

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 8, Gadamer & Bultmann**

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The last session we discussed some of the influences on hermeneutics and interpretation by looking at several individuals around the period of the Enlightenment, from Francis Bacon to Schleiermacher, and their contribution to hermeneutics and their contribution to thinking. We saw that much of our thinking about hermeneutics is influenced not only by biblical interpreters, but more broadly simply by methods of thinking and thinking about understanding and knowing more generally. And we considered the legacy of some of those individuals and their contributions even to modern day hermeneutics, even in biblical studies.

What I want to do is jump forward to the 20th century and examine a number of 20th and even into the 21st century perhaps, but examine a handful of individuals who have influenced our understanding of hermeneutics. And the first one is a person that perhaps more than any other has been influential in our understanding of a bit of interpretation in hermeneutics. This individual was a German philosopher by the name of Hans-Gurt Gadamer, who lived from 1900 to 2002.

It's interesting as you listen to some of the dates of these thinkers, how long most of them lived. The lesson I guess is to become a hermeneutical thinker or a philosopher and you're guaranteed a long life. Obviously that's probably not true, but it's interesting how many of them lived into their 80s and even 90s, and even longer in the case of Hans-Gurt Gadamer.

But this German philosopher Gadamer introduced what has often been labeled as the new hermeneutic. And Gadamer's most famous work that articulated his position

was a work that was translated into English with the title Truth and Method. And in this book, Gadamer developed his understanding of philosophical hermeneutics.

Sometimes you'll hear that term philosophical hermeneutics. It's often seen to go back to Gadamer's work Truth and Method and the development of his understanding of hermeneutics. Gadamer was also reacting to the scientific method and the pursuit of knowledge of objective truth by human reasoning and rational thinking.

And what he said is understanding is far greater than just objective truth achieved through scientific experimentation. Instead, Gadamer's reacting to previous attempts then to see understanding as simply the result of scientific technique and the scientific method or or to see hermeneutics in terms of a subject, an interpreting subject, that dominates over an object for our purposes to the biblical text. A subject that dominates over the object so that the subject gains mastery over it and analyzes it so as to master it.

And that's what Gadamer is sort of reacting to. It's also important to add that for Gadamer, hermeneutics, we're beginning to see that hermeneutics is not just understanding texts, but for him it's under and for us biblical text, but for him it's understanding life. Hermeneutics for him embraces all of life.

It's cross-disciplinary and we'll see that a number of these thinkers it is beginning to become that. So for him we do not dominate a text, but according to Gadamer it also dominates us. And what he did is, Gadamer said, we are so entangled and enmeshed in the world in which we live that whenever we try to understand something, whenever we try to come to an understanding of something else, our interests, our beliefs, our situation in life, our biases, our predispositions, all color our understanding.

But he also argued they are also necessary in some ways. And in direct contrast to Locke, John Locke, that said we could approach something with a blank slate waiting to be written upon by sensory impressions from the external world. Gadamer said no, we are so enmeshed in our culture, our surroundings, we are so enmeshed in our own understanding, our predispositions, our biases, that these necessarily color the way we look at things.

But this was a good thing because this is necessary if we are even to understand something. Again, apart from if one has a blank mind, how can we ever understand something? Apart from categories of understanding, apart from a previous understanding, how can we hope to grasp or understand anything? So for Gadamer, the pre-understanding and the fact that we are enmeshed in this world with our own interests, our own beliefs, our own situation in life was necessary. So therefore, there's no such thing as an objective, neutral observer or interpreter.

We don't experience things as detached observers. It's not as some isolated, detached observer, a subject that I observe this and gain mastery over it and understand it in a purely objective way. Instead, my understanding of this is colored by my own interests, my own beliefs, my own predispositions and presuppositions, my own biases.

All of that influences how I understand this. But again, that's a good thing for Gadamer, not necessarily a negative thing. Therefore, instead of understanding something as a neutral, detached observer, the process of understanding for Gadamer was far more dynamic.

And how he understood his solution to hermeneutics and his solution to the fact that we come to a text with all our biases and presuppositions and our interests and our

beliefs, the solution to that is that we actually enter into a dialogue with the text itself. We enter into a conversation with what it is we are trying to understand. So we bring all our baggage, all our background and our presuppositions to the object we're trying to understand, but we enter into a dialogue with it.

