

# How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth

## *Epiclesis—Epiphany 2017*

### Glossary

**Accusative Case:** The case that nouns, adjectives, and other substantives use to designate the *direct* object of the action of a transitive verb (meaning a verb that takes an object); it *receives* the action of the verb. Example: “For God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only *Son*” (John 3:16). In this example, both *world* and *Son* are in the Accusative Case; *world* is the direct object of the verb *loved*, and *Son* is the direct object of the verb *gave*. (See also **Case** and **Declension**)

**Acrostic:** A poem that has its lines, sentences, verses, or clusters of verses ordered consecutively according to the alphabet, from beginning to end. The first poetic line begins with a word containing the first letter of the alphabet, the second line with a word containing the second letter of the alphabet, and so on, consecutively to the end of the alphabet. Examples of OT Psalms using this literary form are Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, and 145. The most prominent example used in the OT is Psalm 119, which has a series of eight paired lines for each letter of the alphabet. Each line in the series of eight begins with the same letter of the alphabet. (See also **Psalm**)

**Active Voice:** Voice is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates *how* the subject is related to the action or state expressed by the verb. Active Voice indicates that the *subject* is *doing* the acting. Example: “[Jesus] *was teaching* them many things in parables” (Mark 4:2). In the Greek, the verb translated “was teaching them” is in the Active Voice. In this case, the subject of the verb, *he [Jesus]* (which is indicated in the verb itself), is *doing* the teaching. (See also **Middle Voice** and **Passive Voice**)

**Adjective:** Generally, a word modifying a noun or other substantive (a word that functions as a noun; sometimes Greek Adjectives take the place of a noun or an adverb). Example: “the commandment is *holy, righteous* and *good*” (Rom. 7:12). The words *holy, righteous,* and *good* are all Adjectives modifying *commandment*. In other words, these three words are each describing a quality of the word *commandment*. (See also **Noun** and **Participle**)

**Adverb:** Generally, a word modifying a verb, indicating ideas related to time, place, manner, and degree. Adverbs answer questions like “When?” “Where?” “How?” “How much?” and “To what extent?” Example: “[L]ive *in a manner worthy* of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). A more wooden translation of the Greek text would be: “Conduct yourselves *worthily* of the gospel of Christ.” Live *how?* *Worthily*, in a *manner worthy* of the gospel of Christ. (See also **Verb**)

**Allegorical Sense:** One level of interpretation that was part of the “Fourfold Method” developed in the early church and that dominated medieval interpretive practice. Medieval exegetes assumed that each text of the Bible had four levels of meaning: (1) the Literal Sense—the straightforward grammatical meaning; (2) the Allegorical Sense—a spiritual meaning beyond the plain or literal sense; (3) the Tropological Sense—a moral or ethical dimension of the text, revealing how we must live the Christian life in the present; and (4) the Anagogical Sense—an eschatological dimension of the text, revealing our Christian hope—the realization of the new creation and the establishment of God’s kingdom. The Allegorical Sense usually referred to some aspect of the present, earthly life of the Church, geared toward bringing people into a deeper mystical experience of God. (See also **Allegory, Anagogical Sense, Fourfold Method, Literal Sense, Tropological Sense, and Typology**)

**Allegory** (Gk., *allos*, other): (1) A text in which many of the apparently plain details of the text actually refer to *another* level of meaning, operating something like a code. (2) A method of reading texts where the reader assumes that the literal (plain, surface, grammatical) meaning conceals a hidden meaning, to be deciphered using a particular hermeneutical key. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is an example of Allegorical literature. A NT example of Allegory is the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15). Allegories are addressed to “insiders” (the disciples). Jesus’s disciples have the elements of the Allegory explained to them, giving them the interpretive decoding key necessary to understand the Allegory. (See also **Allegorical Sense, Fourfold Method, Literal Sense, and Typology**)

**Allusion:** A text that *indirectly* refers to a past event or text; a literary device for drawing meaning from a past text or event into the present text without *explicitly* quoting the older text. (See also **Echo**)

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**Antagonist:** A narrative character who stands opposed to the protagonist (the principal or leading character of a narrative with whom the reader sympathizes). (*See also Foil, Narrative, and Protagonist*)

**Aorist Tense:** A Greek verbal tense indicating an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside. It is best thought of as a snapshot of an event. In the indicative mood it usually indicates past time from the standpoint of the speaker or actor. Example: “Jesus *reached out* his hand and *touched* the man” (Matt. 8:3). In Greek, both *reached out* and *touched* are in the Aorist Tense. The Aorist verbs create a snapshot of an event, as viewed from a perspective outside the event narrated. (*See also Imperfect Tense and Verb*)

**Apocalyptic** (Gk., *apokalypsis*, unveiling, revealing): A unique genre of biblical literature, as represented, in particular, by the OT Book of Daniel and the NT Book of Revelation (other places in both the OT and NT also employ Apocalyptic form and content, such as Isa. 56-66, Ezek. 38-39, Matt. 24, Mk. 13). Apocalyptic refers to the discernment of divine secrets by means of dreams or visions. These visions are portrayed in the Book of Revelation, for example, as the unveiling of the end of present history, the fulfillment of the new creation, and the final and complete establishment of God’s kingdom on earth (*see* Rev. 21-22). The visions portray technicolor images and events that enact the unveiling of God’s direct and visible intervention into human history, a universal judgment of the peoples of the world, a new age of salvation in which the entire universe is radically transformed and purged of evil, and where God’s universal rule and reign are permanently established on earth. (*See also Eschatology, Kingdom of God (Heaven), Narrative, and Revelation*)

**Apocrypha** (Gk., *apokryphos*, hidden): A term designating the status or relationship of certain books to the canon of Scripture. Roman Catholics accept some of these books as

inspired Scripture, and therefore, as part of their biblical canon. Protestants do not consider these books to be inspired Scripture, but still consider them useful for study (especially 1 and 2 Maccabees). The Eastern Orthodox church does not consider any of the books of the Apocrypha to be inspired Scripture, but they include a number of these books (some different from the Roman Catholic canon) as worthy of being read and useful in general for edification. (*See also* **Authority, Bible, Canon, and Scripture**)

**Archetype** (Gk., *archetypon*, primal type): A recurring plot motif (e.g., the quest), character type (e.g., the prodigal son), image (light as truth; darkness as sin or chaos), or setting (river crossings, as with the Jordan River in both the OT and NT) that draws the reader into a larger interpretive world. An Archetype can also be thought of as a prototype that recurs in texts. (*See also* **Motif and Symbol**)

**Authorial Discourse:** Using the framework of speech-act theory, Christian scholars have developed an interpretive approach that views the biblical text as divine speech spoken by human representatives on behalf of God (like an ambassador speaks for a head of state) or in the name of God (and, thus, as authorized by God). A modern practice that gets at this idea is the power of attorney. A person who has been given power of attorney represents, acts in the place of, and has the full legal authority of the person who granted the power of attorney. The person with power of attorney speaks and writes his or her own words, but what they express thereby is considered the true and legal expression of the person who granted power of attorney. Kevin Vanhoozer sets this idea in a biblical context: “The prophet was not merely a communicator of messages from God to human beings; the prophet also spoke in the name of God. By hearing the prophet speak, human beings heard God speak to them there and then” (Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 79). This is called double agency discourse. This interpretive practice seeks to “take due account of all the particularities and idiosyncrasies of what the human being said while at the same time interpreting what God said thereby” (80). (*See also* **Authorial Intention, Exegesis, and Speech-Act Theory**)

**Authorial Intention:** The stated goal of certain interpretive practices where *the* certain and assured meaning of the text is what the original author intended. Interpreters must uncover the “willed verbal meaning” of the author by means of the author’s textual expression. But this has model been challenged in light of the fact that language precedes subjectivity and intentions (authors live and write from within a language

world). This model of interpretation is the one most commonly used in conjunction with the grammatico-historical method, the method most widely employed by Evangelicals. (See also **Authorial Discourse**, **Exegesis**, and **Speech-Act Theory**)

**Authority:** With respect to Scripture, Authority means the biblical text is the God-given standard for faith and practice. As the *Westminster Confession* states: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (1.4). The Authority of Scripture is known, confirmed, and experienced by individual Christians and by the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is God’s self-communicative presence, through which he establishes the knowledge of himself, engenders faith, transforms the hearts and minds of believers, and gives life to the Church (all through the working of the Holy Spirit). As John Webster makes clear: “Scripture is a function of the triune God’s self-manifestation, especially his presence in the risen Christ, who through the Holy Spirit instructs the church” (Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 725). It is important to understand, however, that Scripture’s authority is a *derived* authority, that is, its authority is rooted solely in the fact that Scripture is God’s speech through human agents. As Jesus himself declares *in* Scripture: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). (See also **Canon**, **Inspiration**, **Revelation**, **Rule of Faith**, and **Word of God**)

**Bible** (Gk., *biblion*, plural, *biblia*, scroll, scrolls, made from papyrus): Early Greek-speaking Christians referred to the Scriptures as *ta biblia*, “the books.” A *biblion* was not a book in our modern sense, with separate pages of text bound together. Rather, it was a *scroll* of papyrus, a kind of paper made from dried reeds, usually containing text on only one side, laid out and joined together like a paper carpet, and rolled up with rollers on each end. (Using these rollers, readers would unroll one end while simultaneously rolling up the other to find their place.) A wonderful reference that pictures a *biblion* is found in Luke 4:16-21: “[Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and 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 proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the

Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" (See also **Authority, Canon, Papyri, Parchment, Rule of Faith, Revelation, Scripture, and Word of God**)

**Canon** (Gk., *kanon*, reed): From the original meaning and use of the word, referring to reeds, came a derivative use whereby reeds were used as measuring rods (see Rev. 11:1). This, in turn, took on the metaphorical sense of rule or standard. So an early Church Father like Origen would use the term Canon to refer to the "Rule of Faith," the standard by which Christians were to evaluate everything offered to them as an article of belief to be binding on Christian faith and practice. Eventually the term was used to refer to the list of books considered to be Holy Scripture, hence the phrase "the Canon of Scripture." It is important to recognize that the Church did not *convey* authority on these books; these books already possessed divine authority by virtue of their divine character as *God-breathed* (see 2 Tim. 3:16). The Canon of Scripture is merely the Church's *recognition* that these books were the Word of God and thereby possessed divine authority. As F. F. Bruce rightly states, "Both logically and historically, authority precedes canonicity" (*The Books and the Parchments*, 95). (See also **Authority, Inspiration, Revelation, Rule of Faith, and Word of God**)

**Canonical Approach:** An interpretive approach pioneered by theologian Brevard Childs, who sought to take seriously the *final form* of a biblical text (as opposed to its prehistory). Instead of focusing on trying to recover the oral traditions *behind* the text (which had been the preoccupation of biblical scholars since at least the nineteenth century), the canonical approach seeks to understand each biblical book as it is, in its final Canonical form. Further, the interpreter seeks to understand the *arrangement* of the entire collection of biblical books, that is, the specific shape of the canon, and what that arrangement means theologically. For example, what significance can be attributed to the fact that in the Jewish canon Daniel is included in the Canonical division known as the Writings, whereas in the Protestant canon Daniel is situated among the Prophetic Books? Behind this approach is the conviction that the Holy Spirit was just as involved in the collection and arrangement of the books of the Bible as in the production of the texts themselves. The Canonical Approach recognizes that the whole of Scripture has an interlocking, coherent witness. This, of course, is consistent with the Bible being a text disclosed by God himself as well as written by human beings. Divine authorship

sustains this overall consistency and coherence among the wide variety of its individual books and human authors. (See also **Canon** and **Rule of Faith**)

