

Hermeneutics overview (Psalm 119:9-11 as springboard) Parts 1 and 2

Week 2- will be more focused on fallacies- may spend 3 weeks

April 20, 2025 and April 27, 2025

### **Agassiz and the Fish**

*Do you know the story of “Agassiz and the Fish”? It’s a powerful lesson on the necessity of painstaking observation—staring at and studying the reality before our eyes—especially if you apply it to the idea of studying the word of God.*

*I first heard it in the late 90s at Bethlehem Baptist Church under Tom Steller, who first learned it in the mid-70s at Bethel College under John Piper, who first learned it in the last 60s at Fuller Theological Seminary under Dan Fuller, who first learned it in the mid 40s at Princeton Theological Seminary under Howard Kuist.*

*Agassiz was the founder of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology and a Harvard professor. The following account was written by one of his students, Samuel H. Scudder, under the title “Agassiz and the Fish, by a Student” (American Poems, 3rd ed. [Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1879], pp. 450-54). Thanks to [David Howard’s site](#) for the reproduction of the original story.*

### **Agassiz and the Fish**

*by a Student*

*It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.*

*“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.*

*“Now,” I replied.*

*This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.*

*“Take this fish,” he said, “and look at it; we call it a Haemulon; by and by I will ask what you have seen.”*

*With that he left me. . . . I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. . . .*

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*In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of a normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face—ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters view—just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour, I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.*

*On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me—I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.*

*“That is right,” said he, “a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.”*

*With these encouraging words he added—*

*“Well, what is it like?”*

*He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me; the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:*

*“You have not looked very carefully; why,” he continued, more earnestly, “you haven’t seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again; look again!” And he left me to my misery.*

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*I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,*

*"Do you see it yet?"*

*"No," I replied. "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."*

*"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."*

*This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.*

*The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.*

*"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"*

*His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically—as he always did—upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.*

*"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.*

*"That is good, that is good!" he repeated, "but that is not all; go on." And so for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. "Look, look, look," was his repeated injunction.*

*This was the best entomological lesson I ever had—a lesson whose influence was extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part. . . .*

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*The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old six-inch worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!*

*The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought into review; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz's training in the method of observing facts in their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.*

*"Facts are stupid things," he would say, "until brought into connection with some general law."*

*At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Disclaimer:**

I know I have a lot of information in this packet. Some of it you could keep as future reference material. Some of it you may be interested in, I know some you will not be interested in.

The main take aways are:

- Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>
- Inductive Bible Study is a method of Bible interpretation.
- With inductive Bible study, we: 1) observe 2) correlate 3) interpret 4) apply
- How does this help me become like Christ? This is about learning to do all that He says. So, this is about how to live out 2 Tim. 2:15-

2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Taylor, Gospel Coalition article, accessed on 04.14.2025. published on 11.16.2009. Link: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/agassiz-and-the-fish/>

<sup>2</sup> Got Questions. Accessed on 04.14.2025: Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible.

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<sup>15</sup> *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

[Don't be intimidated. I think when we interpret the Bible naturally, and put a passage in context, we avoid a lot of these. It is NOT my goal to be saying that we should limit Bible study to professionals. Professionals make mistakes too.]

- I. What is Hermeneutics?
- II. Observe
- III. Correlate
- IV. Interpret
- V. Apply

In a minute we will go through an example with a chart from Discipleship Training for now, let's go over basics.

- I. What is Hermeneutics? What is inductive Bible study?
  - a. In short, I always call hermeneutics the science of interpretation.
  - b. **These next two classes are going to be more focused on inductive Bible study as a method of proper interpretation of the bible.**
  - c. From a source titled: "Got Questions": *Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to be involved in hermeneutics: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who . . . correctly handles the word of truth." The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to help us to know how to properly interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.*<sup>3</sup>
  - d. "Got Questions" article on inductive Bible study: *Inductive Bible study is an approach to God's Word focusing on three basic steps that move from a focus on specific details to a more general, universal principle. Through these three steps, we apply inductive reasoning, which is defined as the attempt to use information about a specific situation to draw a conclusion. The steps are observation (what does it say?), interpretation (what does it mean?), and application (what does it mean for my life?). Inductive Bible study is a valuable tool in understanding and applying the principles of God's Word. Inductive Bible study can be done on*

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed on 04.14.2025: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-hermeneutics.html>

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- many different levels. The shorter version is good for a brief devotional. The more extensive study is wonderful for digging deeper into the mind and heart of God.*<sup>4</sup>
- e. Dr. Bauer and Traina: *We should begin by indicating what we mean by induction. The term inductive is used in both a broader and a narrower sense. In the broader sense, it involves a commitment to move from the evidence of the text and the realities that surround the text to possible conclusions (or inferences) regarding the meaning of the text. In this sense, inductive is practically synonymous with evidential over against deductive, which is presuppositional, involving a movement from presuppositions with which one approaches the text to a reading of the text intended to support these presuppositions.*<sup>5</sup>
  - f. Further: *This broader sense of inductive, with its stress on the movement from evidential premises to inferences, implies an emphasis on inductive, inferential reasoning: one examines the evidence in order to determine what may properly be inferred from the evidence for the meaning of passages. This broader sense of inductive also involves the attempt to help students understand and process the critical interaction between their preunderstandings, including theological creeds and doctrinal commitments, and the witness of the biblical text.*
  - g. ***In the narrower sense, inductive Bible study pertains to a movement in the history of hermeneutics*** that traces its beginnings to the work of William Rainey Harper, of Yale and the University of Chicago, and his associate Wilbert Webster White, a Yale-trained Hebraist and the founder of The Biblical Seminary in New York.<sup>1</sup> ***These scholars were concerned that the almost exclusive attention paid to higher-critical issues—such as trying to reconstruct sources that presumably lie behind the final form of the text, which focused on more or less speculative elements behind the biblical text rather than on the text itself—rendered the study of the Bible lifeless and devoid of clear significance for Christian faith and ministry. Consequently, they insisted that students should give priority to examining the scriptural text in its final form, although eventually they should consider evidence from historical and***

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<sup>4</sup> Accessed on 04.14.2025: <https://www.gotquestions.org/inductive-Bible-study.html>

<sup>5</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

<sup>1</sup> The authoritative resource for the life and work of Wilbert Webster White is still Charles R. Eberhardt, *The Bible in the Making of Ministers: The Scriptural Basis of Theological Education; The Lifework of Wilbert Webster White* (New York: Association Press, 1949).

