



Earl Radmacher: “The Nature & Result of Literal Interpretation”: Introduction; Biblical Beginnings of Hermeneutics, Nehemiah 8:8; Luke 24:27

10. Put to challenge was the false notion that the covenants promised to Israel (and their literal fulfillment on this earth) were transferred to the church.
11. This conclusion was reached by allegorizing the covenants and the promises without any biblical evidence for doing so.
12. The covenants were given to the nation Israel for fulfillment on planet earth. The promises to the Church are given to individuals and have their fulfillment in a heavenly kingdom.
13. The dynamics of God’s message to man was once again viewed with the clarity that was intended and, as is always the case in the Devil’s world, it came under immediate attack and remains so presently.
14. To conclude our study, I would like to present a paper written by one of today’s leading proponents of literal hermeneutics.
15. Dr. Earl D. Radmacher received his Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary and served for 34 years as administrator and professor from 1962 through 1995, and president and chancellor of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon from 1965 through 1995.
16. Dr. Radmacher is co-author of *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus*, and is General Editor of *The Nelson Study Bible* and *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary*.
17. We will now examine a recent paper written by Dr. Radmacher that will serve to summarize our study of hermeneutics.

Radmacher, Earl D. “The Nature and Result of Literal Interpretation.” Paper presented at the 2003 Pre-Trib Study Group Conference. (Washington, D.C.: Pre-Trib Research Center, 2003), 1-11:

Introduction

Thirty plus years ago I accepted a series of random classes to teach at several colleges in the greater San Jose area. In each situation I always started with the subject matter of the course at hand and took the thinking back to biblical principles. After the classes there were always several students who would want to discuss their interests further.

One such student, after expressing his appreciation for the lecture, asked if he could get an appointment with me to rap. I was glad for the opportunity and agreed upon a time and place. We were both on time and immediately got into a heavy discussion which necessitated bringing quotations from other authorities to our aid.

When I called forth help from the Apostle Paul, however, he objected saying, "Well, there are many different interpretations of that." Now even though I had only been teaching hermeneutics for a few years then, it still brought up my ire when someone departed from common sense, to use such lame and irresponsible argumentation. Thus I responded, "Wait just a minute. You asked me to get together to rap and I don't see any presents to rap or any wrapping paper or ribbon with which to rap them. Now I don't know how we are going to rap without presents or wrapping paper."



He looked at me like I had lost my mind saying, "Well, that's not what I meant," to which I responded, "But there are many different meanings to what you said. Now let's wrap!" Totally frustrated, he said, "We can't even continue this discussion." "You are exactly right," I responded. "We cannot continue until I am willing to understand what you meant by what you said. There are not many meanings to what you said. Only one! And if I refuse to find out your meaning for what you said, intelligent communication comes to a halt.

"We cannot go on further until I am willing to understand the single sense you have in mind by what you have said. And I am simply insisting that you allow the Apostle Paul the same privilege that you are expecting. There are not many different interpretations. There may be forty suggested interpretations for that verse but I guarantee you that thirty-nine of them are wrong and maybe all forty. There is one, and only one, interpretation of any passage of scripture."

And, dear friends, that is the bottom line in understanding any communication. And there is no more abused principle in the history of interpretation of the Word of God than the principle of the single sense. Whether by ignorance or design, great harm has been brought to the cause of Christ by the use of *sensus plenior* or multiple senses. E. D. Hirsch is right on target in stating "if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text." [E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 5.] Indeed, it amounts to the banishment of the author and, in the case of the scripture, therefore, the elimination of its authority which is supplanted by the reader.