**Case:** Words perform different functions in a sentence. These different functions are indicated in Greek by changes in the form of the word (inflections) called Cases. For example, *logos*, *logou*, *logoi*, and *logon*, are all different forms of the noun *logos* (word). *Logos* is in the nominative Case, which is the subject of the verb; *logou* is in the genitive Case, which indicates a relationship between words, such as possession; *logoi* is in the dative Case, which is the indirect object of the verb; and *logon* is in the accusative Case, which is the direct object of the verb. (There is also a Case called the vocative Case, which is a form of certain nouns when that noun is being used in direct address.) (See also **Accusative Case**, **Dative Case**, **Declension**, **Genitive Case**, **Nominative Case**, and **Vocative Case**)

**Character** (see **Antagonist**, **Foil**, and **Protagonist**)

**Chiasm** (Gk., the term for the Greek letter  $\chi$  which is pronounced kī): A sequence of two phrases, clauses, or lines that are parallel in syntax, but which reverse the order of the corresponding words to form a crisscross pattern. This is a common literary device in Hebrew poetry. Here's an example of a chiasm from Psalm 1:6: "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed." "The LORD watches over" = A, "the way of the righteous" = B; "but the way of the wicked" = B, "will be destroyed" = A. (See also **Parallelism** and **Psalm**)

**Comedy:** A narrative pattern that begins in an idyllic or stable state, descends into tragedy, and then rises to a glorious, joyous ending. A story that progresses from trouble to resolution in a u-shaped form (like a smile). The entire biblical narrative forms a Comedy, from creation (idyllic condition) to Fall (tragedy) to redemption through Christ's death and resurrection (the decisive turn) to the full realization of God's kingdom and the new creation on earth (glorious ending). A well-known literary example would be Dante's *Divine Comedy*. (See also **Narrative** and **Tragedy**)

**Context:** The sociohistorical and linguistic horizons or frames within which a text is set and derives its significance. Context can refer to three distinct frames of reference: (1) the sociohistorical setting (social and cultural world) in which the author composed the text (as well as the setting of the events portrayed), often called the *Sitz im Leben* (Ger., life Context); (2) the sections of text that precede or follow a word, sentence, paragraph,

or other textual frame (also known as cotext); and (3) the sociohistorical and theological setting (social and cultural world) of the reader. All three of these Contexts are important to take into account in the practice of interpretation. (*See also Exegesis, Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral), and Setting*)

**Covenant:** The promissory and relational commitment between Yahweh and Israel that Yahweh would be Israel's God and Israel would be Yahweh's people. This OT Covenant is made first with Abraham, where the LORD promises to make Abraham's descendants a great nation and to give them a land. The Covenant is then developed and extended under Moses, with Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery through the Red Sea to the Promised Land. In the Mosaic phase, the Covenant includes not only the Ten Commandments, but the whole of the Torah, God's instructions for life contained in Genesis through Deuteronomy. Despite God's grace in Covenant relationship (to which he always remained faithful), Israel continually sinned and violated God's Covenant. In the OT God states the remedy for this broken Covenant situation in Jeremiah 31:31-34. There the LORD says he will make a "new covenant" with his people, where the LORD will "put in the minds" and "write on the hearts" of his people the new Covenant he will make with them. This new Covenant is, of course, the Covenant established by our Lord Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection, which we celebrate together as his body at table each Sunday, and which has been written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Covenant is one of the primary theological frames within which proper biblical interpretation takes place. (*See also Exegesis, Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral), Hermeneutics, and Metanarrative*)

**Dative Case:** The case that nouns, adjectives, and other substantives (words that function as nouns) use to designate the *indirect* object, the person *to* or *for* whom something is done. Example: "he would have given *you* living water" (John 4:10). In the Greek, *you* is in the dative case, it is the *indirect* object of the verb *give* (*what* is being given is living water, which is the *direct* object of the verb *give*; *to whom* it is being given is the *indirect* object of the verb, the woman, the recipient of the giving). (*See also Case and Declension*)

**Dead Sea Scrolls:** A library of scrolls (about 900 manuscripts), including many biblical texts, discovered shortly after 1945 in eleven caves near Qumran, a wadi near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in Palestine. (A wadi is a valley or ravine cut into the land by streams and rivers that is dry except during the rainy season.) The biblical texts



among the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts provide us with some of the very earliest Hebrew manuscripts of the OT we have (including manuscripts of Isaiah and Habakkuk). (See also **Essenes, Masoretic Text** and **Septuagint**)

**Declension:** A pattern of inflection (change in form) that Greek words undergo to reflect different functions within a sentence. English no longer has inflections, but vestiges of these inflections can still be seen in forming the plural of words by adding *s* or *es* to words, or in stem vowel changes, such as *goose* to *geese* (note also the changes in write, wrote, written). In Greek, words are inflected to indicate their function in a sentence (that is, a noun serving as the *subject* of a sentence [Nominative case] will have a different form than that same noun serving as a direct object of a verb [Accusative case]). Declensions are the patterns of those word changes among Greek nouns, adjectives, participles and other parts of speech. (See also **Accusative Case, Case, Dative Case, Genitive Case, Nominative Case,** and **Vocative Case**)

**Definite Article:** In English, the definite article is *the*. It indicates the particular or specific noun, adjective, or other substantive (words that function as nouns) being referred to. For example, “In the beginning was *the* Word” (John 1:1). The Definite Article before “Word” indicates that this word is not just any word or a word in general, but this particular Word.

**Demonstrative Pronoun:** A Demonstrative Pronoun is a pointer, focusing attention on an object in a special way. In English, Demonstratives are “this/these” and “that/those” (singular/plural; “this/these” being more “near,” while “that/those” are more “remote”). In Greek (and English), Demonstratives can be either Pronouns or Adjectives. An example of the Pronominal use of the Demonstrative would be: “What kind of man is *this*? Even the winds and waves obey him” (Matt. 827). In Greek, the *this* highlighted in the first sentence is a Demonstrative Pronoun. (See also **Indefinite Relative Pronoun, Interrogative Pronoun, Personal Pronoun,** and **Relative Pronoun**)

**Dramatic Irony:** A literary device in which the author gives the reader insight into some aspect of the story that a character (or characters) in the story are unaware of. The Book of Job is an example of sustained Dramatic Irony. In the prologue to Job, we as readers are allowed to view the interchange between God and Satan regarding Job that characters within the narrative are not privy to. We know that God is not the cause of Job’s suffering and that Job is a righteous man. That knowledge creates a tension in the reader which is only resolved at the end of the book when God speaks out of the

whirlwind and restores Job's fortunes beyond what he possessed at the beginning of the book. In the NT story of Pilate's encounter with Jesus, we find a wonderful example of Dramatic Irony: Jesus says to Pilate, "[T]he reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on this side of truth listens to me," to which Pilate cynically replies, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38). Earlier in John's Gospel we hear Jesus say, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). We as readers know that Jesus is the Truth. So Pilate's question is profoundly ironic: he has the ignorant chutzpah to ask the question, "What is truth?" to the very one who is Truth incarnate! (*See also Narrative and Verbal Irony*)

**Dualism:** A view of the universe that divides reality into two, distinct parts. In the modern world this division is most commonly seen in the separation of the natural world from the supernatural (if a reality beyond the natural world is acknowledged to exist at all). Throughout history Dualism has taken many forms. For example, in Platonic thought, there were two tiers to the universe: (1) the material world and (2) the eternal, disembodied, spiritual world of the ideal forms. A Platonic view of human nature saw the soul (a part of the spiritual world of the ideal forms) imprisoned in the physical body (a part of the lower, lesser, material world). For Plato, the material world (including the human body) was created by a lower-tier god called the demiurge.

Gnosticism is a form of Dualism heavily influenced by Platonic thought that has plagued the Church from very early in its history. Gnosticism denies many essential tenets of Christian faith such as the humanity of Jesus (Jesus wasn't really human, wasn't born, didn't have a real human body), the death of Christ (Jesus only appeared to die), and our salvation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus ("salvation" is enlightenment found through attaining a kind of secret knowledge). Dualism is contrary to orthodox Christian teaching. As Anthony Thiselton states: "Christian theology rejects the notion that anything can challenge the total sovereignty of God. God has created *all things*, including angels, good and evil powers, humankind and nature. God is omnipresent and almighty. . . . The Christian church has acknowledged only two orders of being: the Creator (God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit) and the created (all other beings)" (Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 289). Orthodox Christian theology sees God as separate (ontologically, not in terms of presence) and distinct from all creation, material or otherwise (time). God created the universe *ex nihilo* (Lat., out of nothing). Creation came into being simply at the

command of God. As Psalm 33:8-9 declares: “[The LORD] spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” (See also **Gnosticism**)

**Echo:** A word, phrase, or image that in subtle ways recalls an event or text from the past. (See also **Allusion**)

**Enlightenment:** A philosophical and cultural movement that is usually traced back to the philosopher and mathematician, René Descartes. The underlying foundation of the Enlightenment was the exaltation of Reason over any kind of tradition. In his *Discourse on Method* [(London: Penguin, 1968), 91], Descartes argues that “those who use only their pure natural reason” can discover truth with certainty, but “those who believe only the books of the ancients” are left to flounder in the world of merely human opinion. Descartes’ method was to doubt everything in order to establish certain truth, from which he could then construct a stable philosophy (including rationally proving the existence of God!). Descartes finally discovered his foundation point—his own conscious mind. This is reflected in his famous maxim: *cogito ergo sum*, Latin for “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes believed he could not doubt that he was a doubting thing, and therefore, he could not doubt that he was conscious. And if conscious, then he must exist. The Enlightenment continued to expand and develop, but the foundations of rejecting tradition and using critical reason to establish certain truths remained stable characteristics of this philosophical outlook.

**Epistemology** (Gk. *episteme*, knowledge): The branch of philosophy concerned with theories of knowledge—how we know things, the limits and possibilities of what we know, and what constitutes valid or justified claims to know.