We enter into a conversation with what we're trying to understand. So the process of interpretation is far more dynamic than just some objective observer sitting back and soaking up the data. Gadamer then, in light of his understanding of hermeneutics as kind of a conversation or a dialogue with what one is trying to understand, Gadamer championed this idea of the fusion of horizons.

And this is one of the things that he is well known for. The fact that the interpreter comes to a text or comes to something that is to be understood, an interpreter comes from his or her own situation. They begin with their own assumptions, their own presuppositions, their own beliefs.

And they come, they begin with an assumption of what they expect to find in the text. And then they enter into a dialogue with the text, kind of a give and take with the text. So that their expectations of what they hope to find in the text might be affirmed, or they might need to be modified.

Their expectations might be thwarted. In turn, then, the text, and again, Gadamer understands it as kind of a back and forth dialogue. So I come with my understanding, I come with my background, my assumption of what I hope to find.

And I find those assumptions confirmed or thwarted in the text by reading the text, for example. In turn, the text itself questions the interpreter. The text, and as I read the text, it begins to enlarge my understanding.

It begins to enlarge what I expect to find. And then it focuses on revising our assumptions and the questions we ask of the text. So again, I come to the text, I bring my questions, my assumptions, and then the text itself challenges or confirms those, and causes me to revise my understanding, the kinds of questions that I ask of the text.

So the goal then for Gadamer is to arrive at what he called a fusion of the horizons. The horizons of the text and the horizons of the interpreter come kind of to a mutual consent, a mutual understanding, a common understanding between the text and the interpreter. So as I enlarge the horizons of my own thinking, I also enlarge the horizons of the text from my own situation and my own historical perspective.

And likewise, the text enlarges my horizon and understanding from its world and its perspective. It reveals something new. It reveals something challenging to my understanding.

But it's important to understand, though, that for Gadamer, this did not mean that the result of this process somehow was a correct final interpretation of a text, or a specific single correct meaning that came from the text. Rather, the result was it simply opened up possibilities where the horizons of both were enlarged that they came to kind of a mutual relationship. So Gadamer is not quite saying that somehow the horizons merge into a correct meaning, a correct understanding of the true meaning of the text.

So for Gadamer, he championed what could be called sort of a hermeneutics of dialogue, again, where the interpreter enters into a dialogue with the text. So one way to look at Gadamer's contribution, then, is to look at both the contributions to hermeneutics, but also some of the questions that his approach raises. So for example, as far as contribution, once again, I think Gadamer has poignantly

reminded us that there is no such thing as an objective, neutral observer and interpreter, that somehow we can approach a biblical text in a completely unbiased way, uninfluenced by our background and our theological beliefs, our culture, our perspectives, etc.

That no one can approach a text as a neutral observer. But those things inevitably reflect and sometimes hinder our understanding of a text. There's no such thing as purely inductive approaches of text where we simply soak up data and observe something in a neutral manner.

But instead, we're influenced by what we bring to the text. That will necessarily color the way we look at it. And I think also in some respects that's inevitable, and it's necessary.

How can we hope to understand something such as a text if we don't have any prior knowledge, if we don't have any prior experience, if we don't have any prior categories to help us to perceive that. So one of the contributions of Gadamer, then, has been to further draw our attention away from the mythical, neutral, completely neutral, unbiased observer, just waiting to soak up data and make sense of it in an objective, neutral way. Second, Gadamer has helpfully emphasized that interpretation is a dialogue in some respects.

Interpretation is a dialogue that enables us to be challenged. It enables our preconceived notions to be challenged. It enables our own horizons and our own understanding to be challenged and to be changed.

So that meaning is often surprising. Meaning often then challenges our own understanding and the pre-understandings that we bring to the text. Again, Gadamer

did not go as far necessarily to say that somehow, therefore, that the text has priority and the interpreter can arrive at a correct meaning of the text.

But at the same time, I think he's helpful in emphasizing the dialogical nature of interpretation. It's not just me as an objective observer gaining mastery over an object. But instead, we come to the text with our questions and assumptions and what we expect to find.

And the text also challenges that and can overturn that, can challenge and change that. So that sometimes meaning is surprising and challenges our preconceived notions of what we're going to find in the text. Related to that, a third contribution, I think, is that interpretation is not a one-time event.

It's sometimes an ongoing process that often opens up new insights. We don't interpret a text. I don't open my Bible to Jeremiah chapter 31 and read it and arrive at the correct meaning and I'm done.

