

## HERMENEUTICS

### THE HISTORY OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION (PART III)

**THE RISE OF THE ALLEGORICAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION.** Origen of Alexandria (185-254) saw a threefold meaning in Scripture – literal, moral, and allegorical (spiritual). Origen ignored the literal meaning of Scripture, and his allegorizing became excessive. An example of allegorizing is found in this interpretation of the God Samaritan which was approved by Origen. The man going down to Jerico is Adam. Jerusalem is Paradise. Jericho is the world. The robbers were hostile powers. The priest is the law. The Levite is the prophets. The Samaritan is Christ. The wounds are disobedience. The beast is the Lord's body. The inn is the church. The two denari are the Father and the Son. The innkeeper is the head of the church. The Samaritan's promise to return is the Lord's second coming. Even though Origen modified this interpretation slightly he stated, "All of this has been said reasonably and beautifully."

**THE LATE CHURCH FATHERS.** Jerome (347-419) originally followed Origen in his allegorizing, but later he came under the influence of the school in Antioch and became more literal. His commentary on Jeremiah was literal in its approach. He did believe that a deeper meaning of Scripture was to be built on the literal sense. He continued to do some allegorizing. He eventually settled in Bethlehem where he wrote commentaries on most of the books of the bible. He is best known for translating the Bible into Latin. This translation is known as the Latin Vulgate. Augustine (354-430) is the most noteworthy of the late church fathers and is considered by the Catholic Church as one of the greatest theologians in history. His approach to interpreting Scriptures has influenced the church since then. In Augustine's book "On Christian Doctrine," he taught that the way to determine if a passage is allegorical is to consult the teaching of the church as well as the Scripture itself. Due to the influence of Augustine and others, allegorizing and church tradition were prominent during the Middle Ages. More and more the interpretation of the Bible became based on the teachings of the church fathers. More and more people became dependent on the opinions of men rather than the counsel of God. Jerome and Augustine led the way for two emphases that would endure for more than a thousand years – allegorizing and church authority.

**THE MIDDLE AGES.** Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was the most famous theologian of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. He held that the literal meaning of Scripture is basic, but other senses are built on it. It wasn't until John Wycliffe (1330-1384) that literal interpretation of the Bible was given its rightful place. Wycliffe was an outstanding reformer and theologian who fought for the authority of Scripture. He opposed the authority of the Catholic Church and their idea of tradition, stressing the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture. The historical-grammatical approach seeks to interpret Scripture as the original author would have intended it and the original audience would have understood it. Wycliffe wrote, "all things necessary in Scripture are contained in its proper literal and historical senses." Wycliffe was the first English translator of the Bible. He is referred to as "the Morningstar of the Reformation."

Tomorrow we will look at the Reformation and its influence on the interpretation of Scripture.