**Epistle:** A letter. Certain scholars have tried to make the distinction between more personal letters in the NT (e.g., Paul’s letters to Philemon, Timothy, and Titus) and his less personal letters, (e.g., Romans). They have tried to distinguish between letters, assumed to be largely private and personal, and Epistles, assumed to be a more permanent, literary, and public form (what we might today call an “open letter”). But the letters/Epistles of the NT (along with letters extant from the first century) display varying degrees of literariness. It’s clear that the NT letters/Epistles were immediately assumed to be public documents that the early churches read when gathered for worship, fellowship, or study, irrespective of the letters’ so-called “literary” qualities. It’s also clear that even the most “personal” letters such as Philemon, Timothy, and

Titus contained instructions relevant to church life, church discipline, and discipleship, and were therefore suitable for public reading and permanent keeping. (*See also Genre*)

**Eschatology** (Gk., *eschatos*, last): The doctrine of “last things,” the “end times,” the creation of the new heavens and the new earth—the *final, fulfilled, new creation age* where God dwells in the midst of humanity on earth, *see Rev. 21-22*). Eschatology refers to the return of Christ (the *Parousia*), the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, the full realization of the new creation, and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom here on earth. (*See also Apocalyptic, Kingdom of God (Heaven), and Revelation*)

**Essenes**: The Jewish apocalyptic sect that lived a monastic-like life in the region of Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1940s. They existed in Judea from at least the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. (*See also Apocalyptic, Dead Sea Scrolls and Masoretic Text*)

**Exegesis** (Gk., *exegeisthai*, to lead or guide out, to explain): The careful practice of close reading and careful interpretation of the biblical text. As Klyne Snodgrass explains: “[E]xegesis is the analysis of the significance of words and the relations into which they are set to construct meaning. Meaning is a set of relations for which words are verbal symbols. By placing specific words in specific relations to each other and in specific contexts, meaning is conveyed, and exegesis seeks to analyze the significance of the particular words used and the relations into which they are set to discern the intent of communication. . . . The goal of exegesis is not merely information but a ‘usable understanding.’ Texts are the result of action and are intended to produce action” (*Vanhoozer, Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, 203-204*). (*See also Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral), Hermeneutics, and Illumination*)

**Flashback**: Episodes, stories, phrases, or allusions inserted into a narrative that recall a past event, whereby the meaning of that past event becomes formative for understanding the present episode. Biblical examples of this would be Jacob’s pact with Laban (Gen. 31:38-42) and Joseph’s interactions with his brothers after he had become Pharaoh’s right-hand man (see, for example, Gen. 45:3-8; 50:15-21). (*See also Narrative and Plot*)

**Foil**: A narrative figure whose contrasting character or temperament serves to highlight the opposing character or temperament of the protagonist. We might consider Esau a Foil to Jacob. (*See also Antagonist and Protagonist*)

**Form Criticism:** The historical-critical method used to identify structures and literary Forms in the OT and NT. This included analysis of OT Forms such as hymns, laments, proverbs, and prophetic judgments (comparing OT Forms to those extant from other groups within the same general geographical area and timeframe). Analysis of the NT uncovered certain conventional, patterned stories, such as pronouncement stories, miracle stories, healing stories, and so forth. These various story types display consistent Form throughout the Gospels. An example of a pronouncement story (a Gospel Form type) would be the one Matthew tells in 22:15-22. Matthew tells us that the Pharisees are confronting Jesus in order “to trap him in his words.” The Pharisees ask, “Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” The Pharisees thought they had caught Jesus on the horns of an impossible dilemma: if Jesus said “No,” he would be subject to Roman imprisonment and punishment; if he said “Yes,” Jesus would be viewed as a collaborator with the oppressive Romans, and would likely face fierce opposition from the people. (First-Century Jews bitterly resented paying taxes to Rome, on religious as well as economic grounds). But Jesus gave them an answer that shocked and astonished them, causing them to walk away scratching their heads. Jesus said, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (v. 21). This story is told primarily for the Church to remember Jesus’s powerful pronouncement, and to reflect on its theological importance for faithful, godly living. (*See also Source Criticism*)

**Fourfold Method:** A method of interpretation developed in the early church and that dominated medieval interpretive practice. Medieval exegetes assumed that each text of the Bible had four levels of meaning: (1) the Literal Sense—the straightforward grammatical meaning; (2) the Allegorical Sense—the spiritual meaning beyond the plain or literal sense; (3) the Tropological Sense—the moral or ethical dimension of the text, revealing how we must live the Christian life in the present; and (4) the Anagogical Sense—the eschatological dimension of the text, revealing our Christian hope—the realization of the new creation and the universal establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. The allegorical sense usually referred to some aspect of the present, earthly life of the Church, geared toward bringing people into a deeper mystical experience of God. (*See also Allegorical Sense, Allegory, Anagogical Sense, Literal Sense, and Tropological Sense*)

**Future Tense:** Like the Aorist tense, this Greek verbal tense indicates an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside. It is best thought of as a snapshot of an

event that is yet to come. With respect to time, the future tense is always future from the speaker's standpoint. Example: "She [Mary] *will give birth* to a son, and *you are to give* him the name Jesus, because *he will save* his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). In the Greek, there are three future-tense verbs in this sentence, *she will give birth*, *you are to give* (literally, *you shall call* the name of him), and *he will save*. The first and last future tense verbs are in the indicative mood, the middle future tense verb is in the imperative mood (command). (See also **Aorist Tense and Verb**)

**Genitive Case:** A Case that nouns, adjectives, and other substantives (words that function as nouns) use to express connection, description, possession, qualification, limitation, source, and so forth; frequently translated using our preposition *of*. It is one of the most versatile Cases, and can express a wide variety of meanings (as determined by context). Example: "John . . . [was] preaching a baptism *of repentance*" (Mark 1:4). In the Greek, *repentance* is in the Genitive Case. The meaning of the Genitive in this example could mean any of the following: "baptism that is based on repentance" (causal), "baptism that points toward/produces repentance" (purpose or production), "baptism that symbolizes repentance" (descriptive). Another example: "This righteousness is given through faith *in Jesus Christ* to all who believe" (Rom. 3:22). In the Greek, *Jesus* and *Christ* are in the Genitive Case; in this translation, the Genitive Case is being taken as an *objective* Genitive (Jesus Christ as the *object* of the "verbal idea" carried in the word *faith*). This text can also be translated: "even the righteousness of God, through the faithfulness *of Jesus Christ* to all who believe." In this second translation, the Genitive Case is being construed as a *possessive* Genitive, that is, Jesus's faithfulness, the faith (faithfulness) that exists in or is displayed by Jesus Christ. (See also **Case and Declension**)

**Genre:** The categorization of different types of literature. The Bible contains a wide variety of Genres, but the most prominent are narrative, poetry, letter, and visionary writing (prophecy and apocalypse). Each Genre must be read and interpreted according to the specific rules governing its form. We must read psalms differently than epistles, and apocalypse differently than proverbs. So, for example, in reading a psalm, we must keep in mind the basic structure of psalms—that of parallel lines. When reading narrative in Genesis, we must analyze the plot, characters, episodes, settings, scene changes, and so on. When we read Romans, we follow the movement of the letter according to groupings of thought—paragraphs (as well as larger segments)—in order

to follow the exposition or argument of the text. And when reading John's Apocalypse, we focus on paragraphs (as with the Epistles) in the first part of the book. But then we must "shift gears" by paying attention to John's vivid, technicolor scenes, loaded with allusions to and echoes of the OT (e.g., "I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, 'Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers,'" 11:1, an allusion to Ezekiel 40), NT (e.g., "a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain," 5:6, an obvious allusion to Jesus as "the Lamb of God" who died on the cross), and veiled symbols of political and spiritual realities from John's world ("The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while," 17:9-10, the seven hills refers to Rome [which is built on seven hills], and the seven kings probably refers to Roman emperors [the five fallen being Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius]. Each of these images and symbols must be "decoded" in order for us to understand John's message. (See also **Apocalyptic, Epistle, Gospels, Imagination, Proverb, Psalm, and Wisdom Literature**).

**Gnosticism** (Gk., *gnosis*, knowledge): A related network of sects heavily influenced by Platonic thought, who were prominent from the second to the fifth centuries A.D. (although spontaneously rearing their heads periodically throughout the history of the Church, including the present day). Among the many varieties of Gnosticism, two emphases stand out: (1) a dualistic view of reality (a "higher," pure spiritual world and a "lower" material world) and (2) secret knowledge (obtained via "revelation") that "saves," that is, transports the Gnostic to a higher spiritual plane. The Church Father Irenaeus, in his book *Against Heresies*, successfully defended orthodox faith against Gnosticism in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. He rightly pointed out that true Christian faith is no secret; instead, the revealed truths of orthodox tradition are public and open to dialogue and debate. He (along with many other Church Fathers) also defended the goodness of the human body, the created world, and everyday life, affirming that the one true God created the universe, as opposed to many Gnostics who posited a lesser god, power, or demon who created the material world. (*The Gospel of Thomas* is an early Gnostic text, thought to have been written sometime between the early 2<sup>nd</sup> to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D.) (See also **Dualism** and **Gospel**)

**Gospel** (Gk., *euangelion*): The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The good news is the *content* of the Church's proclamation (Gk., *kerygma*) regarding deliverance from the

stain and oppression of sin through the divine Word made flesh who died on the cross and was raised to new life—a new creation life that Christians experience now, in part, but will experience in all its fullness when God’s kingdom reign on earth is fully realized in the last days (Gk., *eschaton*). (See also **Eschatology, Gospels, Kingdom of God (Heaven), and Revelation**)

**Gospels** (Gk., *euangelia*): The historically rooted, theologically shaped, narrative proclamations of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by four different authors, in four distinct portraits. Three of the Gospels bear a strong resemblance to one another—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share a largely common viewpoint (although each Gospel has numerous unique features). The Gospel of John is quite different in structure, tone, themes, etc., from the Synoptics. All four Gospels share a basic framework that portrays the life and teachings of Jesus Christ followed by a laser-sharp focus on the Passion and Resurrection narratives as the climax of each of the Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels tend to relate relatively brief episodes of Jesus’s life and teaching leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection, whereas the Gospel of John contains longer theological discourses by Jesus leading up to the climax. The Gospels’ emphasis on the cross and resurrection is not accidental; it is the focal point of the good news. It has been said that the Gospels are long and powerful Passion narratives (the cross and resurrection) with brief introductions (the remaining text of the Gospels). This is, of course, an exaggeration, but it reflects a profound truth about the Gospels and the Gospel. (See also **Gospel**)

**Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral)**: The term is used to describe two closely related interpretive movements or processes. The first describes an interpretive process focused primarily on the *text*—that we can only understand the individual parts of a text (the phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc.) if we understand the text as a whole (the entire discourse, essay, poem, novel, gospel, or epistle). At the same time, we can only understand the text as a whole when we understand the individual parts that make up the whole. This reciprocal process is pictured as an interpretive circle (or, better, a spiral), where clearer understanding of the parts extends the understanding of the whole, and deeper understanding of the whole further clarifies the parts.