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**even historical-critical examination of the text.** This procedure involved (1) direct study of the biblical text in the student's mother tongue,<sup>2</sup> with the hope that students who had opportunity and ability would supplement the study of the Bible in the vernacular with original-language analysis; and (2) special attention to the ways in which the immediate and broader-book context of passages and the literary structure of passages themselves inform students' understanding of their meaning.<sup>6</sup>

h.

II. The method:

a. 1. Observe

b. Drs. Bauer and Traina (Asbury Seminary) also reference Asassiz and the Fish.

c. **Further, Dr. Bauer:**

d. ***Impartiality: Seeing What Is Truly There***

e. *Being completely free of presuppositions or being entirely impartial is unattainable; therefore students should do all possible to be aware of their prejudices in reading the text, with a view toward exposing the prejudices to the evidence from the text.*<sup>7</sup>

i. Context, context, context

1. Where are we (as the readers) at in the book as a whole?

2. *What insights might the immediately preceding and following material offer for understanding our particular passage?*

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<sup>2</sup> Thus inductive Bible study was often called "English Bible," as reflected, for example, in the curriculum of The Biblical Seminary in New York. This nomenclature accurately represents the emphasis that was given to the study of the Bible in the vernacular but was problematic in that (1) it assumed an English-language environment and was insufficiently global in its reference; (2) it gave the impression that inductive Bible study was limited to vernacular translations, whereas from the beginning it was acknowledged that inductive Bible study would be ideally executed with texts in the original languages; and (3) it seemed to suggest that the use of the vernacular was the central concern when actually the principle of induction was the operative issue, and the role of the vernacular was understood to be a tactical concession to the limits of linguistic equipment on the part of most students as they pursued their inductive work in the Bible.

<sup>6</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 1–2.

<sup>7</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 77–78.

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3. Determine paragraph breaks, segments, sections... **See the sample below.**
- ii. S.P.E.C.S.
- iii. Sins; principles, or promises; examples, commands, stumbling blocks...
- iv. **What is the genre?** What type of literature are we reading/studying? **This is critical.**
- v. **The below list comes from Dr. Long's exegesis class at Asbury Theological; Seminary in 2009. It is part of a document which I think he has since published.**

1. Prophetic saying (salvation or woe);  
2. Apocalyptic saying;  
3. Proverb (wisdom);  
4. Legal saying:  
a. casuistic [applying general moral principles to specific cases] legal maxim;  
b. apodictic [clearly established, beyond dispute] legal maxim.  
5. Rules of church discipline;  
6. Parable (in general):  
a. illustrative speech;  
b. hyperbole;  
c. paradox;  
d. metaphor;  
e. comparison proper;  
f. simile;  
g. parable in particular;  
h. exemplary story;  
i. figurative speech;  
j. allegory.  
7. Words of  
a. self-presentation;

b. self-recommendation.  
8. Apophthegm/chreia [brief anecdotal saying or maxim]:  
a. biographical;  
b. discussions.  
9. Miracle story:  
a. paradigmatic miracle story;  
b. novelistic miracle story.  
10. Legend:  
a. biographical;  
b. cultic.  
11. Martyr story;  
12. Epiphany;  
13. Kerygmatic formula (X died/raised);  
14. Confession;  
15. Acclamation (amen, Abba, etc.);  
16. Doxology;  
17. Hymn;  
18. Paraenesis (exhortation);  
19. Catalogue of virtues;  
20. Catalogue of vices;  
21. Haustafel; household codes  
22. Standards for officials;

23. Vision:  
a. dream;  
b. vision proper.  
24. Audition;  
25. Vocation story;  
26. Autobiographical statement;  
a. res gestae (accomplishments);  
b. catalogue of peristaseis (circumstances faced by writer);  
c. fool's speech.  
27. Greetings;  
28. Prayer:  
a. intercession;  
b. confession of sins;  
c. berakah (blessing);  
d. hodayah (thanksgiving);  
e. benediction;  
f. curse.  
29. Genealogy;  
30. Is there a possibility of the mixture of forms?

- vi. Literary structures: **13 Major Structural Relationships (from David Bauer, slightly adapted) I am taking this from Dr. Fred Long's document referred to earlier:**
- vii. 1. Introduction—the giving of necessary background information which prepares the reader for the material which follows; e.g. Luke 1:1-4;
- viii. 2. Interrogation or Problem/Solution—The movement from a problem to its solution or a question and its answer.
- ix. 3. Comparison—the process of showing how two or more items/ideas/people are alike;
- x. 4. Contrast—the process of showing how two or more items/ideas/people are different;

