpret biblical texts and I think we'll see the influences are many and we'll examine what those are and the main persons associated with that and again how that might influence the way we read and interpret biblical passages. Thank you.