The second use of the term Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral) focuses primarily on the *interpreter*. All interpreters come to texts with certain built-in perspectives that shape our preliminary or provisional understanding of a particular text (this provisional



understanding is part of the interpretive horizon we inherit and carry with us that is shaped by our *Sitz im Leben*, our social and historical life context). As we read the text (assuming we approach the text openly), our preliminary or provisional understanding becomes a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the text. This deeper understanding, in turn, becomes our preliminary understanding for reading that text a second or third time (or for reading another text). (See also **Exegesis** and **Hermeneutics**)

**Hermeneutics** (Gk., *ermeneia*, interpretation, explanation; from the greek god, Hermes): In its broadest sense, the study of human understanding of speech and texts. Hermeneutics refers to the theories and practices that are artfully employed in understanding texts, particularly biblical texts, which were written in times long past, “to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:1). These texts were written in strange languages, by authors we do not know, who lived in very different world and life contexts, and who wrote to unknown people, living in unfamiliar places, embodying social worlds and circumstances largely unknown to us. Hermeneutics explores how we read, interpret, understand, and embody these ancient biblical texts faithfully. (See also **Exegesis**, **Illumination**, and **Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral)**)

**Illumination**: In order to understand the things of God, we must be enlightened by God. Interpreting the biblical text requires more than merely following some interpretive method or practice, it requires prayerful, submissive, openness to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. It is *not* possible for our human minds to comprehend God’s truth in Scripture unaided by the Holy Spirit. Although it is impossible for us to quantify or precisely describe the Spirit’s role in illuminating the interpretive process, we know that the Holy Spirit is the one who “guides [us] into all the truth” (John 16:13). (See also **Exegesis**, **Hermeneutics**, and **Perspicuity**)

**Imagery**: The Bible is not a systematic theology, a theological treatise, or a set of abstract propositions. It is an overarching *narrative* from Genesis to Revelation within which we find prophetic pronouncements, stories, poetry, prayers, proverbs, letters, sayings, parables, metaphors, similes, and historical narratives. The Bible is not written in abstract, “theological” language, but rather in vivid Imagery and concrete, living action that sparks our imagination (these are narratives that we can imaginatively enter into). The Bible primarily *images* and presents the truth incarnationally, as lived reality, supremely portrayed in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in the

Gospels. The writers of Scripture employ a wide range of literary devices and images throughout the whole of Scripture. Here are just a few examples of familiar metaphors, images, and scenes: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1); “The Lord is my Shepherd” (Ps. 23:1); “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:35); “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24); “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13); “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (Gen. 1:3-5); “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire” (Exod. 19:16-18); “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. The he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have” (Luke 10:33-35); “[T]he father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:22-24); “[T]he angel carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (Rev. 21:10-11). (See also **Imagination**)

**Imagination:** The name we give to our God-given ability to picture worlds and images in our minds. The Imagination is an essential capacity used in the interpretive process, of faith, and of imitating Christ. Our Imaginations allow us to enter fully into the world and narrative of the biblical text (visibly, emotionally, intellectually, and concretely). We can then return to our extra-textual worlds with fresh, new ways of living out the life of faith. Trevor Hart sums this up well: “[I]t may justly be insisted that Christian faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit is a matter of having one’s imagination taken captive and reshaped, such that one comes to see and taste and feel the world anew” (Vanhoozer,

*Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 323). (See also **Exegesis, Hermeneutics, and Imagery**)

**Imperative Mood:** Mood is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates the degree of *actuality* or *potentiality* represented in the verbal action or state. Generally, the imperative mood is the mood of command. Example: “If any of you lacks wisdom, *you should ask God*” (Jas. 1:5). Even this English translation (TNIV) lacks some of the punch of this imperative. A better translation might be: “If any of you lacks wisdom, *you must ask God!*” It’s not a suggestion; it’s a command, an obligation. (See also **Indicative Mood, Optative Mood, Subjunctive Mood, and Verb**)

**Imperfect Tense:** A Greek verbal tense portraying an action from the *inside* of an event; an activity *in process* (without importance being placed on the beginning or end of that activity). In the indicative mood, this tense is portrayed as occurring in the past from the standpoint of the speaker or writer. It is perhaps best thought of as viewing a motion picture of past events as they were unfolding, without any sense of what prompted the action or where the action was heading. The Imperfect Tense often has a sense of incompleteness, focusing on the *process* of the action. Example: “Now a man who was lame from birth *was being carried* to the temple gate” (Acts 3:2). In the Greek, *was being carried* is in the Imperfect Tense. It indicates that there was a process (just past) in which the man was carried (an ongoing movement) to the temple gate, just prior to encountering Peter and John, but that he is no longer being carried. (See also **Perfect Tense, Present Tense, and Verb**)

**Indefinite Relative Pronoun:** Pronouns used to introduce in a general way a member of a class without further clarification. They can be used substantively (as a true Pronoun) and adjectivally. These Pronouns are usually translated “anyone,” “someone,” “a certain person,” “whoever,” or simply by the indefinite article “a” or “an.” Example: “*Whoever* eats of this bread will live forever” (John 6:51). The word translated *Whoever* in this verse is an Indefinite Relative Pronoun. (See also **Demonstrative Pronoun, Interrogative Pronoun, Personal Pronoun, and Relative Pronoun**)

**Indicative Mood:** Mood is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates the degree of *actuality* or *potentiality* represented in the verbal action or state of the verb. The Indicative Mood is, in general, the Mood of assertion, or the *presentation* of asserted reality. Example: “In the beginning *was* the Word” (John 1:1). In the Greek, the verb *was*

is in the Indicative Mood, indicating a straightforward statement of fact. (See also **Imperative Mood, Optative Mood, Subjunctive Mood, and Verb**)

**Infinitive:** An indeclinable verbal noun that has features of both nouns and verbs. Like Greek verbs, the Infinitive has tense and voice, but not person or mood. Like Greek nouns, it can reflect many of the case functions that ordinary nouns have (such as being a subject or object). Often, the Infinitive is used to indicate the purpose or goal of the action or state of its controlling verb. It answers the question ‘Why?’ in that it looks ahead to the anticipated and intended result. Example: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17). In the Greek, *to abolish* is an Infinitive that indicates the purpose of Jesus’ coming; *I have come* is the controlling verb of this Infinitive. (See also **Noun, Participle, and Verb**)

**Inspiration** (Lat., *inspirare*, in-breathing): The English word Inspiration poorly reflects the NT concept it’s attempting to name, and it carries overtones that lead to a great deal of misunderstanding. In general, when we speak of Inspiration in English, we mean to motivate, to uplift, to stir someone up emotionally or creatively to accomplish great feats of athleticism, music composition or performance, poetry, writing, art, or speaking, and so forth. The one explicit reference in the NT to Inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:16. Many Bible translations (even very recent ones) translate the Greek word *theopneustos* in this passage as “inspiration,” so that the verse reads something like this: “All Scripture is *inspired by God* and is profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness.” (See, for example, the KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ASV, NLT, HCSB, etc.) A few Bible versions translate the term more abstractly (and thus create greater ambiguity), such as the New Century Version, which translates the passage in this way: “All Scripture is *given by God*.” None of these versions accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek word *theopneustos*, which means “*God-breathed*.” Inspiration points to something *internal* (something happening in the human authors of Scripture or in the interpreters of Scripture), whereas the Apostle Paul is using a word that is explicitly reflecting an *external* reality—God’s *breathing out* the Scriptures. I think Paul specifically (and carefully) chose the word *theopneustos* because it connotes God *speaking* (you breathe *out* when you speak) and because it’s a not so subtle reference to the working of the Holy Spirit in the production of Scripture (Spirit in Greek is *pneuma*, a word directly related to *pneustos*). Paul has chosen the perfect word to reflect the profound theological reality that every Scripture text (and the Scripture as a whole)

represents God *speaking*, and that the living Breath of God, the Holy Spirit, is the one who has *breathed out* these words through the words of the human authors of Scripture. (See also **Authority, Bible, Canon, Illumination, Revelation, Rule of Faith, Scripture, and Word of God**)

**Interpretation** (see **Exegesis**)

**Interrogative Pronoun:** A Pronoun used to ask questions, such as “Who?” “What” “What sort” or “How much?” Example: “*Who* do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). The word translated *Who* in this verse is an Interrogative Pronoun. (See also **Demonstrative Pronoun, Indefinite Relative Pronoun, Personal Pronoun, and Relative Pronoun**)

**Intertestamental Period:** The term used to describe the period between the end of the OT and the beginning of the NT (around 300 years). Important developments in Judaism occurred during this period that profoundly affect one’s understanding of the NT. Intertestamental documents, such as 1 and 2 Maccabees (reflecting the Jewish Maccabean period, 165-63 B.C.E.), which the Roman Catholic church considers canonical, give a bit of historical context for the development of groups such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Zealots, and so forth, as well as the development and importance of the synagogue. (This is also the time period in which the group known as the Essenes, the Jewish sect associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls found near Qumran, was founded and developed.) These groups and their institutions are commonly referred to in the NT, but are nowhere to be found in the OT. That’s because they are groups and institutions that grew out of the postexilic, post-canonical period. The Intertestamental Period is also the period in which certain theological beliefs that were at best latent in the OT become more explicit in Judaism, doctrines such as an apocalyptic understanding of resurrection and eternal life, punishment and rewards following death, teachings about Satan, angels, and demons, and so forth. It is important to have a grounded historical understanding of these groups—their theological, social, and historical roots, developments, and perspectives—in order to understand Jesus’s interactions (and conflicts) with them in the NT Gospels. Having a clear understanding of the Pharisees, for example, also provides an interpretive frame of reference for understanding the sociohistorical and theological background and development of the Apostle Paul. (See also **Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Septuagint**)

**Irony** (see **Dramatic Irony and Verbal Irony**)

**Kingdom of God (Heaven):** The phrase *Kingdom of God* (Mark and Luke) or *Kingdom of heaven* (Matthew) names the central focus of Jesus's preaching and teaching about his mission and the life of discipleship. His first public proclamation echoed John the Baptist's theme of preaching: "The time has come, [Jesus] said. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). The phrase indicates the sovereign reign and rule of God on earth, as is captured in the parallel lines of the Lord's prayer in Matthew's text, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10). It involves the realization of justice and righteousness on earth among God's people and in the world. God's rule as realized in Jesus's work on the cross delivers believers from the oppressive power of sin (*see* Rom. 6:1-7), making God's demands for justice and righteousness possible. The Kingdom of God also carries an eschatological dimension, hence, "The *time* has come"! Jesus was the long-awaited hope of Israel's salvation and redemption. What Jesus accomplished through the cross and resurrection not only made forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and one another possible, it also inaugurated the new creation. "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15) and "[I]f anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

At present, we live in the "already and not yet" dimension of the Kingdom of God. Whenever God's righteousness or justice is manifested or embodied on earth, the Kingdom of God is made present through the working of the Holy Spirit. But God's complete, perfect, and universal reign on earth awaits a future day. That day is captured in John's apocalyptic vision: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'" (Rev. 21:1-4). (*See also* **Apocalyptic and Eschatology**)

**Law** (*see* **Torah**)

**Lexicon:** A reference dictionary or wordbook. Biblical scholars frequently consult Greek and Hebrew Lexicons to aid their exegetical work; Lexicons provide contextualized

definitions of Greek and Hebrew words. Like dictionaries, Greek and Hebrew Lexicons list words in alphabetical order (usually according to their root), indicate what grammatical form the word displays (or the various common forms the word can take), show the etymology of the word (i.e., trace the historical development of the word's linguistic forms), and list the various, distinct definitions of the word as determined by grammar, syntax, or context. In addition, biblical Lexicons list references to occurrences of the word in ancient sources (such as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, the LXX, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Intertestamental literature, the Church Fathers, etc.) as well as many (and sometimes all) of the occurrences of the word in the biblical text. Among the list of references by biblical book, chapter, and verse, biblical Lexicons also frequently include some complete phrases, sentences, or verses in the original language where the word occurs, along with an English translation of that segment of original language text. The most widely used Hebrew Lexicons include: *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs); *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay); *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Gesenius and Driver); and the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Harris, Archer, and Waltke). The most widely used Greek Lexicons include: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker); *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell and Scott), *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Mounce); and the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida). (See also **Semantics**)