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- xi. 5. *Climax*—the movement from lower to higher intensity within a passage or book with focus on the highest or greatest point being realized; e.g. the gospels and the crucifixion.
- xii. 6. *Pivot or Cruciality*—a movement of events or ideas to an unexpected crucial point on which subject matter turns in another direction; e.g. King David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11).
- xiii. 7. *Particularization*— the movement from general idea(s) to particular ideas. Usually one may detect a general statement which is then particularized.
- xiv. 8. *Generalization*— the movement from particular ideas to a general statement or broad topic.
- xv. 9. *Recurrence*—the repetition of the same terms, phrases, clauses, or themes; repetition of word family; e.g. "holy" in Leviticus.
- xvi. 10. *Summarization*—the conclusion to some discussion by way of reiterating specific elements or themes; e.g. Matt 28:18-20 (Make disciples of all nations, baptizing, commanding, etc.)
- xvii. 11. *Causation*—the move from cause to effect, from action to the result produced; e.g. Rom 12:1;
- xviii. 12. *Substantiation*—the move from effect to cause, from the result produced to the source/action; the basis or rationale of an
- xix. 13. *Instrumentality* - a reference to the means by which an end argument; E.g. Rom 1:16 or goal is achieved; E.g. Matt 3:13
- xx. *Supporting Structural Relationships: These patterns help convey Major Structural Relationships.***
- xxi. *Inclusion*—beginning and ending a unit with the same words or ideas; this "brackets" the section and may help to convey key topics of the passage or an entire book (see, e.g. Mark's Gospel and heavens "torn apart"—1:10; 15:38).
- xxii. *Chiasm*—discussing topics A...B...C and then continuing to discuss the same topics but by inverting their order C...B...A; so you have ABC-CBA. e.g. Mark 2:27 "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath;"
- xxiii. *Alternation or Interchange*—going "back and forth" between material: ABABABAB; this is a good way to compare or contrast two ideas. See 1 Cor 14:1-5.
- xxiv. *Intercalation*—the insertion of seemingly unrelated material (B) in the midst of a larger narrative or argument (A); thus, A-BA;
- xxv. e.g. the account of John the Baptist's beheading in the midst of the sending out and return of the twelve.

2. Correlate: this you may think of as cross-reference.

- f. Again from **The below list comes from Dr. Long's** exegesis class at Asbury Theological; Seminary in 2009. It is part of a document which I think he has since published.
- g. *Quotations and Allusions: Often OT quotations are easy to locate. Most Bibles will put these OT verses in quotes and footnote them providing the OT reference. However, the allusions are harder to track down.*

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- h. *Parallel Accounts: Especially if you are working with narrative material (e.g. Gospels or 1 & 2 Kings/Chronicles), there is always a possibility that a parallel account exists. Again, a good Bible will help you find these parallels. Such parallels may provide more information about a saying or event and thus allow for clarity of understanding and application today (e.g. consider Jesus' teaching on forgiveness: Luke 17:3-4 illuminates Matt 18:21-22 and the requirement of "repentance" for "forgiveness.")*
- i. *Thematically Related Passages: A Nave's Topical Bible or other reference source (your own memory ideally!) will help you to find these related passages. In the context of a sermon or teaching, the correlation of such passages will help establish and further illustrate a point. This is particularly helpful if a narrative passage can illustrate a theological point from, e.g., Deuteronomy, Proverbs, or Paul.*

3. Interpret: What does it mean? NOT WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU. The Bible speaks objectively.

4. Apply

III. Example below:

- Observe
- Correlate
- Interpret
- Apply

**Below comes from Discipleship Training by Dr. Charles Lake**

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of Truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

What is Bible study?---- It is prayerfully analyzing a passage of Scripture, answering three questions.

1. What does it say? (**Observation**)
2. What does it mean? (**Interpretation**)
3. How can I apply it to my life? (**Application**)

Following is one way to study the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. You can use this method in order to study another chapter of the New or Old Testament on your own.

Method	Example
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<p>1. Read all the book you chose to sense the author's main purpose</p>	<p>Gospel of Mark</p>
<p>2. Reread the chapter to be studied and divide it into paragraphs. A paragraph consists of a complete thought or, in a narrative section, a complete incident.</p>	<p>Chapter 1—paragraphs (verses): 1-8, 9-11, 12-13, 14-20, 21-22, 23-27, 28-31, 32-34, 35-39, 40-45</p>
<p>3. Analyze each verse by paragraph. Is it a command, a promise, or an instruction? Check any references made to other passages. Ask yourself significant questions regarding the passage.</p>	<p>Paragraph 2 (vs 9-11)          Geography: Nazareth of Galilee? Jordan River? --- Find on a Bible map. "... heaven being torn open..." (vs. 10) (See also Acts 1:10, 7:56; James 5:18) "... the Spirit... like a dove..." (vs. 10) What else is the Spirit compared with? (See John 3:8, etc.) "And a voice came from heaven..." vs. 11) What followed the glory of His baptism? What can I learn from this?</p>
<p>4. Look up any word you don't understand in a Bible dictionary. <b>(compare translations)</b></p>	<p><i>Dove</i>—"a poor man's sacrifice, the emblem of peace." "... with you I am well pleased." (NIV) "... in whom I am well pleased." (KJV) "... you are my delight." (Living Bible)</p>
<p>5. Where else in the Bible is this subject discussed? Investigate cross references.</p>	<p>Compare accounts of Christ's baptism in the other Gospels. Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34. John revealing the Holy Spirits descent in the form of</p>

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	a dove was the confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah (Christ or anointed one).
6. Put the paragraph "back together." Write a brief summary or outline of the main points. Give the paragraph a title.	Paragraph 2 (vs. 9-11): <i>Jesus' Baptism</i> : Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John. Messiahship was confirmed by sight and sound; the sight of the Holy Spirit as a dove and the sound of God's voice of approval.
7. Write an application for your life. Am I seeking God's will in this area? Move on to the next paragraph and repeat.	Lord, let your Holy Spirit rest upon my life, and may I desire your Divine approval.

Taken from *Discipleship Training* level 1 week 6 by Dr. Charles Lake.

- Before we get to interpretive fallacies, I want to share the following:

(a). *Allegory*. A study of the commentaries or use of Scripture among the early Church Fathers reveals a fantastic use of the imagination in finding New Testament truth or spiritual truth or theological truth in the Old Testament by the use of allegorical interpretation. This is really an assertion of the plural meaning of Scripture. Believing in the unity of the sense of Scripture eliminates all allegorizing of Scripture, ancient or modern.<sup>8</sup>

(b). *Cults*. *Metaphysical cults, theosophical cults, divine science cults, pantheistic cults* all base their interpretation of Holy Scripture on the **theory that the meaning of Scripture is plural. [this happens in our groups today]** The first meaning is the ordinary historical or grammatical one; and the second meaning is the one the cultist brings to Scripture from the particular metaphysical system or religious system he is pushing. Once again the emphasis on the unity of the sense of Scripture puts an end to the cultic abuse of Scripture.