And there's no more work to be done. There's no more interpretation to take place. But instead, Gadamer reminds us that sometimes interpretation is not a one-time event but is often ongoing and continues to open up new insights into the text as our understanding is challenged by the text.

But at the same time, Gadamer's hermeneutical approach raises some questions. For example, two questions that, again, I don't hope to answer necessarily right now, but just to raise from Gadamer's thinking. Number one, are there limits to understanding? When I enter into a dialogue with the text, are there limits to my understanding of the text? Even when you talk about the fusing of the horizons, are there limits to how those horizons are fused? Are there limits to how I understand another text? And second, is the dialogue a vicious circle? I mean, is a dialogue

something that just goes back and forth and goes back and forth and is ongoing? For example, some have even raised the question, how do I know if I come to a text with my pre-understanding and my own biases and assumptions of what I'm going to find, how do I know that when the text speaks back to me, when the text challenges me, how do I know that I'm understanding that correctly if I'm already influenced by my background and my biases? So, for example, considering the contribution of Gadamer, when I read a biblical text, again, if I choose to read one of Jesus' parables, for example, or if I choose to read one of Paul's letters, the text may then challenge my own, for example, the biblical text may challenge my own preconceived notions of individualism.

I might come to a biblical text and from a very individualistic perspective, especially in 21st century, as a 21st century middle class American, I might come to the text with my individualistic assumptions and I might try to understand the text from that perspective. But the text then may challenge my own preconceived notions. It may frustrate me as a reader because I'm finding something now that challenges my belief.

And at least as a Christian, hopefully then I allow the text as the Word of God to overturn that and challenge that and conform my horizon or my perspective and my understanding to that of the biblical text. One example in my own interpretation that may or may not exactly reflect what is going on with Gadamer's approach, but for the longest time I read a text like Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 18. I read this from a purely individualistic, personal, pietistic perspective.

When the author says, do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery, instead be filled with the Spirit. I was prone to read this in purely individualistic terms. This was about as an individual Christian, the God Spirit filling me and



therefore producing the rest of the text, producing the kind of characteristics that Paul sees as further indicating a life that is controlled by or filled by the Holy Spirit.

So I read this in personal, pietistic, individualistic terms that the God Spirit would fill me as an individual and produce the kind of life that he wanted. However, as I read this text again in the broader context of Ephesians, I wondered whether my perspective was too narrow. And I began to consider the fact that perhaps the perspective of chapter 5 verse 18 of Ephesians is more corporate and communal.

So that the command to be filled with the Spirit is a command to the entire community, the church, to be God's temple where God dwells and is present with him through his Holy Spirit. So that this, while it may not necessarily rule out individual experience and individual filling, on the other hand, Paul's emphasis may be far more communal. That he envisions the entire church, the entire body of Christ, the entire corporate community as the locus of God's filling, as looking at the entire community as a temple that God will fill.

God's presence will be in the midst of his people. So at times, again, the biblical text may function to challenge our preconceived notions and function to make us uncomfortable and see something surprising that challenges what we thought we would find in the biblical text. This brings me to another individual who was influential in hermeneutics, though, to some degree, though, probably more so in his broader theological and biblical understanding of the New Testament.

But the next individual that I want to talk about is Rudolf Bultmann, another German scholar and German New Testament scholar, particularly, who lived from 1884 to 1976. Rudolf Bultmann was a German scholar that is often associated with what is known as existential hermeneutics. And again, I don't want to talk, spend a lot of time talking about Bultmann.

But in some ways, Bultmann also contributed to our understanding of hermeneutics. Bultmann is better known as the author of one of the most important books of the author, was *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, where he expounded his views of the synoptic gospels in relationship to the historicity, and how he understood the development of the gospel tradition. Rudolf Bultmann is probably one of the most important New Testament interpreters in the 20th century, both in Europe and in North America as well.

His influence, both through his students, but also through his writing and his thinking, is still widely felt. He's also known for writing a New Testament theology, where he developed his approach to New Testament theology from an anthropological perspective. But he also wrote on and contributed, as I've already said, to hermeneutics.

And there are several important features in his writing that we want to focus on. First of all, is Rudolf Bultmann emphasized pre-understanding? Similar to what we saw in Gadamer's work, is Bultmann emphasized that our understanding of a biblical text is conditioned by our prior understanding. In other words, there's no such thing as an objective neutral observer of the text, but instead, when we come to the text, influenced by our prior understanding.