**Literal Sense** (Lat., *littera*, according to the letter): One level of interpretation that was part of the "Fourfold Method" developed in the early church and that dominated medieval interpretive practice. Medieval exegetes assumed that each text of the Bible had four levels of meaning: (1) the Literal Sense—the straightforward grammatical meaning; (2) the Allegorical Sense—a spiritual meaning beyond the plain or literal sense; (3) the Tropological Sense—a moral or ethical dimension of the text, revealing how we must live the Christian life in the present; and (4) the Anagogical Sense—an eschatological dimension of the text, revealing our Christian hope—the realization of the new creation and the establishment of God's kingdom. The Literal Sense was the foundation for the other three senses; the interpreter had to establish the Literal Sense before attempting to examine or discover the other senses. (See also **Allegorical Sense**, **Allegory**, **Anagogical Sense**, **Fourfold Method**, and **Tropological Sense**)

**Masoretic Text** (Heb., *masar*, to hand over, tradition; *abbr.* MT): The authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text of the OT for Rabbinic Judaism and Protestant Christians. This text was created by groups of Jewish scholars from Tiberius and Jerusalem in the 6<sup>th</sup> through the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., who were known as Masoretes. The original Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the OT were written with consonants only; there were no vowels. Those who knew the original languages could read these texts easily without any vowel signs. However, as the Hebrew language became less and less commonly spoken, the need for an accurate system of pronunciation became more acute. The Masoretes created a standardized form of vocalization by inventing a system of vowel markers called vowel-points. These vowel-pointings were added to the consonantal text to create what became the authoritative Hebrew text of the Bible for Jews and Protestants. (*See also Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Targum*)

**Metanarrative:** An overarching, universal account or interpretation of reality (Story) that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences. (*See also Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral) and Hermeneutics*)

**Metaphor:** A conjunction of terms or images drawn in comparison that creates fresh meaning beyond the literal or isolated meaning of the individual terms or images. Biblical examples include: "The LORD is my Shepherd" (Ps. 23:1); "You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14); "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35); "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). (*See also Simile and Symbol*)

**Method:** A term indicating a set of interpretive procedures used to exegete or explicate texts, which when properly employed was (until the middle of the twentieth century) assumed to yield the objective, coherent, and stable meaning of texts. From the time of Francis Bacon's inductive Method, as outlined in his work *Novum Organum* (1620), biblical exegesis became increasingly dominated by a quasi-scientific, inductive Method (which itself underwent a series of permutations over time, including its most prominent general form since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century—the historical-critical Method.) In keeping with the general outlook of the Enlightenment, these quasi-scientific Methods were intended to overcome the so-called "idols" of tradition (characterized as "mere human opinion"), by making the interpretation of texts a rational, "value-free," universal, and objective (that is, "scientific") process. But as philosophers and theologians since the mid-twentieth Century have demonstrated, such claims to



objectivity reflect a Promethean hubris, a claim to a God-like knowledge that is not within the reach or capacity of human beings to actually attain. It also represents a bias against tradition which is itself an unexamined prejudice. As the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer points out in his book *Truth and Method*, “the fundamental prejudice of the enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which deprives tradition of its power” (240). This philosophical critique against the pretensions of the historical-critical Method has created a greater appreciation for the role of tradition in interpretive understanding and an openness to appropriating certain so-called “pre-critical” interpretive practices (such as those reflected in the exegetical and theological works of the Church Fathers). (See also **Enlightenment**, **Exegesis**, **Hermeneutics**, and **Tradition**)

**Middle Voice:** Voice is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates *how* the subject is related to the action or state expressed by the verb. Generally, in the Middle Voice, the action expressed by the verb reflects back on the subject in some self-involving, participatory way. Example: “*he hanged himself*” (Matt. 27:5). These three English words translate *one* word in the Greek, a verb that contains the subject, *he*, the object of the verb, *himself* (by virtue of being in the Middle Voice), and the basic meaning of the verb, *hanged*. (See also **Active Voice**, **Passive Voice**, and **Verb**)

**Motif:** A broad literary term meaning a repeating pattern (such as recurring images or themes). Examples in Scripture are many, but would include images and themes such as light and dark, land and water, covenant, exile, exodus, bread, salvation, journey, and so forth. (See also **Archetype**)

**Narrative:** A story. A constructed, imaginative tale that plots a series of events shaped with specific purpose(s) in mind, within a unified world, and aimed at certain ends (aesthetic, existential, intellectual, and theological). All Narratives are shaped; the evening news and historical documentaries no less than short stories and novels (that is, they are all organized and shaped for certain purposes and according to a certain point of view). Narratives take a myriad of forms, but three elements common to Narrative are: plot, setting, and character. Aristotle famously described plot as a continuous Narrative sequence with a beginning, middle, and end, emphasizing both movement and unity. The essence of plot is conflict moving toward resolution.

The importance of Narrative for Christian life and thought can hardly be overstated. The whole of Scripture is structured as an overarching Narrative from Genesis to Revelation; it is God’s Story enacted in and through human history. The Gospel itself is

a Narrative. And the most widely used genre in Scripture by far is Narrative. We are commanded to imitate Christ and to walk in the Spirit. Walking is a metaphor for life's journey, a journey with a great deal of conflict that is moving (and being moved) toward God's intended resolution. We are on a pilgrimage heading toward the fulfillment of our redemption and the final, visible return of our Lord and Master, Jesus, to establish God's permanent reign on earth. We look forward with great anticipation, in faith and in hope, to the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth, with God himself dwelling among us, reigning as the Sovereign King of the universe from his throne in the new Jerusalem descended from heaven. That's the greatest Story ever told! (See also **Antagonist, Context, Genre, Imagination, Metanarrative, Plot, Point of View, Protagonist, Salvation History, Setting, and Suspense**)

**Nominative Case:** The "naming case" of nouns, the case of specific designation, usually naming the main subject or topic of the sentence. Example: "In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1); in Greek, *God* is in the Nominative Case; it is the subject of the verb *created*. (See also **Accusative Case, Case, Dative Case, Declension, Genitive Case, and Vocative Case**)

**Noun:** A word that stands for someone or something. In Greek, Nouns change their form (are inflected) to represent their different functions in a sentence. Example: "*Paul and Timothy, servants of Messiah Jesus*" (Phil. 1:1). In Greek (and English) there are five Nouns in this brief phrase: Paul, Timothy, servants, Messiah, and Jesus. (See also **Accusative Case, Case, Dative Case, Declension, Genitive Case, Nominative Case, and Vocative Case**)

**Number (*gram.*):** Words can be either singular or plural, depending on whether they refer to one or more than one. In Greek, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, infinitives, and participles all have number (infinitives are always singular). (See also **Adjective, Infinitive, Noun, Participle, and Verb**)

**Optative Mood:** Mood is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates the degree of *actuality* or *potentiality* represented in the verbal action or state. Generally, the Optative Mood indicates a verbal action or verbal state that is possible but uncertain. It can be thought of as the "obtainable wish" Mood. It is fairly uncommon in the NT. Example: "[Paul] was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, *if possible*, by the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16). The phrase translated *if possible* here is a combination of a conditional particle *ei* (*if*), a noun, *dunaton* (possible), and the Optative form of the verb *to be*. A

more wooden translation would be: “if possible *it might be*”). The idea is that Paul hopes to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, but he’s unsure if he will. (See also **Imperative Mood**, **Indicative Mood**, **Subjunctive Mood**, and **Verb**)

**Ostraca:** A piece of unglazed pottery commonly used in the ancient world as material for writing (texts were both *inscribed* into this material using a metal stylus and *written or painted onto* this material using ink or paint). (See also **Bible**, **Papyri**, and **Parchment**)

**Papyri:** A kind of paper made from reeds that were dried, laid out in rows side by side, with a second set of dried Papyri strips laid in crisscross fashion over the first set, and then glued together and joined to form long paper rolls called scrolls. (The Apostle Paul refers to this type of writing material in 2 Timothy 4:13, when he says to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my *scrolls*, especially the parchments.”) Papyrus was a relatively inexpensive writing material that was widely used in the first few centuries of the Common Era. It was, of course, a very degradable material, and many, many manuscripts from these early centuries were lost due to the destructive effects of weather and climate. However, some of the earliest manuscripts of both the NT and the OT have been found in the dry, desert regions of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and elsewhere. These early manuscripts include many of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in the 1940s near Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea (some of the manuscripts are OT texts, such as the books of Isaiah and Habakkuk). Other early Papyri include NT documents such as P<sup>52</sup>, the earliest extant manuscript fragment of the NT in existence; it’s a copy of John 18:31-33 and 18:37-38, that was composed around 125 A.D. (which is remarkably early since many biblical scholars believe the Gospel of John was written somewhere between 90 and 110 A.D.). This manuscript fragment is housed at the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, England. (See also **Bible**, **Ostraca**, and **Parchment**)

**Parable** (Gk., *parabole*, putting things side by side): A form of *indirect* communication frequently used by Jesus. Parable, like its Hebrew counterpart, *mashal*, includes a wide range of literary/oral types (almost any kind of non-literal utterance). The following examples illustrate *some* of these types (note: not all Parables are introduced by or use the term *parabole*): (1) *Allegory*—the Sower, e.g., Mark 4:1-20; (2) *Illustration*—Mark 13:28: “Now learn this *lesson* from the fig tree” (the italic font indicates the English translation of the word *parabole*); (3) *Simile*—Matthew 13:31-32: “Then [Jesus] told them another *parable*: ‘The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed’”; (4) *Similitude* (a concise

comparison or narrative, reflecting a widely held or common truth)—Luke 15:3-7: “Then Jesus told them this *parable*: ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them’”; (5) *Proverb*—Luke 4:23: “Surely you will quote this *proverb* to me, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’”; (6) *Narrative Parable*—the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37.

Many of Jesus’s Parables relate in some way to the proclamation of the kingdom of God: its nature, its growth, its value, its coming, the sacrifices it calls for, and so forth. As a form of indirect communication, many of Jesus’s Parables also intend to do more than merely illustrate or communicate a truth. Instead, they draw the hearer/reader into the narrative world of the Parable in order to affect some kind of *experience* of transformation or reversal within the hearer/reader. For example, one could state the theological truth (or proposition) that God is gracious to all people regardless of merit. That’s a direct form of communication. Jesus’s Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16, however, places the hearer/reader into the line of laborers where he or she feels the “shock of recognition” that God’s grace eclipses conventional notions of justice. Thus, the Parable so thoroughly involves the hearer/reader (mind, imagination, emotions, will, etc.) that he or she is personally or existentially transformed. Jesus uses such Parables to form covenant faith and kingdom character in us. (*See also Allegory, Hermeneutics, Metaphor, Proverb, and Simile*)

**Parallelism:** The basic form of Hebrew poetry in which a pair (or more) of poetic lines express the same idea in different words. The paired expressions can extend, contrast, or parallel the meaning from one line to the next. Example: “When I consider your heavens/ the work of your fingers/ the moon and the stars/ which you have set in place/ what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them/ human beings that you care for them?” (Ps. 8:3-4). (*See also Chiasm and Psalm*)

**Parchment** (Gk., *membrana*): A material used for writing made from animal skins (such as sheep, goats, antelopes, and similar animals). The animal skins were scraped to make a more durable writing material than papyrus. This kind of animal-skin document is also known as vellum. The Apostle Paul refers to this type of writing material in 2 Timothy 4:13, when he says to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the *parchments*.” (*See also Bible, Ostraca, and Papyri*)

**Participle:** A declinable verbal adjective, deriving its tense and voice from its verbal nature, and its gender, number, and case from its adjectival nature. Like the infinitive,

the Participle's verbal nature is normally adverbial, that is, dependent on a controlling verb. The Participle's relation to time is also dependent on the controlling verb.