(c). *Protestant Pietism*. **[see example below]** Many devout Christians believe that God speaks to them each day out of Scriptures and so gives them direction and guidance for the decisions of that day. Hence the Scripture is read in anticipation of specific directions emerging

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Ramm, [Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics](#), Third Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 111.

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*out of their reading of the Scripture that pertain directly to their lives and their decisions. Scripture is not only the fountain head of all theological truth and God's Word through the ages, but its phrases or sentences or verses are intended to be specific ways in which God can speak to each Christian each day he reads his Scripture in the light of the decisions and situations that Christian is confronted with that particular day.*

***For example, a very pious Protestant might be in a place of indecision whether he should take a certain trip or not. In his devotions he reads how the Church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas away on a missionary trip. So this Christian feels that God is speaking to him in that passage and it is now God's will that he should take the proposed trip.***

*This is a very direct assertion of plurality in the meaning of Scripture, (i) The first sense is what the record means of Paul and Barnabas setting out on a missionary trip, (ii) The second meaning is that God is telling this pious Christian of the twentieth century to take a trip.*

*But the pious Christian who does this has no idea that he is asserting a plural meaning of all Scripture. He does not know that much Catholic dogma is supported by allegory which is based on a plural meaning of Scripture; nor does he know that many cults base their theology in Scripture by the use of plural meanings in Scriptural texts. In short the Protestant who uses his Holy Scripture this way is unwittingly in some very bad theological company.<sup>9</sup>*

Interpretive Fallacies: From Dr. Bauer and Traina "Inductive Bible Study"

[Don't be intimidated. I think when we interpret the Bible naturally, and put a passage in context, we avoid a lot of these. It is NOT my goal to be saying that we should limit Bible study to professionals. Professionals make mistakes too.]

They write:

*In order to elucidate what is involved in accurate exegesis, we will enumerate and discuss briefly some of the fallacious interpretive approaches that have surfaced in the history of interpretation. Students will note that many of these erroneous practices contain some truth or are motivated by at least a partially legitimate consideration. The fact that some of these practices involve certain elements of truth serves as a reminder that fallacious exegesis is often the result of an overemphasis on a valid but one-sided dimension of interpretation.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Ramm, [Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics](#), Third Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 111–112.

<sup>10</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 249.

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This is ONLY a sampling of some of the fallacies they write about. I had trouble limiting them and this is a copy and paste.

#### **FALLACY OF LEXICAL REDUCTIONISM<sup>11</sup>**

*Sometimes students limit their understanding of interpretation to the lexical definition of key terms in a passage. This limitation may involve students believing that if they simply identify the basic definition of each term in a passage, they will have adequately interpreted the passage-as-a-whole. Or it may also involve students noting two or three alternative definitions of a term from a lexicon and proceeding to frame all of their subsequent interpretive work around support for one or another of these basic definitions. Such students need to recognize that statements mean more than the sum of the definitions of terms; statements communicate meaning through the dynamic relation of terms to one another in the clause or sentence (syntax) and through their function within their literary and historical/cultural contexts. The exegetical category of preliminary definition, which we previously described, is useful as a beginning point in interpretation, but one must not view it as the totality of interpretation or even as the frame into which all other evidence and inferences must fit.<sup>12</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF REVERSE ETYMOLOGY**

*We have seen that arguing for the meaning of a biblical term ultimately on the basis of the etymology, or original formation, of that Greek or Hebrew term is problematic. But a manifestly more fallacious choice is to interpret a term in a biblical passage on the basis of the etymology of the English word that certain translations use to render the original Greek or Hebrew term. Such would be the case, for example, if one were to interpret the word gospel in New Testament passages as “good tale” or “good story,” according to the morphological development of the English word (from Old English—gōd [good] + spell [tale]). Another example is interpreting the biblical term instruction according to the etymology of that word, which derives from the Middle English and is formed from the Latin instruere, “to build.”<sup>13</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF SEMANTIC ANACHRONISM**

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<sup>11</sup> relating to the words or vocabulary of a language.

<sup>12</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 251.

<sup>13</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 253.

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*The fallacy of semantic anachronism involves interpreting Hebrew and especially Greek words in the Bible on the basis of contemporary English words that stem from the Greek or Hebrew term. An example one frequently encounters is that of interpreting the Greek word dynamis (might/power) according to the English word “dynamite,” suggesting that dynamis carries with it the idea of potentially dangerous, explosive energy. Another example is the word translated “exile” in 1 Peter 1:17, which is paroikia, from which comes our English word “parish.” But one would be committing the fallacy of semantic anachronism to interpret the Petrine passage in terms of the meaning of the English word “parish.” While tracing the semantic development from a Hebrew or Greek word to the English may serve the heuristic [discovery/problem solving] function of causing one to recognize certain dimensions of the significance of the original term as employed in its biblical context, one should not allow such considerations to determine the sense of the biblical term. Language is dynamic; therefore one has every reason to expect significant differences between modern English words and their Hebrew or Greek derivations.<sup>5,14</sup>*

#### FALLACY OF THEOLOGICAL ANACHRONISM

*Closely related to semantic anachronism is the fallacy of theological anachronism, which involves assuming that a theological term in a biblical passage corresponds completely to the understanding of that term in the theological tradition of the church or the theological tradition of one’s own faith community. When readers of biblical passages encounter such words as sanctification, predestination, election, or atonement, they naturally construe these words according to their own theological preunderstanding, and they often hold these preunderstandings deeply and cherish them fervently. This situation, therefore, requires probing self-reflection to identify exactly what one thinks these terms mean or what one wants these terms to mean, and it requires a determination to fairly consider alternative ways of construing these terms or concepts in the biblical text. We are not saying that the theological tradition of the church or of individual faith communities cannot inform and illumine the meaning of these terms in the Bible; certainly they can and should. But they can do so only insofar as one’s understanding of these terms is confirmed by the biblical data as processed through proper exegetical practices.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the historical relationship between English and Greek, the English language contains many more cognates with Greek than it does with Hebrew.