This was spelled out particularly in an article that Bultmann wrote entitled, *Is Presuppositionalist Exegesis Possible?* Try that out on your congregation. Is presuppositionalist exegesis possible? And of course, to that question, Bultmann answered no. A second thing that Bultmann's hermeneutics seem to emphasize is that hermeneutics is circular.

The process of understanding and interpretation is circular. We begin with our pre-understanding, again, much like what we find in Gadamer. We begin with our pre-understanding, and that is either confirmed, rejected, or modified in dialogue with the text.

So again, in some respects, Bultmann understood hermeneutics similar to Gadamer, in some respects, to be a dialogue between the interpreter and the text. We come to the text with our pre-understanding, we then find the text modifying or challenging or rejecting that, and the dialogue continues. A third feature of Rudolf Bultmann's hermeneutics is existential.

Again, Rudolf Bultmann is often seen as and identified with existential hermeneutics. According to Bultmann, the goal of hermeneutics is an existential encounter with the text, and here Bultmann is usually seen to be influenced by the existential thinker Martin Heidegger, but he saw that an existential encounter with the text was the main goal of interpretation. And so one would read a text, and the goal was to be open to what this text says about the possibilities for authentic human existence.

The goal of reading the text then was to experience a call to decision and authentic existence. So for that reason, Bultmann's hermeneutic could be characterized as existential. The goal is to have an encounter with the text and a call to decision and authentic human existence.

The fourth feature that, and last feature that I'll mention about Bultmann's hermeneutic, is the process of demythologization. That is, Bultmann underwent a program of demythologizing the New Testament text. And what that meant is, for him, the Bible held to, especially the New Testament, held to an outmoded, pre-scientific view of the world, where there were things like demons and angels and miraculous healings and resurrections.

But in the modern world, we no longer believe in such a world. We no longer live in and experience such a world. Again, for him, again, kind of almost Bultmann again is operating with this distinction between faith and religion and God and seeing history within the realm and seeing the world within the realm of cause and effect and science, which leaves out anything supernatural.

So if that's the case, we don't experience angels and we don't experience resurrections and miraculous things. That was for a pre-scientific, outmoded worldview. But in our scientific, technological world, we no longer experience those things.

So what do we do with the Bible? Again, according to Bultmann, we interpret the New Testament existentially. And what we do is we have to strip away all the myth related to this outmoded worldview dominated by the miraculous and resurrections and angels and demons and things like that. We strip away the myth to get at the true meaning of the biblical text.

Some have compared it to stripping away all the husk until you get down to the kernel of truth, which according to Bultmann was simply an existential call to authentic existence. So again, for example, when one reads in the gospels about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we're not to understand this as an actual literal resurrection of Christ from the dead. Again, that's part of an outmoded worldview that we no longer participate in and experience instead because those things just don't happen.

But rather now we read the resurrection account as by stripping away the mythical husk. The kernel is that this is simply a call for faith in the Christian. So to summarize, again, there are other persons that we could no doubt talk about, but I've tried to

simply sample some of the more important influences in hermeneutics and interpretation.

So to summarize our survey to this point on historical roots and historical influences on interpretation, going all the way back to Francis Bacon again and his purely scientific inductive reasoning, looking at Descartes and his emphasis on human, the autonomous thinker and human reasoning and rationality as capable of knowing. The emphasis by John Locke on the mind is a blank slate that receives sensory impressions from the external world. And then Immanuel Kant, who emphasized the autonomous thinking self and that it was the categories and we perceive everything and know things through the grid and categories already in the mind.

On to Friedrich Schleiermacher that in reacting to pure rationality suggested that the goal of hermeneutics was to uncover the author's thought and the intention of the author. To Hans-Gur Gadamer who suggested that interpretation is the result of a fusion of horizons. We enter into a dialogue with the text.

We come with our presuppositions, our predispositions, our beliefs and biases, and we enter into a dialogical relationship with the text. And then on to Rudolf Bultmann who also emphasized the importance of pre-understanding and presuppositions. No understanding can take place apart from prior understanding and that the goal of interpretation was an existential encounter with the text.