Example: "*After fasting* forty days and forty nights, [Jesus] became hungry" (Matt. 4:2).

In the Greek, *fasting* is a participle; *after* is the temporal relation of the Participle to the controlling verb, *became hungry* (as determined by context). (See also **Adjective, Infinitive, Noun, and Verb**)

**Passive Voice:** Voice is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates *how* the subject is related to the action or state expressed by the verb. Generally, verbs in the Passive Voice indicate that the subject is *acted upon* or *receives the action* expressed by the verb. Example: "The angel Gabriel *was sent* from God" (Luke 1:26). In the Greek, *was sent* is in the Passive Voice (meaning God was the active agent (the sender) and Gabriel was the Passive agent (the one sent)). (See also **Active Voice** and **Middle Voice**)

**Pentateuch** (see **Torah**)

**Perfect Tense:** A Greek verbal tense indicating an event that occurred in the past, but has results or effects existing in the present (present from the standpoint of the speaker); a present state of affairs resulting from a past action. This tense is used less frequently than the aorist or present tense, so when it occurs, it often carries important theological connotations. Paul uses the Perfect Tense with some regularity. Example: "The love of God *has been poured out* in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5). In the Greek, *has been poured out* is in the Perfect Tense, meaning God poured out his love in our hearts in the past and we are still experiencing the results of that act in the present. (See also **Aorist Tense, Pluperfect Tense, Present Tense, and Verb**)

**Person (gram.):** An aspect of verbal grammar, reflected in verbal endings (inflections), that indicates the speaker, the Person spoken to, or the Person spoken about. As in English, there are three Persons. First Person: the Person speaking; Second Person: the Person being spoken to; and Third Person: the Person or thing being spoken about. Example: First Person: "*I* hear"; Second Person: "*You* hear"; Third Person: "*He/she/it* hears." These examples are all in the singular form. Person can also be plural: First Person: "*We* hear"; Second Person: "*You all* hear"; Third Person: "*They* hear." (See also **Personal Pronoun** and **Verb**)

**Personal Pronoun:** Words used in place of proper nouns or other substantives (words that function as nouns). In English (and Greek), the Personal Pronouns are: "I/we" (first

person singular and plural); “you/you all” (second person singular and plural); and “he, she, it/they” (third person singular and plural). Since person is indicated in the inflected form of the verb itself, the inclusion of a Personal Pronoun often indicates emphasis.

Example: “*You* are the Christ” (Mark 8:29). A wooden translation of the Greek would be: “You, you are the Christ.” In English we usually indicate this type of emphasis with italics and/or exclamation points, so this text is, perhaps, best translated, “*You* are the Christ!” (See also **Demonstrative Pronoun, Indefinite Relative Pronoun, Interrogative Pronoun, Person, Relative Pronoun, and Verb**)

**Perspicuity:** A Reformation principle regarding the general clarity of Scripture with respect to matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct. Reformers like Luther and Calvin strongly believed that God had formed Scripture in such a way that, although there are many complex and difficult passages in the Bible, those things necessary for salvation could be known by anyone with basic common sense. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (1.7). (See also **Illumination**)

**Plot:** The arrangement of events in a narrative; the actions that take place in a story that lead to some end. A biblical author constructs a narrative to achieve certain artistic, imaginative, emotional, intellectual, and theological ends. Aristotle famously described Plot as a continuous narrative sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. The essence of Plot is conflict moving toward resolution. (See also **Antagonist, Archetype, Comedy, Narrative, Protagonist, Setting, Suspense, and Tragedy**)

**Pluperfect Tense:** A Greek verbal tense indicating an event that occurred in the past (viewed as a snapshot), and has results or effects that existed in the past (past from the standpoint of the speaker), but that no longer has a direct effect on the present; a past state of affairs resulting from a past action that remains in the past. Example: “*as was his custom*, [Jesus] taught them” (Mark 10:1). In the Greek, *as was his custom* is in the Pluperfect tense. Jesus had an intermittent habit of teaching people in the past prior to this present time of teaching. (See also **Imperfect Tense, Perfect Tense, and Verb**)

**Point of View:** The viewpoint from which a story is told. The means by which an author presents the reader with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events

that make up the narrative. Often, biblical stories are told from the Point of View of an omniscient narrator, meaning the story is told from a God's-eye view. Readers are given access, for example, to a character's motives, thoughts, and feelings (realities that only an omniscient person could know). (See also **Dramatic Irony, Narrative, Plot, and Protagonist**)

**Preposition:** A word that shows the relationship among certain words. Example: "For God did not send his Son *into* the world to condemn the world, but to save the world *through* him" (John 3:17). In Greek, there are two prepositions in this sentence. The first, *into* (Gk., *eis*), indicates *location*, or *where* the Son was sent by God, i.e., into the world. The second, *through* (Gk., *dia*), indicates the *means by which* or, better, the *instrument by whom* the world will be saved, i.e., by the Son. (See also **Genitive Case**)

**Present Tense:** A Greek verbal tense portraying an action from the inside of an event; an activity in process (without importance being placed on the beginning or end of that activity). In the indicative mood, this tense is portrayed as occurring right now, at the Present time. It is perhaps best thought of as a movie camera capturing events as they unfold, passing through the lens's field of vision, without looking left or right to see where the event originated from or where it is heading. Example: "[Jesus] says to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins *are forgiven*'" (Mark 2:5). In Greek, *are forgiven* is in the Present Tense. The forgiveness of the man's sins was happening right then. (See also **Imperfect Tense and Verb**)

**The Prophets** (Heb., *Neviim*): The second division of the Hebrew canon. The books in this division are as follows (in order): Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve—the shorter prophetic books (in order): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. (See also **Torah** and **The Writings**)

**Protagonist:** The principal or leading narrative character whom we as readers stand alongside through the unfolding of the story. Sometimes a narrative is told from the viewpoint of the Protagonist. Usually the Protagonist is viewed positively in the story (and therefore by the reader), but occasionally they are viewed negatively. For example, the prophet Jonah is the Protagonist in the book that bears his name, and God is Jonah's antagonist. (See also **Antagonist, Foil, and Narrative**)

**Proverb** (Heb., *mashal*): A short, pithy statement that reflects basic wisdom about everyday life. In Scripture the wisdom presented reflects a godly way of living. Proverbs should not be read as God's promises or as absolute statements of how things always are, but rather as the basic orientation to life that is in keeping with God's design for human flourishing. (See also **Wisdom Literature**)

**Psalms**: A Hebrew poem set in a unique form (parallelism) used to express praise, lament, thanksgiving, questioning, the wonder of creation, anger, celebration of Torah, a song of victory, worship of God, and so forth. The largest occurrence of the Hebrew Psalm is, of course, in the OT Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms has been the foundational text for Jews and Christians for learning prayer, praise, and worship. It instructs us in how to respond to God. As Eugene Peterson notes, "[P]rayer is never the first word; it is always the second word. God has the first word. Prayer is answering speech; it is not primarily 'address' but 'response.'" He goes on to say, "The great and sprawling university that Hebrews and Christians have attended to learn to answer God, to learn to pray, has been the Psalms. More people have learned to pray by matriculating in the Psalms than any other way. The Psalms were the prayer book of Israel; they were the prayer book of Jesus; they are the prayer book of the church" (*Working the Angles*, 45, 50). Example of a line from a Hebrew Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God/ the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). (See also **Parallelism**)

**Reader-Response Criticism**: An interpretive approach that focuses on the *Reader* rather than the author or the text itself as *a* or *the* primary determiner of textual meaning. Reader-Response Critics consider the ongoing mental and emotional responses of Readers to be the formative dimension of textual understanding. (See also **Exegesis, Hermeneutics, Narrative, and Suspense**)

**Relative Pronoun**: Relative Pronouns are so called because they *relate* to more than one clause. Typically, they are 'hinge' words in that they both refer back to an antecedent in the previous clause and also function in some capacity in their own clause. Example: "[A]mong you stands one *whom* you do not know" (John 1:26). *Whom* is the Relative Pronoun here in English and in Greek. It refers back to the assumed antecedent person (as indicated by the main verb) *he stands*, while also being the direct object of the verb *know* in the following clause. *Whom* is standing among the crowd; the crowd does not



know *whom*. (See also **Demonstrative Pronoun, Indefinite Relative Pronoun, Interrogative Pronoun, and Personal Pronoun**)

**Revelation** (Gk., *apocalypsis*, unveiling): The word *Revelation* carries a number of connotations. It can be used as a form of synecdoche (the part standing for the whole) to refer to the whole of Scripture, that is, the Bible as God's Revelation to humanity. It can also refer to God's witness to himself in Christ, through creation, in dreams, in prophetic words, in the eschaton (the "last things" or final age), among other uses. Underlying this wide range of revelatory forms or types is the foundational conviction that God, the Creator and Redeemer of all that exists, personally communicates to human beings in all these various ways. The supreme Revelation of God, that is, God's highest and perfect revealing of himself, is the person and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. (See also **Apocalyptic, Kingdom of God (Heaven), Scripture, and Word of God**)

**Rhetorical Criticism:** An interpretive approach that focuses on those elemental structures and forms within texts that are constructed to evoke a particular response in a reader. Rhetorical Criticism studies the art of composition and the art of persuasion as embodied in the structures, forms, genres, aesthetic styles, vocabulary, and communicative strategies of Scripture (among other elements). (See also **Exegesis and Hermeneutics**)

**Rule of Faith** (Gk., *kanon tes pisteos*, Lat., *regula fidei*): The term used by many of the early Church Fathers (such as Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Tertullian) to refer to the authoritative summary of apostolic teaching characteristic of the Gospel. The Church Fathers used the Rule of Faith as a hermeneutical device (the doctrinal overarching whole from within which individual Scripture texts or parts of texts could be understood), in the construction of creeds (such as the Nicene Creed), and as the standard by which to determine which texts reflected authoritative, divine revelation, and were thus to be included in the canon of Scripture. (See also **Canon, Gospel, Revelation, Scripture, Tradition, and Word of God**)

**Sacrament** (Lat., *sacramentum*, sign, from Gk., *mysterion*, mystery): The word *Sacrament* is not found in Scripture. It appears that the Church Father Tertullian, in his treatise, *On Baptism*, is the first to use the word in extant writings. He begins his text with these words: "Here is our *sacrament* of water" (1.1). The Roman Catholic church, following Thomas Aquinas, recognizes *seven* sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Marriage. The Reformation tradition

only recognizes *two* sacraments based on the fact that Jesus only *explicitly* instituted *two* sacraments: The Lord's Supper or Eucharist (*see* Matt. 26:26-29) and Baptism (*see* Matt. 28:19). Theologically, a Sacrament is understood as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace or reality. (*See also* **Symbol**)