<sup>14</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 253.

<sup>15</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 253–254.

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#### **FALLACY OF PARTIAL EVIDENCE**

Limitations of time or implicit commitment to a preunderstanding can cause the student to deal with only a part of the relevant evidence, leading to a skewed interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

#### **FALLACY OF VIOLATION OF GENRE**

As we mentioned in “Literary Forms” in chapter 14, literary form, or genre, involves an implicit agreement between author and readers that a given text should be read according to the expectations of its genre and over against other ways of reading and construing the passage.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Example:**

The Bible itself contains accounts of persons who misunderstood communication because of a violation of genre. When Nathan told David the parable of the poor man and the ewe lamb, David mistook Nathan’s parable for prose narrative (and more specifically, a judicial case), thereby failing to understand the prophetic communication until Nathan expressly said, “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:1–7). Moreover, many throughout the history of the church into the present day have been inclined to interpret passages that are prose narrative as if they were in the form of allegory.<sup>18</sup>

#### **FALLACY OF FRAGMENTATION [JER. 29:11]**

*Fragmentary interpretation treats the Scriptures as if they are merely a collection of isolated verses, each of which is to be understood apart from its immediate and broad context. Such a practice is partly due to the rather arbitrary division of the Bible into chapters and verses. In addition, some students have a view of biblical inspiration that leads to a practically oracular understanding of the nature of the biblical text. According to this view, every individual statement from the Bible contains in itself absolute divine truth, and God speaks directly in each clause or sentence in isolation from the others. All of this fragmentation can lead to the neglect of the contextual setting of biblical statements.*

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<sup>16</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 254.

<sup>17</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 254.

<sup>18</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 254.

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*Ministers are among the worst offenders in this connection. They frequently disregard the setting of the passage they take as a text. One of us recalls listening to a sermon in which he was surprised to hear the preacher take only half of one verse as his sermon text; he wondered why the preacher did not read at least the entire verse. But soon he realized that the preacher could not have preached the sermon he delivered if he had read the remainder of the verse. And if Christian ministers are guilty of such a practice, what can one expect of their parishioners who depend upon them for guidance in biblical interpretation?*<sup>19</sup>

### PSYCHOLOGICAL FALLACY

*The psychological fallacy occurs when one interprets a passage on the basis of emotional or psychological considerations when such data or indications are lacking within the passage or its context. The psychological fallacy may relate to claims made regarding the psychological/emotional state of the author or about the inner state of characters described within passages.*

*An example is Bishop John Shelby Spong's suggestion that Paul's statements against homosexual behavior in the first chapter of Romans should be interpreted as a "homophobia" that masked Paul's own latent homosexual urges. Here the bishop commits the psychological fallacy involving the author, since (at least according to our study) there is no indication in the passage that the reader is invited to engage in a psychological analysis of Paul in order to ascertain the message of the passage. The argument of the passage does not depend upon and is not affected by Paul's alleged psychological condition.<sup>7</sup> This reading involves the imposition onto the text of complex modern psychological theory, fueled by contemporary social and political interests. When Oesterley and Robinson suggest that the account of Hosea's marriage to the harlot Gomer in the early chapters of his book indicates that "Hosea suffered from sex-obsession, which drove him into the thing of which he had the greatest horror,"<sup>8</sup> these scholars commit the psychological fallacy. And when a prominent preacher insists that David's sins of adultery with*

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<sup>19</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 255.

<sup>7</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 135–42; idem, *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 151. One may use such considerations in the evaluation of the passage (see chap. 17). But in our judgment, the evidence for Spong's assessment is sorely lacking.

<sup>8</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 351–52.

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*Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 11) were due to David's "midlife crisis," without citing any evidence that such is the perspective of the text, this preacher commits the psychological fallacy involving a character within the narrative.<sup>9,20</sup>*

**The fallacy below is very important-**

#### **FALLACY OF REFERENTIAL ANACHRONISM**

*The fallacy of referential anachronism involves the assumption that, as a general principle, biblical statements referred to events in the future; therefore their meaning is ultimately locked until it is made clear to those who actually experience the events. Those who practice this approach expound the Old Testament as if it at every point foreshadows the New Testament, and they direct every interpretive inference to fulfillment in Christ and the New Testament. They interpret even the minutest details in historical narratives as types that are fulfilled in the New Testament. Such a view begins with the legitimate principle that the Old Testament is a preparation for the revelation of the New Testament. However, every detail of the Old Testament is not necessarily a type for New Testament events or persons, and even the details that are types for New Testament fulfillment have a basic meaning and significance in the historical context of those to whom the passages were originally directed. To understand the Old Testament this way is to violate two basic principles of exegesis: first, the need to understand passages in terms of their historical setting; and second, the need to expound passages in terms of the (implied) author's intention. One should be careful, therefore, not to draw inferences that necessarily assume typological significance for accidental resemblances between occurrences in the Old and New Testaments.*

*But this fallacy pertains not only to the insistence that every Old Testament passage be interpreted in terms of its realization in the New Testament; it also pertains to the tendency on the part of some readers to assume that the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, is replete with predictions of future events. They draw inferences that are intended to show how*

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<sup>9</sup> We do not deny the legitimacy of exploring the psychological conditions of historical personages as a historical enterprise, but these proposals are not a primary means of interpreting a passage that lacks psychological or emotional references or any indication that the reader is to employ such considerations in the construal of the passage. Moreover, the reconstruction of the psychology or emotions of flesh-and-blood biblical authors and characters is a precarious operation because in almost all cases the only witness we have to them is the biblical text itself. If the biblical text lacks psychological or emotional references, the process of psychological reconstruction tends to be speculative.