Bultmann associated with an existential hermeneutic. And in the New Testament, since we can no longer buy into this world of angels and demons and the supernatural and miracles and resurrections, the goal is to demythologize the text, to strip this all away and to uncover the main kernel of meaning, which is a call to authentic existence and an existential encounter with the text. So, what do we learn in summary? What is the contribution of these individuals and the historical roots

and historical influences on hermeneutics? Some of this obviously we've already mentioned, but just to recap and summarize.

Number one, I'll mention five things briefly. Number one is, one of the legacies of this approach then is seen in hermeneutical textbooks or interpretive movements and Bible studies that emphasize an inductive approach. Movements that emphasize the correct application of correct methods of interpretation so that the meaning of the text can be arrived at, the correct meaning of the text can be extracted.

And that furthermore, there's a direct correlation between the interpretation and my knowing and my understanding of the meaning of the text. There's a direct correlation between that and the text itself. So, human reason, logical thinking, the correct application of methods, the ability to approach the text as a neutral, objective observer is one of the legacies of these individuals that still in many respects has influenced our hermeneutics today and certainly has influenced countless, especially in the 19th and 20th century, has influenced countless interpreters of the biblical text and countless hermeneutical textbooks.

A second legacy of these individuals historically was an emphasis on the author's intention that the goal of interpretation is to uncover the author's intended meaning. And even to the extent that we are told that we are to attempt as much as possible to empathize with the author, to put ourselves in the author's shoes, to try to put ourselves in the biblical author's situation so that we understand what the author was intending to communicate. It's an attempt to understand the author and what and the meaning the author was trying to convey.

While we're going to see while most discussions of author's intent have moved away from the more psychological approach of Schleiermacher, one of the legacies of Schleiermacher is still to emphasize the goal of interpretation is recovering the

author's intention. A third influence of this historical survey of some of the roots and influences of these individuals on hermeneutics is an emphasis on the reader as the autonomous self. That is starting especially with Kant and even going back to Descartes, there is now a division between the ability of the self to think, which raises the ability and the autonomous thinker, which raises the question to what extent then is meaning determined by the perspective that the reader brings to the text.

As we said in some respects this has anticipated modern reader oriented approaches such as reader response criticism that we'll talk about in a later session where the reader creates meaning. The reader is the one that perceives and even determines and creates meaning in the text rather than the author. Fourth related to this is then that several of these approaches have left us with the legacy that no one comes to the text without biases.

In contrast to the first two points that I just mentioned, especially the first one that emphasized a purely inductive approach that one could stand as a neutral objective observer and gain mastery over the text. In contrast, several of these individuals have emphasized that no one comes to the text as a completely neutral or objective observer. We all come with our biases, our prejudices, our backgrounds, our predispositions, our prior understandings, our own beliefs and experiences that influence and affect the way we read the text.

But there's also an assumption that this is not necessarily a bad thing or it doesn't have to be. In fact, to some extent it's necessary. How can you understand anything without a prior understanding? If you have a blank mind, a blank slate, how in the world can you hope to understand anything? So there's a recognition that no one comes to the text without biases and prejudices and pre-understandings and prior influences.

But all of those influence the way we read a text. This does raise the question of whether we will therefore inevitably distort the text or whether this means that there is no correct meaning or that no one can ever hope to arrive at the correct meaning of the text. We'll deal with those issues later.

But at the very least, we have now come to grips with the fact that no one is a completely objective neutral observer, but we all bring our own so-called baggage to the text that influences the way that we read it. And finally, a fifth result of this approach is to recognize that interpretation to some extent is a dialogue. Even many evangelical interpreters you'll find will talk about an interpretive spiral or a hermeneutical spiral where we enter into a dialogue with the text.

We come to the text with our questions and assumptions, allowing the text to challenge that. And then we continue to approach the text and question it and allow it to challenge. You'll even see some evangelical interpreters, although they may use it very differently, but using Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons.

But at the very least, interpretation is not so much a one-time event where we gain mastery over text and just extract its meaning, but at times maybe an ongoing dialogue where we continue to discover new things about the text. What I want to do now is shift gears and start to discuss methods of interpretation or hermeneutical approaches to the text in the form of different methods, but also different criticisms as their label. And let me start with a side note here.

When we talk about criticism, and throughout the rest of this course we will talk about different criticisms, we've already introduced you to one criticism known as textual criticism, but we'll introduce you to some other criticisms such as genre criticism or redaction criticism, form criticism, historical criticism, that we'll just begin



to touch on at the end of this session right now. But we'll introduce you to several different criticisms. It's important to stop and note what we mean by criticism.

