The Biblical & Philosophical Case for The Literal, Grammatical, Historical, (and Cultural) Hermeneutics

III. Etymological and Objective Foundations of Hermeneutics

Etymological Breakdown

- ***Hermeneutikos* (Greek):** Meaning "interpretation" or "to explain."
- ***-ics* (from the Greek *ikos*):** Meaning "pertaining to." In the English language, this suffix designates a formal science or discipline.
- **Combined Definition:** Hermeneutics is strictly defined as "the science or discipline of interpretation."

Qualities of Hermeneutics as an Objective Science

Hermeneutics operates as an **objective discipline**—meaning its rules exist independently of the individual interpreter. It is grounded in structural elements of language, including:

1. Knowledge of the specific language (phonetics, language symbols).
2. Knowledge of the construction of the specific language.
3. Knowledge of the mechanics of the specific language.

Refutation of Subjective Interpretation

The common critique, "That is just your interpretation of the Bible," wrongly posits that biblical interpretation is subjective to the individual reader. Grammatical mechanics were not invented by human readers; **God established the mechanics of language** by giving humanity the natural capacity to acquire and process language. Across the globe, despite surface-level visual differences, all human languages operate under universal structural mechanics (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, subjects, objects).

II. The Five Presuppositional Pillars of Biblical Hermeneutics

If hermeneutics is to be termed "biblical," its governing principles must derive directly from divine revelation. This framework rests upon five fundamental presuppositions:

Pillar	Presupposition	Primary Biblical Reference
Pillar #1	God Exists.	Genesis 1:1
Pillar #2	God has revealed Himself not only through creation, but also through spoken and written language (and the governing characteristics of language).	Genesis 1:26–28
Pillar #3	God created humankind to acquire language and understand the characteristics that govern language.	Genesis 1–3
Pillar #4	God revealed Himself through language in time among His creation.	Historical Scriptural Context
Pillar #5	God revealed Himself using the language found in the specific culture and geographical region He was addressing, using the standard characteristics that govern language.	Biblical/Historical Context
Conclusion: Based on these pillars, God Himself has prescribed the method by which His Word is to be understood.		

III. Biblical Evidence for Normative Interpretation

The pattern of divine speech demonstrates that God expects His communications to be taken in their plain, normal sense.

- **"God said"**: Appears **1,016 times** across the Hebrew Scriptures, occurring most frequently in the Book of Genesis (**86 times**).
- **"LORD God said/called"**: Appears **5 times** in the Hebrew Scriptures (**5 times** in Genesis).
- **"The LORD said"**: Appears **233 times** in Genesis (and 20 times in specific formulaic occurrences in the book of Genesis
- **Textual Density:** Divine speech accounts for approximately **35–40%** of the Book of Genesis.

- **Historical Recipient Response:** Across the **111 combined total occurrences** of the LORD speaking in Genesis, the listeners interpreted His statements in their plain, normative sense **100% of the time**.

Examples Across Old and New Testaments
Written Revelation on Physical Objects

God communicated His truth using tangible, readable mediums:

- **Stone:** The two tablets of testimony written directly by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18).
- **Papyrus:** The prophetic scrolls read by the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:30–35), the "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*) sacred writings (2 Timothy 3:16), and the Spirit-moved prophecies of Scripture (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Prophetic Interpretation: Joseph (Matthew 1:22–25)

Eschatological Interpretation: The Book of Revelation

Even "apocalyptic" literature containing heavy symbolism adheres to standard grammatical, historical, and cultural hermeneutics:

- **Normative Grammar:** Revelation adheres to standard rules of grammar (subject-verb-object, complete thoughts, modification by adjectives/adverbs) from the perspective of the author (John).
- **History & Geography:** It references specific historical realities and real geographic locations (e.g., the island of Patmos, the seven actual churches of Asia, the Euphrates [Rev 9:13], and Babylon [Rev 17:1–7]).
- **Culture & Scripture Allusions:** Revelation contains over **500 references and parallels** to the Hebrew Scriptures.
- **Self-Explaining Imagery:** Where cryptic or esoteric figures are used, the text provides its own explicit interpretation without reader speculation:
    - Two olive trees and two lampstands = The two witnesses (Rev 11:1–6).
    - Great red dragon = Satan (Rev 12:7–9).
    - Woman with 12 stars = Israel / the remnant (Rev 12:1, 6).