<sup>20</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 255–256.

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*passages prognosticate major events that have subsequently occurred. This fallacy usually stems from the failure to differentiate between prophecy and pure prediction. In prophecy the aspect of foretelling is inevitably connected with the forthtelling; in fact, the primary purpose of foretelling is to support the prophet's message. Therefore the prophet's foretelling is relevant to the concrete historical situation in which and for which he spoke. Pure prediction, in contrast, may be totally unrelated to the historical setting in which it is made. The Scriptures, we believe, contain prophecies but not pure predictions, and when one overlooks this fact, one disregards the importance of the historical element in the Scriptures and therefore misinterprets them.<sup>21</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF COMPOSITION [WHEN WE APPLY PSALM 103:3 TO TODAY THIS IS AN EXAMPLE]**

*This fallacy involves the assumption that what is true of the part is necessarily true of the whole.<sup>12</sup> If one were to infer that because Luke presents some Samaritans as more generous (10:29–37) or grateful (17:11–19) than some Jews, he wants his audience to conclude that all Samaritans are morally superior to Jews, then one would be going well beyond the evidence and committing the fallacy of composition. The same would be the case if one were to infer from the story of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate in Acts 3:1–10 that Luke thereby teaches that all who are in need of physical healing will find it if they likewise place their faith in the name of Jesus. The fallacy of composition often surfaces in inferences that use the first-person plural: “This passage teaches that we can or that we should,” suggesting that what is said to or about particular persons in particular situations necessarily pertains to everyone everywhere, or at least to all believers.<sup>13,22</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF DIVISION**

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<sup>21</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 258–259.

<sup>12</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 93–94; Rudinow and Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 281.

<sup>13</sup> The issue as to whether the teaching of a passage legitimately applies to all persons, or at least to other persons in other places and other times, is a matter of evaluation and application, which we discuss in part 4.

<sup>22</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 259–260.

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*The fallacy of division is the opposite of the fallacy of composition. This fallacy involves the assumption that what is true of the whole is necessarily true of the part.<sup>14</sup> For example, when the book of Isaiah declares that the nation of Israel was sinfully rebellious in the time of Isaiah, one should not infer that every individual Hebrew was thus guilty. What was true of the nation as a whole was not necessarily true of every person within the nation. Such may be the case but is not necessarily so.<sup>23</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF HASTY GENERALIZATION**

*In the fallacy of hasty generalization, “an exceptional case is used as the basis for a general conclusion that is unwarranted.”<sup>15</sup> One would commit this fallacy if one were to argue that because the Lord turned away from his intended judgment upon Israel on the basis of the earnest prayer of the prophet Amos (7:1–6), this passage teaches that God always turns away from his judgmental intentions when God’s righteous minister implores him. The book of Amos may present the events of this passage as exceptional. Similarly, one would commit this fallacy if one were to argue from the fact that the book of Joel counts the locust plague as God’s judgment upon the sin of Judah to the inference that the book of Joel teaches that natural disasters are always God’s judgment upon the sins of nations. Again, the book of Joel may make no such claim but instead addresses only the judgmental divine purpose of this particular natural disaster.<sup>24</sup>*

#### **FALLACY OF BIFURCATION**

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<sup>14</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 94; Rudinow and Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 281.

<sup>23</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 260.

<sup>15</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 108; cf. Irving Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 64.

<sup>24</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 260.

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*The fallacy of bifurcation<sup>16</sup> is sometimes labeled “the false Either-Or”<sup>17</sup> because it insists upon only two possible alternatives (either this or that) when, in fact, a third alternative is possible. Those who commit this fallacy take contraries to be contradictions. In contradictory statements, both propositions cannot be true and both cannot be false (a genuine either-or: either this is true or that is true); yet in contrary statements, both propositions cannot be true but both may be false. Thus a third alternative exists: neither is true.*

*One would commit the fallacy of bifurcation if one were to infer that because Gamaliel was not against the apostles in that he argued for their release (Acts 5:33–39), he must therefore have been for them, that is, he must have been a supporter of their cause. Here the following two propositions cannot be true at the same time: Gamaliel was for the apostles and Gamaliel was against the apostles. But they could both be false. Hence, a third possibility exists: according to the book of Acts, Gamaliel was neither against the apostles nor a supporter of the apostles.*

*To take a further example, one would fall into this fallacy if one were to infer that because the Old Testament does not condemn polygamy, it must advocate it. The Old Testament may neither condemn nor advocate polygamy but may simply concede the practice without making a clear judgment one way or the other.<sup>25</sup>*

#### FALLACY OF BEGGING THE QUESTION

*In popular parlance, “begging the question” has come to refer to a situation that prompts, or poses, a question, **but in logic “the fallacy of begging the question is committed when, instead of offering proof for its conclusion, an argument simply reasserts the conclusion in another form.** Such arguments invite us to assume that something has been confirmed when in fact it has only been affirmed or reaffirmed.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, in begging the question one states a conclusion in the form of a premise, and the so-called inference simply repeats the conclusion with which one began. Note the following example:*

**PREMISE**

In Mark 7:27 Jesus takes a bigoted attitude toward Gentiles.

**INFERENCE**

Therefore Mark presents Jesus here as a bigot.

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<sup>16</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 111–13.

<sup>17</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 90–92. Rudinow and Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 312–13, refer to this error as the “fallacy of false dilemma.”

<sup>25</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 260–261.

<sup>18</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 114. See also Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 65–66.

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**Here we see that the premise actually presents the interpretive conclusion (without providing evidence)**, and the inference simply repeats the conclusion already stated. It has yet to be argued, from evidence, that this passage expresses a bigoted position toward Gentiles. It begs the question of the meaning and character of Jesus's statement to the Syrophenician woman.