When we talk about criticism, we are not using the term necessarily in a negative way in terms of being critical or judgmental about a text or about a theological belief. Instead, we're using criticism in a more positive sense of providing valid justification and sound reason for the position we hold. That is, many of these methods indeed did arise within the context of rather negative critical judgments and negative assumptions.

But at the same time, when they are divorced from these judgments and these negative assumptions and predispositions, many of these critical methodologies are indeed still valuable. So that again, when we use the word criticism, we are talking primarily about providing justification for our beliefs, providing reasons why we interpret a text the way it is, providing reasons why we think the text means this as opposed to this. So that the opposite of criticism is not piety, but the opposite of criticism in this sense is gullibility or naivety that does not provide reasons for why one believes the way one does.

So just a side note as to how we're using criticism. Don't be shocked by it or turned off by it, but to recognize that criticism is a good thing simply referring to providing justification for an analysis for why we interpret a text and read it in the way we do. So having said that, let's begin by looking at historical and author-centered approaches to hermeneutics or to biblical interpretation.

Another way of looking at this is, let's look at approaches that primarily go behind the text. That is, we have already suggested that interpretation focuses on three aspects of the production of text. That is the author and the circumstances surrounding the author that are behind the text.

The second is the text itself, that is, interpretation is within the text. And then the third one is focusing on the reader as the person receiving the text or looking in front of the text. So those are the main kind of foci of interpretation.

And again, both historically and logically, hermeneutics seems to have moved through these three. And so we're going to begin with the first one, that is, author and historical-oriented approaches to biblical interpretation that, on the whole, primarily seek to go behind the text. That is, asking questions about the author, primarily the author's intention, asking questions about the historical circumstances that produce the text, asking questions about the historical authors, I'm sorry, the historical readers, and their circumstances, and how the author was trying to address that by producing this text.

So historical approaches focus, they go behind the text. They look, in many respects, they look at the forces that produce the text historically. So what I wanted to begin to discuss then, initially, is what is known as the historical critical method or historical critical approaches to interpretation that, again, will include and often largely focuses on the author's intention.

In one sense, historical critical approaches to the New Testament or Old Testament are nothing different than what often goes on in interpretation in hermeneutics. That is, often it's nothing more than examining the background of a biblical book, examining who the author is, examining the situation, examining who the readers were, the date of the book, the location, the kinds of things that one finds in the introduction to most commentaries, or in older New Testament surveys and introductions. Those types of books deal with those kinds of questions.

Again, date, authorship, etc. So if I'm dealing with, I'm trying to understand, or I want to interpret and try to understand the book of Jeremiah, I ask questions about who the author was and what his circumstances were. I ask questions about the times and situations, politically, religiously, that transpired that would have created the environment for the book of Jeremiah to be written.

I ask questions about the date of the book, when it was written, the situation of the readers, etc., etc. All of that to reconstruct what most likely was the background and the situation that engendered the book in the first place. It's taking the book and simply placing it within its broader historical context.

And again, we've been doing that for a long time, and most commentaries, that seems to be the genre of a commentary, to begin with those kinds of questions, to place biblical books in their settings. Or again, Old and New Testament surveys that have treatments, extensive treatments, of these types of issues. However, more than just a summary of traditional approaches to interpretation of biblical books that you find in commentaries and New and Old Testament introductions and surveys and things like that, is that the historical critical method represents an approach to interpreting the Bible that is a product of the Enlightenment, in a sense, with its emphasis on human reasoning and emphasizing human rational thinking.

And an approach to interpreting the Bible historically that carries with it a number of assumptions and ideas. Often, sometimes in earlier, I won't use this language, in earlier treatments of the historical critical method, it was often called higher criticism. You very seldom find that terminology anymore.

But if you do, if you run across an older work, and they talk about higher criticism, they're usually talking about historical critical methodology and asking some of these types of questions, background and history and authorship, etc, etc. But again, the

historical critical method as it developed, was seen as a historically oriented approach to interpreting the Bible that carried with it a number of assumptions and beliefs, as it was applied to the biblical text. And we will look at some of those.