The Basic Principle of Interpretation

Biblical Beginnings of Hermeneutics. At the risk of being unduly rudimentary, allow me to review some very well-known biblical beginnings of the art and science of hermeneutics. Almost 600 years before Christ, the Jewish people were taken captive by the Babylonians. Their return under the Persians was in three stages led by Zerubbabel (538 B.C.), Ezra (458 B.C.), and Nehemiah (444 B.C.), under whom the city wall was rebuilt. In the process of the decades in the Babylonian captivity, the Jews ceased speaking Hebrew and spoke Aramaic; thus, this created a language gap between themselves and their Scriptures. So when the people stood in the open square before the Water Gate within the rebuilt city wall, they asked Ezra the Scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses to read to them. Also, the Levites circulated among the people to help them understand what Ezra was reading. Nehemiah records:

Nehemiah. 8:8 - So they read distinctly [פָּרַשׁ *parash: to translate (from Hebrew to Aramaic)*] from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense [שֶׁחֵל *sechel: to set forth the meaning*], and helped them to understand [בִּינְיָן *biyn: to perceive and understand*] the reading.

(Bernard) Ramm explains: "It was the task of Ezra to give the meaning of the Scriptures by paraphrasing the Hebrew into the Aramaic or in other ways expounding the sense of the Scriptures. This is generally admitted to be the first instance of Biblical hermeneutics." [Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), pp. 45-46.] Notice that it was not *sensus plenior* but "sense", that is, the singular sense of Moses as found in the written document.



[Ramm continues: “Far removed from the land of Palestine, the Jews in captivity could no longer practice their accustomed religion (Mosaism) which included the land, their capitol city, and their temple. There could be no Mosaism with no temple, no land about which there were many regulations, and no harvest. Robbed of the national character of their religion the Jews were led to emphasize that which they would take with them, their Scriptures. Out of the captivities came Judaism with its synagogues, rabbis, scribes, lawyers, and traditions.” p. 46.]

That which was true of Ezra the scribe in the Hebrew Scriptures is also true in the Greek source of our English word hermeneutics as used by Luke in recording the practice of Jesus with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:27 - And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus thoroughly interpreted [διερμηνεύω, **diermēneuō**] to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

NOTE: The verb **diermēneuō** is an intensified form of the verb, **ἑρμηνεύω**, **hermēneuō**, the word from which we get the English noun, “hermeneutic,” and is best translated “to thoroughly interpret and explain.”

(1) **Diermēneuō** is a compound of the preposition **διά**, **dia**, which means “to take through to the end,” or “through to completion,” and intensifies the suffixed verb, **hermēneuō**, “to interpret or explain.” Together the word means to “thoroughly interpret and explain.”

(2) **Diermēneuō** is an aorist active indicative:

aorist: Ingressive; signifies a state or condition, and denotes entrance into that state or condition.

In verse 27, the Lord entered into the condition of thoroughly interpreting the Old Testament prophecies concerning Himself and continued His exposition all the way to Emmaus. It was a seven-mile trip, so the Lord summed it up in what amounted to a double session.

active: The Lord produced the action of thoroughly interpreting and explaining the Scriptures pertaining to Himself.

indicative: Declarative; this actually happened.

(3) The word **hermēneuō** is likely derived from **Ἑρμῆς**, Hermes, the Greek god of communication who served as herald and messenger of the other gods. Philo described the prophets as the “interpreters of God” (*De Decalogo*). Josephus calls Moses the “**ἑρμηνεύς**, **hermēnus**, of God” (*Antiquities of the Jews*).

(4) In Luke 24:27, the verb **diermēneuō** indicates that the Lord thoroughly interpreted and explained to the two disciples how He was revealed in the books of Moses, the prophets, and the writings.

Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2:665-66:

Luke 24:27 presents the risen Jesus to those who walked to Emmaus as the expounder of the Old Testament prophecies of His passion and exaltation. The Messianic understanding of the Old Testament is thus established by Jesus and developed by early Christianity. It rests on an exposition of Scripture which is new in content, though not in method. In the light of their fulfillment, Old Testament sayings are claimed to be prophecies of Christ, and therefore a radically new meaning is seen in the Old Testament on the basis of the New Testament revelation.



- (5) This is another example of how the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are confirmed by Scripture to be literally fulfilled in the New.
- (6) If the prophecies regarding the Messiah are literally fulfilled in Jesus then it follows that the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel, and her earthly kingdom under the rule of a returning Messiah, are to be literally fulfilled as well.