Note a further example:

PREMISE

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus gives his disciples the impossible command to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect.

INFERENCE

Therefore, this command is an unrealizable ideal toward which disciples should strive but never expect to actualize.

Here again, the premise contains the conclusion, which is simply repeated in slightly different terms. It begs the question of the meaning of *perfect*. The premise itself assumes its impossibility.<sup>26</sup>

#### FALLACY OF ASSUMED PREMISE

*Drawing inferences that go beyond the evidence cited by lacking sufficient evidentiary foundation is most often the result of unstated or assumed premises. It is critically important for students to make explicit all premises leading to inferences. Only in this way can students assess premises for their validity. Note the implicit, unstated premises in the following examples:*

PREMISE

In 1 John 4:8 John declares that God is love.

INFERENCE

Therefore this passage teaches that God will never condemn anyone.

This inference assumes an unstated premise, that God's love is of such a nature that it necessarily excludes all condemnation.

PREMISE

In Mark 15:34 Jesus indicates that at the cross God has forsaken him.

INFERENCE

At the point of Jesus's death, God laid all the guilt and wrath of the world's sin upon Jesus.

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<sup>26</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 261–262.

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This inference assumes several unstated premises: (1) that God actually did forsake Christ at the cross; (2) that God's forsaking involved a personal repudiation of Jesus over against, say, a functional decision not to intervene so as to deliver him from death on the cross; (3) that if a personal repudiation was involved, such repudiation was an expression of God's revulsion and horror at the sins of the world. These unstated premises may or may not be valid; but the interpretive process requires that they be expressed and tested by evidence.<sup>27</sup>

### FALLACY OF FALSE CAUSE

The fallacy of false cause<sup>19</sup> occurs if one asserts or assumes causality when one has not demonstrated such causality from the evidence or premises cited. The assumed causality may be either extratextual or intratextual.

The following is an example of *extratextual* assumed causality: Because Herod unfairly executed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29), therefore Herod's guilty conscience caused Herod to believe that Jesus was John raised from the dead (Mark 6:16). The text says nothing, at least explicitly, about Herod's guilty conscience, which is an extratextual psychological assessment, and the evidence cited does not bear the inference of causality. This causal connection may be true, but the inference would be sound only if one cited specific evidence for this causality.

*Intratextual* assumed causality occurs when two elements are presented in the text and the student simply assumes that a causal relationship exists. Note this example:

PREMISE 1	Samuel was opposed to the emergence of the Israelite monarchy (1 Sam. 8:6).
PREMISE 2	Samuel pronounced judgment against the first Israelite king, Saul (1 Sam. 13:8–15; 15:10–33).
INFERENCE	Samuel pronounced judgment against Saul because of his personal distaste for the monarchy and his desire to sabotage it.

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<sup>27</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 262.

<sup>19</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 132–37; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 133–34; Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 64–65; Rudinow and Barry, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 321–22.

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Here both premises are found in the text, but the text makes no causal connection between them (at least the premises do not present evidence of a causal connection). This inference lacks the evidence required for the causal connection.<sup>20,28</sup>

#### **FALLACY OF CONSENSUS OPINIO**

*Closely related to the fallacy of appeal to authority is the fallacy of appealing to the general scholarly consensus. In fact, the fallacy of consensus opinio is a specific form of the appeal to authority; this fallacy involves appeal to a certain type of authority, the authority of the group, in this case the scholarly group. It is true that one should take scholarly consensus seriously because none of us is able to explore exhaustively all the intricacies of every exegetical issue in even individual passages, as the community of scholars has done. Therefore, when students argue for an interpretation that contradicts the consensus opinio, they should realize that they bear the burden of showing, by citing specific evidence, exactly how the scholarly consensus is wrong and what is the basis for such an assessment. But there is nothing infallible about scholarly consensus; and the history of interpretation is replete with examples of “assured results” of scholarship that have been swept away by new evidence or more sound arguments.<sup>27,29</sup>*

#### **AD HOMINEM FALLACY**

*Ad hominem fallacy<sup>24</sup> (ad hominen means “to or toward a person”) refers to an argument made against a position, based not on the merits of the position itself but on the background or character of the person who advocates the position. In interpretation, this fallacy pertains especially to inferences made from the evidence of the interpretation of others. It involves dismissing or disparaging an interpretation because it has been offered by someone who is, from*

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<sup>20</sup> More specifically, this argument involves post hoc, ergo propter hoc (after this, therefore because of this): the assumption that an event that occurs *after* another event occurred *because of* that previous event.

<sup>28</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 262–263.

<sup>27</sup> Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 37–38.

<sup>29</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 265.

<sup>24</sup> Engel, *With Good Reason*, 166–68; Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 54–57.

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*the perspective of the student, suspect. The student may infer that the interpretation and exegetical arguments put forward by a given scholar are not to be taken seriously because the scholar is, say, a Catholic, or a liberal, or a fundamentalist. Students need to judge exegetical arguments and conclusions on their own merits; in the final analysis, neither the background nor the commitments of the person who presents arguments have anything to do with the validity or lack of validity of the arguments themselves.<sup>30</sup>*

**There are others such as:**

**Fallacy of Appeal to Authority**

**The dogmatic fallacy**

**Fallacy of illegitimate questions**

**Fallacy of orientation: mistake perspectives toward the process of interpretation**

**There is also a book by D.A. Carson called “Exegetical Fallacies.” Those are more specific to dealing with the Greek text.**

**There are fallacies of correlation:**

- Overgeneralization
- Invalid separation
- A few others.

#### **RATIONALISTIC FALLACY**

*The rationalist tries to expound the Scriptures in such a way as to make them acceptable to human reason. For example, the many “lives of Jesus” written by classic nineteenth-century liberals, such as David Friedrich Strauss, are replete with naturalistic explanations of Jesus’s miracles offered to appease the rationalistic sensibilities of Victorian intellectuals.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 264.