The historical critical method, though, was seen as a result of some of the earlier more dogmatic approaches to interpreting biblical text, more dogmatic theological readings of biblical texts that were simply reinforcing and reasserting theological traditions and beliefs. And now instead, the historical critical approach asks the interpreter to examine the Old and New Testament books as products of very historical processes. And so historical criticism then developed as a way of interpreting old and New Testament biblical text.

What does it mean to say then that the Bible is historical? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Did a group of Israelites really? And how is that historical? Did a group of Israelites really cross a sea that was parted so that they could walk through dry land? How is that historical? So in one respect, then it studies the biblical text like it would any other document. Several principles then, what I want to do now is discuss several principles that that guided the historical investigation of the Old and New Testament text. What were some of the assumptions and principles that governed and guided historical critical approaches to the Old and New Testament? First of all, and much of this will sound like some of the thinkers that we just examined previously, is the first assumption or principle that guided the historical critical approach was the priority of human reason and the priority of common sense.

Historical examination of biblical text progressed and proceeded according to human reason. That is, the human reasoning and the process of common sense was able to account for and to understand and interpret biblical texts in their historical context. So for example, when one approaches a text like Matthew chapter 1, where Jesus is

seen as being his birth, being the product of a virginal conception and birth, human reasoning and thinking tells me that that kind of thing does not happen.

Virgins don't conceive and give birth to children. So human logic, human reasoning is significant and important and has a priority in historical critical approaches to the biblical text. A second one that also sounds much like and owes much to some of the thinkers that we examined in the previous section is the principle of cause and effect.

This is one of the primary presuppositions of the historical, original historical critical approach to the Old New Testament. Everything happens within a closed continuum of cause and effect. That is, the world and history operates according to a natural system, a mechanistic system of cause and effect.

Every event is seen within the context of that which occurs before it and seen in the context of its relationship to all these other events. That is, every event must have a natural explanation. And so what that means, obviously, there can be no supernatural interruptions into the course of events.

There can be no intervention by an outside being, by a god, into those events. But instead all events must have a natural explanation. Events don't just occur, but instead they have an explanation, a cause and effect relationship.

They have a cause historically that gave rise to those events. So once again, a Red Sea doesn't just part so that an entire nation can cross over. Water does not just turn into wine.

People don't just rise from the dead. People that are sick are not just healed at a spoken word or with a touch. So that according to this method then, one must find other explanations for those types of things.

One method of approaching this, although there are others, one method was known as the religious historical approach, where basically the Old New Testament were simply read as variations or versions of other religious beliefs and similar religious phenomena in the ancient world. So first of all, the priority of human reasoning and thinking. Second primary presupposition was cause and effect.

Every event had a historical cause. Everything happened within a closed continuum of cause and effect so that miracles had to be explained in another way. There can be no supernatural intervention into the affairs of history.

A final one was the principle or assumption of analogy. That was historical knowledge proceeds from the known to the unknown. Or another way of putting it is simply history repeats itself.

It's constant. When I study a historical event, the assumption is that things in the past that took place must have an analogy to things that are taking place in the present. Therefore, only events that are analogous to my own experience, presumably then in my technological scientific era, events, only events that are analogous to my present experience are true.

So again, when I'm examining an account of historical events, only those that have an analogy to my present experience can be relied upon as true. Now, for most, this doesn't completely rule out some unique events. For example, to use an example from the history of the United States, the Battle of Gettysburg, one of the more famous battles that transpired in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, one of the more famous battles of the Civil War.

It was only a single battle. It wasn't repeated and fought over and over again. Yet at the same time, we do know of other well-known battles in history, and we experience warfare and battles today.

So that we can know then that this Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania that happened in the mid-1800s can be accepted as true because we have analogies of that today. But today we don't see things like people rising from the dead, and we don't see seas being parted so that entire nations can cross over. So the principle of analogy is an important assumption or principle within the application of the historical critical approach.

Now, the difficulty with this is this still raises questions about unique events. Much of the historical critical approach did not allow for unique, unparalleled events. As one interpreter suggested, someone who lives in an environment where there is no snow and where they experience no ice would have the right to doubt and to deny the existence of things like icebergs because there's no precise analogy.

So the historical critical method did not allow, there was no room for unique events that had no parallel or analogy with any other. When we resume our discussion of historical criticism in the next session, we will examine a little bit more the historical critical method, and then ask the question of how that can be harnessed and utilized in interpreting scripture, interpreting the Old New Testament as the word of God to his people today.