**Salvation History** (Ger., *Heilsgeschichte*): A term used to describe both "the mighty acts of God" (Creation, Exodus, Covenant, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, etc.) and the narrative of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, whereby the Sovereign Lord and Creator is intimately and directly involved in the affairs of human history, bringing about certain ends in keeping with his will and purpose. Salvation History is much more than a mere historical account of significant events in human history. It is God's Story, the divine narrative enacted and revealed in history and recorded in Scripture. History, then, is itself revelatory in that the unfolding narrative of human history reveals the superintending, providential actions of God. (*See also* **Metanarrative** and **Narrative**)

**Scripture** (Gk., *graphe*, writing): As opposed to the word *Bible* (*biblion*), which originally referred to a particular *kind* of writing material (papyrus), Scripture refers to the *writing itself* (content), not the material. The term Scripture is used to refer to the sacred, authoritative writings of Christian faith, both OT and NT. Its authority is rooted in the fact that the texts are God-breathed (*theopneustos*, *see* 2 Tim. 3:16)—God-speech, as well as texts written by divinely commissioned human authors. (*See also* **Bible**, **Canon**, **Inspiration**, **Revelation**, **Rule of Faith**, **Tradition**, and **Word of God**)

**Scroll** (*see* **Bible**)

**Semantics** (Gk., *sema*, sign, *semainein*, to mean, signify): The study of meanings—how words mean by virtue of their functions, histories, sociohistorical contexts, morphological and grammatical forms, syntactical relations, and inter- and intra-textual settings. (*See also* **Authorial Discourse**, **Authorial Intention**, **Context**, **Exegesis**, **Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral)**, **Hermeneutics**, and **Speech-Act Theory**)

**Septuagint** (Lat., *septuaginta*, seventy; *abbr.* LXX): The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible as well as the deuterocanonical books, such as Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and so on. These are books the Roman Catholic Church accepts as inspired Scripture, and therefore canonical, but that Protestants do not. The Septuagint was translated for Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora by Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3<sup>rd</sup>

Century B.C. After the exile and deportations of both the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Jews were scattered throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond (this is known as the Diaspora, Gk., *diasporas*, scattered; see 1 Peter 1:1). Following this geographical and social displacement, many Jews no longer spoke Hebrew. Instead, they spoke the common language of the Hellenistic Empire—Koine Greek. Thus the need for a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Septuagint is extremely important for both OT and NT studies. For OT studies, it represents an alternative stream of textual tradition, and one much older than any Hebrew manuscripts or texts we currently have. For NT studies, the Septuagint is most significant for its widespread use and authority in the apostolic church. It is the Bible of the early church. The vast majority of OT quotations and allusions in the NT come from the Septuagint. (See also **Apocrypha**, **Dead Sea Scrolls**, **Masoretic Text**, and **Scripture**)

**Setting:** The physical locale, historical timeframe, and social circumstances in which a narrative takes place; the narrative frame within which characters and events in a story occur. An important NT example would be the fact that the crucifixion of Jesus occurs *outside* Jerusalem at Golgotha. (See also **Context**, **Narrative**, and **Plot**)

**Simile:** A verbal correspondence between two things using the explicit formula “like” or “as.” Biblical examples include: “the wicked are *like* chaff” (Ps. 1:4), “the day of the Lord will come *like* a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2), “the kingdom of heaven is *like* a treasure hidden in a field” (Matt. 13:44). The context determines what the “like” or comparison refers to (“like a thief in the night”: quickly? unexpectedly? violently?), and the comparison may hold multiple levels of meaning. (See also **Metaphor** and **Symbol**)

**Source Criticism:** The attempt to uncover written documents lying behind a given text, a biblical book, or several books (such as the *theoretical* Q document, which purports to be a “source document” for the textual materials that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke hold in common, but that are *not* present in the Gospel of Mark). The Q document (from the German, *Quelle*, meaning source) is a *hypothetical* document. No such document has ever actually been found. It is merely *assumed* that there must be such a document because of the type and extent of common material between Matthew and Luke that is lacking in Mark. (Most NT scholars consider Mark to be the first Gospel written, and that both Matthew and Luke made use of Mark in the construction of their own Gospels.) (See also **Form Criticism** and **Textual Criticism**)

**Speech-Act Theory:** A philosophy of language (and an interpretive approach to texts) that distinguishes between different modes and effects of various types of Speech, each type viewed as a particular kind of Action. There are a multitude of Speech Acts, including stating, questioning, promising, commanding, warning, praising, thanking, and so on. A sentence consisting of the same words in the same grammatical form, such as, “I am leaving tomorrow,” may have the force of an assertion, a clarification, a threat, a promise, and so on. Language also does much more than merely convey information. Certain types of Speech Acts *enact something in the speaking or writing itself*. For example, when a bride or groom at a wedding says, “I do,” much more is happening than merely making a statement; these words have the power of binding a person in a marriage relationship. Another example would be the statement in the liturgy, “In Christ, your sins are forgiven.” This means much more than a detached theological idea; it is a theological reality effected and experienced in that moment through the Holy Spirit. (See also **Authorial Discourse** and **Authorial Intention**)

**Story** (see **Narrative**)

**Subjunctive Mood:** Mood is the grammatical property of Greek verbs that indicates the degree of *actuality* or *potentiality* represented in the verbal action or state. Generally, the Subjunctive Mood indicates that the verbal action or state of the verb is *uncertain* but still *probable*. The Subjunctive Mood is commonly used to exhort oneself and/or others. Example, “let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (Heb. 4:14). In the Greek, the verb translated *let us hold firmly*, is in the Subjunctive Mood. The Subjunctive Mood here indicates the good *possibility* that the *us* will hold firmly to the faith, but it’s not a certainty or a statement of fact. (See also **Imperative Mood**, **Indicative Mood**, **Optative Mood**, and **Verb**)

**Suspense:** A lack of certainty on the part of a concerned reader about what is going to happen in a story, especially to the character(s) with whom the reader has formed a sympathetic bond. Suspense not only keeps the reader interested, it sharply focuses the reader’s mind, and heightens the reader’s projection of possible outcomes. The Gospel of Mark as a whole operates using Suspense. Mark frequently uses the adverb *euthus*, “immediately,” to set the pace of the narrative. In the first part of Mark’s Gospel, from the opening line until Peter’s confession in 8:29, Mark uses *euthus* at least 32 times, creating a fast-paced narrative. From Peter’s confession until the beginning of the passion narrative, Mark only uses *euthus* 6 times, creating a moderately paced narrative.

But when Mark recounts the passion of Christ, his narrative moves in slow motion, focusing the reader's attention on the cross and resurrection.

In addition, Mark makes use of Jesus's frequent commands to silence regarding his true identity as a means of creating Suspense and dramatic irony in his Gospel. We as readers know from the very first line of Mark's Gospel that Jesus is God's Anointed: "The beginning of the good news about *Jesus the Messiah*" (Mark 1:1). But throughout Mark's Gospel the disciples and others are continually confused and amazed at Jesus's identity, saying things like "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He [Jesus] even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him" (Mark 1:27) and "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41). But then we find Jesus saying over and over, "Tell no one." For example, when a demon-possessed man shows up at the synagogue in Capernaum shouting, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus responds by sternly commanding the demon, "Be quiet!" (Mark 1:24-25). In another episode, after Jesus heals a leper, he tells the leper: "See that you don't tell this to anyone" (Mark 1:43). When Jesus raises the little girl from the dead in Mark 5:21ff, we read: "[Jesus] gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this" (v. 43). After Jesus heals the deaf and mute man in chapter 7, we read: "Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone" (Mark 7:36). And perhaps most pointedly, in Mark 9 we find Jesus telling Peter, James, and John to be silent after they've just seen Jesus "transfigured before them" (v. 2) and hearing God's voice say, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (v. 7). Mark tells us, "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant" (Mark 9:9-10). Mark uses the varied pacing of the narrative and the messianic secret theme to create Suspense in his Gospel in order to drive his readers forward to the cross and resurrection. (*See also Narrative, Plot, and Reader-Response Criticism*)

**Symbol:** In the broadest sense a Symbol is anything which signifies something else; in this sense, all words are Symbols. The more focused meaning used for interpreting texts refers to words or phrases that carry a deeper, extra-textual meaning beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves. Biblical examples would include: the cross, manna, the bread and the cup, fire and cloud, circumcision, baptism, the Temple, Jerusalem, the numbers 7, 12, and 40, the Exodus, father, shepherd, the Promised Land, and so on.

Symbols create resonances of meaning in the human mind and heart, drawing together various memories of images, events, narratives, and so forth in order to deepen our understanding and experience of the truth depicted in and by the Symbol expressed in the present text. As Paul Ricoeur once wrote, “The symbol gives rise to thought” (*Freud and Philosophy* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970], 543). The Holy Spirit uses biblical Symbols to expand our imaginations and thereby deepen our lived experience of the truth. (See also **Metaphor**, **Sacrament**, and **Simile**)

**Synoptic** (see **Gospels**)

**Syntax:** In contrast to the grammar of *words* and their component parts, such as prefixes and suffixes (morphology), syntax refers to the grammar of *sentences*, examining the way sentences are held together according to certain rules. Syntax involves an analysis of all the parts of the sentence—principally nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions—and how all these elements are interrelated in a specific sentence. Is the noun the subject, indirect object, or direct object of the verb? Which noun or other substantive (words that function as nouns) does the adjective modify? How is the prepositional phrase related to the verb (or adverb or noun, etc.)? (See also **Context**, **Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral)**, and **Semantics**)

**Targum** (Heb., *targum*, *targumim*, translation, translations): Aramaic translations of the Hebrew OT. *Targumim* exist for every book of the Hebrew Bible except Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel (perhaps because these books already have significant portions of their texts in Aramaic). (See also **Masoretic Text** and **Septuagint**)

**Textual Criticism:** The principles and procedures for establishing the original words of a text. (See also **Form Criticism**, **Papyri**, and **Source Criticism**)

**Torah:** The Hebrew word *Torah* carries a number of different connotations: (1) It can refer to the 613 specific laws in the Pentateuch. (2) It can be used as synecdoche (the part as representing the whole) for the entire Hebrew Bible. (3) It can mean divine instruction within the bounds of covenant, as expressed in Exodus or Leviticus, for example. (4) In Psalm 19 and 119 it is used in the specific sense of the “revealed will of God.” (5) It can refer to the Pentateuch itself, being the name given for the first division of the Hebrew canon. (6) The phrase *Torah of YHWH* has even be used to refer to the *Psalter* as a whole. (7) And it can refer specifically to the Book of Deuteronomy itself. (See also **The Prophets** and **The Writings**)

**Tradition** (Gk., *paradosis*, to hand down, pass on): The texts, teachings, interpretations, doctrines, patterns of living, and instructions for worship, prayer, and living (among many other things) passed down from one generation to another. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, the Apostle Paul gives a concrete example of Tradition: “For what I received I *passed on* (Gk., *paradoka*, the verbal form of *paradosis*) to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.”