IV. READER "GAPS" IN HERMENEUTICAL APPLICATION

Because modern readers are separated from the text by millennia—living **2,000 years** removed from the Greek Scriptures and **4,000 years** removed from the Hebrew Scriptures—interpreters must actively bridge five historical/contextual "gaps" to align with the original writer's perspective:

1. **Linguistical Gap:** Differences in language structure, vocabulary, phonetics, and idioms between original biblical languages and modern languages.
2. **Chronological (Historical) Gap:** Temporal distance. Scripture marks time using specific markers, such as personal ages (e.g., Noah's age in Gen 7:6) or detailed calendar dates (e.g., "in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month..." Gen 8:13).
3. **Cultural Gap:** Societal norms, customs, and concepts unique to ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman worlds.
4. **Geographical Gap:** Specific ancient geographic regions, locations, and tribal distributions (e.g., Canaan, Cush, Uz, Sodom, Gomorrah, and Nineveh in the Genesis 10 Table of Nations).
5. **Supernatural Gap:** Unique historical acts of God that do not occur in present-day experience, including:
    - Ex nihilo creation by divine speech (Gen 1:1–25).
    - Direct formation, animation, and building of man and woman (Gen 2:5–22).
    - Visible interaction between God and early humanity.
    - Extreme human longevity (Gen 5:1–32).
    - The global flood (Gen 6–9).
    - Direct prophetic dreams and visions (Gen 12:1).

V. SEVEN ISSUES THAT WORK AGAINST CONSISTENT EXEGESIS

When interpreters fail to maintain a consistent Literal, Grammatical, Historical, and Cultural (CLGCH) approach, exegesis breaks down. Seven specific procedural failures lead to misinterpretation:

1. **Partial Method Recognition:** Recognizing one or more qualities of the method (e.g., historical context), but ignoring others (e.g., literal grammar).
2. **Inconsistent Application:** Recognizing all qualities of the method but applying them inconsistently across different passages or genres.

3. **External Systematic Filtering (Complete):** Recognizing all qualities of the method but filtering the final explanation through external human traditions (denominational creeds, theological traditions, external commentaries).
4. **External Systematic Filtering (Partial):** Recognizing only some qualities of the method while filtering interpretations through external creeds and traditions.
5. **Subjective Filtering:** Recognizing the method's qualities, but filtering explanations through personal or societal preferences and modern perspectives.
6. **Prioritizing Subjectivity Over Method:** Placing personal and societal preferences ahead of the literal, grammatical, historical, and cultural context during the exegetical process.
7. **Complete Method Rejection:** Failing to recognize the objective qualities of the method entirely, relying exclusively on personal or societal preferences.

VI. HUMAN CREEDS AND THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS VS. THE BEREAN MODEL

A major threat to sound hermeneutics occurs when an interpreter adopts a theological system prior to performing textual methodology (Kevin DeYoung, "Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete," Clearly Reformed (2022))

Exegetical Evaluation of System-First Hermeneutics:

- **System vs. Method:** A systematic theology is a **system**; it is not a hermeneutical method. Commentaries and denominational creeds are strictly **human documents**; they are not "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16).
- **Lack of Divine Attributes:** Human authors of creeds and systems lack God's attributes (omniscience, omnisapience, omnipresence).
- **Risk of Distortion:** Allowing external human systems to dictate exegesis forces the biblical text into a human framework, risking the total override of the original author's intent—especially in complex passages.

The Berean Model of Evaluation (Acts 17:10–12):

The biblical response to external authority structures is modeled by the believers in Berea. The Bereans did **not** evaluate the Apostle Paul's teaching using Greek philosophy, rabbinic traditions, human creeds, or even Paul's personal apostolic authority. Instead, they thoroughly evaluated his claims by examining the written Scriptures daily in their plain, grammatical, historical context to determine authorial intent.

VII. KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSIONS

- **Scripture Dictates Method:** Any valid hermeneutical framework must be derived directly from Scripture itself, based on how God constructed language and communicated with humanity.
- **Objective Clarity:** Consistent use of the Literal, Grammatical, Historical, and Cultural (CLGH) hermeneutic maximizes the likelihood of uncovering the original author's intent, leading to textual clarity.
- **Preservation of Authorial Intent:** Abandoning components of the literal-grammatical method—or filtering Scripture through external systems, human creeds, or personal preferences—introduces subjectivity and risks missing the inspired intent of the text.