<sup>29</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson from the 4th German ed. (1840), Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); cf. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: The First Complete Edition*, ed. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

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*Such an emphasis has various causes. For example, the inability to believe certain biblical facts such as miracles often results in rationalistic interpretation. Rationalism reminds students that exegesis must involve the use of reason and that they should engage in a sincere attempt to comprehend the message of the Bible and to relate that message to the realities of the world, employing their best and most rigorous thinking in the process. But the rationalist needs to recognize the possibility that reason is finite and that reason itself may point to the limits of reason. Moreover, in order properly to interpret the message of the Bible, one needs to be open to the transcendent perspective of the text even if in the end one does not accept its perspective on the reality of the transcendent.*

*A specific manifestation of the rationalistic fallacy is the mythological approach to interpretation. Frequently, in order to remove what cannot be comprehended or accepted by reason, one will declare that certain events are myths, that is, fictional representations of reality, rather than actual historical occurrences. They are like the shell of a walnut and thus may be discarded as soon as the nut's meat—that is, the spiritual truth it conveys—is discovered.*<sup>30</sup>

*To a great extent, such an approach serves to negate the historical aspect of the Scriptures: it denies that an indispensable relation exists between history and the conveyance of spiritual truth. This opinion will often result in the position that the Gospels contain the Christ myth.<sup>31</sup> According to this view, the resurrection was not a real historical event. It was a myth whose purpose is to teach the supreme spiritual truth that though Jesus was slain, his spirit still lives.<sup>32</sup> When one learns this important spiritual lesson and participates in it existentially, one may then dismiss the story that was used to express it.*<sup>31</sup>

## REDUCTIONISTIC FALLACY

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<sup>30</sup> A helpful clarification and description of myth, especially as it pertains to the OT, can be found in John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1977); Burton L. Mack, *The Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); cf. Michael Green, ed., *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans W. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961); Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 189–216.

<sup>31</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 266–267.

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*The fallacy of the reductionistic approach to the Bible takes a certain aspect of the Bible's reality to be the totality of the Bible's character. One form of the reductionistic fallacy is the panhistorical fallacy. According to this view, the Bible should be studied almost exclusively as the history of certain peoples.<sup>33</sup> Such an approach fails to realize that the Scriptures contain more than history; they present history that is embedded in literary narrative and mediated through text, presented from the perspective of divine, transcendent purpose. The events that the Bible describes can be approached only through the literary/narrative framework that the biblical text provides. The historical study of the Bible is thus necessarily bound up with literary study and with theological study.<sup>34</sup> The historical narrative reveals the God of history. Therefore one cannot limit the process of exegesis to an examination of empirically verifiable historical events recorded there or to the bare historical facts of the documents' production.<sup>35</sup> The panhistorical view, however, reminds students of the important truth that the biblical message is first of all a witness to the God who acts in history, and that the biblical narrative almost always claims to present actual events on the plane of history.*

*Another form of the reductionistic fallacy is the panliterary fallacy. According to this view, the Bible can be reduced to literature. At one time in some circles, the study the Bible as great*

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<sup>33</sup> E.g., Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 2 vols., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972); Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, ed. Diana Edelman (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2000); Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Of course, many historical studies are not *panhistorical*: instead, they attend seriously to narrative and/or theological issues, as does Bright, *History of Israel*; Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Ben Witherington III, *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: SCM, 1998); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Martin Hengel, *The Cross of the Son of God* (London: SCM, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> To do so would be to commit the *genetic fallacy*: the false notion that the meaning of a reality is reducible to its beginnings. See Engel, *With Good Reason*, 170–73.

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*literature was quite popular.*<sup>36</sup> Many of those who have examined the Scriptures from this standpoint have failed to take into account the fact that purpose is essential to greatness in literature: in some extreme cases, they searched the Bible merely for its euphonious phrases and picturesque images as if it were a purposeless collection of appealing expressions and no more. More recently, some, but by no means all, practitioners of certain forms of literary criticism have tended to reduce the Bible to its literary character.<sup>37</sup> They restrict the study of the Bible to its literary power to construct its own world of formative cognitive meaning in the process of reading, as all literature does, and they do so without attending to its historical or theological claims.<sup>38</sup> But in biblical study, just as event cannot be known or thought about without narrative, so also event

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<sup>36</sup> E.g., Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974). Ryken himself appreciates the theological genius of the Bible, and this recognition is reflected in most of his later works, including *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> Examples of literary critics who attend to the theological meaning and claims of the text include Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury, 1980); L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua*, LCBI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, JSOTSup 46 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; Kingsbury, *Christology of Mark's Gospel*; Mark Allan Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); idem, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); idem, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*

<sup>38</sup> To some extent this is true of the massive (and in many ways helpful) work by J. P. Fokkerman, *Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 4 vols., *Studia semitica neerlandica* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981–93), although this work implicitly contains some helpful theological insights; and Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, BLS 9 (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), although at the end of the book she includes some brief reflections on the relationship between literary study and historical criticism. See also Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOTSup 70, BLS 17 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*; Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). See the corrective to the nonhistorical character of much NT narrative criticism in Peter Merenlahti, *Poetics for the Gospels? Rethinking Narrative Criticism* (London: T&T Clark International, 2002).

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*cannot be collapsed into narrative. Historical narrative bears witness to event and to the importance of event. Even as the panhistorical approach tends to focus on the historical to the exclusion of the literary, the panliterary approach tends to focus on the literary to the exclusion of the historical. Both of them tend to bracket out the question of the meaning and validity of the theological claims of the text. In fact, an inductive examination of the Bible may indicate that in the Bible the literary, historical, and theological are inextricably bound up together,<sup>39</sup> and interpreters cannot deal adequately with any one of these without attending to the others. Ultimately interpreters cannot deal adequately with any biblical passage without engaging the text in the complexity of its historical, literary, and theological matrix.<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> See also Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 47–166.

<sup>32</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, [\*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 267–269.