Tradition is the interpretive horizon *from within which* we see the world, understand God and ourselves, live out our faith, and interpret Scripture. In turn, our engagements with the text of Scripture (illuminated and enlivened by the Holy Spirit) extend, transform, correct, and deepen our inherited interpretive horizon and our understanding of Scripture. (*See also Authority, Exegesis, Hermeneutics, Hermeneutical Circle (Spiral), Revelation, Scripture, and Word of God*)

**Tragedy**: A narrative pattern that begins in an idyllic or stable state, and then descends into a disastrous conclusion. Tragedy is the opposite of comedy. Its shape is often viewed as a frown (an upside-down u-shape). A biblical example of Tragedy would be the narrative movement from creation (an idyllic condition) to the Fall (a condition of sin, brokenness, and death). Pride is a common cause of Tragedy in literature. The Tragedy of Genesis 3, while involving pride, is primarily idolatry. (*See also Comedy*)

**Tropological Sense**: One level of interpretation that was part of the “Fourfold Method” developed in the early church and that dominated medieval interpretive practice. Medieval exegetes assumed that each text of the Bible had four levels of meaning: (1) the Literal Sense—the straightforward grammatical meaning; (2) the Allegorical Sense—a spiritual meaning beyond the plain or literal sense; (3) the Tropological Sense—a moral or ethical dimension of the text, revealing how we must live the Christian life in the present; and (4) the Anagogical Sense—an eschatological dimension of the text, revealing our Christian hope—the realization of the new creation and the permanent establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. (*See also Allegorical Sense, Anagogical Sense, Fourfold Method, and Literal Sense*)

**Typology**: “[T]he interpretation of an event belonging to the present or recent past as the fulfillment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in Scripture” (R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* [London: SCM, 1959], 7). Typology compares and contrasts

*events* or *persons*; Allegory compares and contrasts *ideas*, which must be interpreted or decoded according to a specific code key.

The crossing of the Red Sea is a type of baptism. Moses is a type of Christ. These are examples of typology. Allegory can be found in the Parable of the Sower (*see*, for example, Mark 4:1-20). In the Parable of the Sower, seed falls on the path, and is eaten by the birds; it falls on rocky places, where because of the lack of soil, it is unable to become sufficiently rooted, and therefore withers in the heat of the sun; it falls among thorns, which choke off the sunlight and sufficient access to soil nutrients and water, and therefore the plant is unable to bear fruit; and the seed falls on good soil, producing crops that bear fruit thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times the original volume of the seed planted. Jesus goes on to explain this parable to his disciples, providing them with interpretive key to understanding the parable, and without which we could not understand the parable as Jesus intended. The seed is the Word of God, and the various soils among which the seed falls represent various types of response to the Word (the good news announcement of the presence of God's kingdom). Apart from Jesus's explanation, we would not be "insiders" who know to view the seed as the Word of God, and so forth. (*See also Allegory and Symbol*)

**Verb:** The Verb is usually the key word in a Greek sentence, carrying the movement, state, or action of the sentence. As in most languages, Greek Verbs have tense, voice, mood, person, and number. In English, Verbs are largely defined by time. Greek Verbs, however, convey two qualities: (1) kind of action (called aspect) and (2) time. In Greek, the Verbal aspect carries greater weight than the Verb's relation to time. A Verb is normally parsed (grammatically identified) according to the order above: Tense, Voice, Mood, Person, and Number.

The Greek Verb has six Tenses (all references to time are in relation to the standpoint of the subject of the Verb): (1) *Aorist* (snapshot, generally in the past); (2) *Imperfect* (movie, with a fuzzy beginning and ending, generally in the past); (3) *Present* (movie, with a fuzzy beginning and ending, in the present moment); (4) *Future* (snapshot, in the future), (5) *Perfect* (snapshot in the past that continues to affect the present in some way), and (6) *Pluperfect* (snapshot in the past that had some lingering effect after the snapshot, but no longer has an effect on the present). *Infinitives* (indeclinable Verbal nouns) and *Participles* (declinable Verbal adjectives) also have tense.



Greek Verbs have three Voices: (1) *Active* (the subject is acting on someone or something), (2) *Passive* (the subject is being acted on by someone or something), and (3) *Middle* (the subject is acting in a way that is somehow self-involving; the action of the Verb reflects back on the subject).

Greek Verbs have four Moods: (1) *Indicative* (assertion of fact); (2) *Subjunctive* (assertion of something desirable or probable); (3) *Optative* (assertion of something possible, but uncertain); (4) *Imperative* (command, assertion of something intended).

Like English Verbs, Greek Verbs have three Persons, each of which can be singular or plural. In first Person, the subject is speaking; in second Person, the subject is being spoken to; and in third Person, the subject is being spoken about. First Person singular: "I"; second Person singular: "You"; third Person singular: "He/She/It." First Person plural: "We"; second Person plural: "You all"; third Person plural: "They." The Verbal inflection indicating Person also indicates Number, that is, whether the subject of the Verb is singular or plural.

Paying close attention to the Verbs (the tense, how the Verb relates to other elements of the sentence or other Verbs, the significance of the mood in the context, etc.) is a very important interpretive practice.

**Verbal Irony:** To say one thing (at a surface level) and mean the opposite (at the intended level). There is Verbal Irony in OT stories such as in Exodus 32, where in verse 4 the text tells us that Aaron "fashioned [the golden calf] with a tool." Yet later, when Aaron is giving an account of his actions to Moses, he tells him, "[The people] gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (v. 24). In 1 Kings 18:27 we find a particularly humorous and biting Ironic sarcasm voiced by the Prophet Elijah as he taunts the prophets of Baal who are getting no response from their god. Elijah says: "Shout louder! . . . Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." In the NT we can detect Verbal Irony in Paul's words to the Corinthians: "We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! (1 Cor. 4:10). (See also **Dramatic Irony**)

**Vocative Case:** The case used for addressing someone or, on occasion, for uttering exclamations. Example: "Take heart, *daughter*, . . . your faith has saved you" (Matt. 9:22).

In the Greek text, *daughter* is in the vocative case; Jesus is addressing the woman directly. (See also **Case** and **Declension**)

**Vulgate** (Lat., *vulgate*, common, popular): The Latin translation of the OT and NT by St. Jerome (347-420 A.D.). Jerome translated the OT into Latin using both the Hebrew and Greek (Septuagint) texts of the OT. Although the majority of Jerome's OT Vulgate ultimately became based on the Hebrew text, some parts reflect the Greek Septuagint, particularly his earliest translation of the Psalms, which was retained in the Vulgate due to its popularity and widespread use in the Western Church's liturgy. Jerome's Vulgate translation was the standard text of the Bible in the Western Church for well over a thousand years, and a critically revised version of the Vulgate is still the official Roman Catholic version of the Bible today. The majority of theologians from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century onward used the Vulgate in their teaching, preaching, liturgical texts, and theological treatises. Its importance for the development of Christian thought, liturgy, and theology, as well as its impact on Western culture more broadly, cannot be overstated. (See also **Masoretic Text** and **Septuagint**)

**Wisdom:** The Bible (as well as Western philosophy) makes a clear distinction between Wisdom and knowledge. As Anthony Thiselton points out: "Wisdom is generally practical, exploratory, creative, and has its roots in the *community*. It stands in contrast with the more *individualist* quest for knowledge, which may deteriorate into a search for mere information" (Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 843). The OT holds together two competing strands of Wisdom tradition: (1) Proverbs, which on the whole offers a positive view of practical, godly Wisdom and of God's gracious providence in the life of those "whose delight is in the LORD's Torah," and who "meditate on his Torah day and night" (Ps. 1:2) and (2) Job and Ecclesiastes which reflect the profound limitations and difficulties of Proverb's more optimistic view. Biblical Wisdom in both strands of the tradition grounds Wisdom in humility: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10); "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few" (Eccl. 5:1-2); "Then Job replied to the LORD: 'I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, "Who is this that obscures

my plans without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things too wonderful for me to know"" (Job 42:1-3).

The NT extends this grounding of Wisdom in humility by setting Wisdom in the framework of Jesus on the cross. The crucifixion is the epitome of God's Wisdom. The Apostle Paul says: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where are the wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written" "Let those who boast boast in the Lord"" (1 Cor. 1:18-31). And in 1 Corinthians 3:18, Paul proclaims: "If you think you are wise . . . you should become fools so that you may become wise."

Throughout its history the Church has maintained this Wisdom/humility interconnection as an essential aspect of Christian spirituality. Here's what Thomas à Kempis says, "What's the point of entering into a deep discussion concerning the Holy Trinity, if you lack humility, and thus displease the Trinity? For truly it's not deep words that make a person holy and upright; it's a godly life that draws you into an intimate relationship with God. Isn't it better to feel profound sorrow for our sins than to be able to offer the most eloquent theological definition of *repentance*? Even if you know the whole Bible, and the wisest words of all the philosophers, how can all that

possibly benefit you apart from the love and grace of God?" (*The Imitation of Christ*, 1.3, AT). Elsewhere Thomas says: "Everyone naturally wants to gain knowledge, but what good is great learning without a deep and profound reverence for God? Surely humble peasants who serve God are better than proud philosophers who, neglecting their own souls, contemplate the course of planets in the heavens. Those who have a God's-eye view of themselves don't engage in proud self-promotion, and no matter how many honors or accolades they receive, they don't become enamored with themselves. If we can fathom all mysteries and gain boundless knowledge of the universe, but don't have love, what will we have really gained when we come face to face with God, who will judge us by the measure of our faithful obedience to him? People with great knowledge often aspire to *appear* learned, and to be *called* wise. Yet there are a great many things we can learn that are of little or no benefit to our souls. What could be more foolish than to expend excessive time and energy on gaining immense knowledge about things that don't lead to greater godliness?" (*The Imitation of Christ*, 2.1 and 2.2, AT). (See also **Proverb and Wisdom Literature**)

**Wisdom Literature:** A genre of OT Scripture that instructs believers in practical, everyday, wise and godly living, on the one hand, and that explores the complexities, wonders, and difficulties of human existence, on the other. OT books of this type include Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (in the NT, the epistle of James displays many of the features and qualities of Wisdom Literature, and, of course, many of the pronouncements and sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ are of this type). Two basic types characterize this genre in the OT: (1) Proverbs—short, pithy sayings that give instruction for godly living and general welfare, and (2) Theological/Philosophical Expositions—lengthy monologues (Ecclesiastes), dramas (Song of Songs), and dramatic dialogues (Job), that wrestle with human suffering and pain (Job), explore life's blessings, such as sex and committed, faithful love (Song of Songs), and extended reflections on the meaning and meaninglessness of life (Ecclesiastes).

Unfortunately, Wisdom Literature is often misread, misunderstood, and misapplied. For example, individual proverbs are often interpreted as eternal, universally absolute, and divinely guaranteed truths, instead of as God's instruction in generally wise and godly ways of living. The Book of Proverbs contains numerous individual sayings that have contrasting or opposing sayings that counterbalance one another. Proverbs are not divine or legal guarantees of a certain outcome. Many people—to their own confusion

and sorrow—have interpreted the following Proverb as a divine guarantee for parenting: “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (KJV). This saying is not intended as a binding guarantee, but rather as the *general* or *likely* outcome of godly parenting. And as all the books of Wisdom Literature make crystal clear, Wisdom has nothing to do with a person’s IQ or the extent of a person’s knowledge. Rather, the wise person is one who is rightly oriented toward God, and who not only understands *how* to live a life pleasing to God, but diligently and joyously *does* so. (See also **Proverb** and **Wisdom**)

**The Writings** (Heb., *Kethuvim*): The third division of the Hebrew canon. The books in this division are as follows (in order): Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles. (See also **The Prophets** and **Torah**)

## Resources

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