



Hermeneutics: Literal versus Allegorical: the Influence of Allegory During the Middle Ages; the Reformers; the Rediscovery of Koine Greek & Dispensations

Literal versus Allegorical:

1. Hermeneutics is both a science and an art. It is science in that it can determine certain principles for discovering the meaning of a document. It is an art because the principles and rules can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill of the interpreter.
2. Dispensationalists are consistent in studying the Scripture from a literal-grammatical-historical system of hermeneutics. The Bible is interpreted by the same rules of grammar and language that govern the interpretation of literature in general.
3. Allegory is the use of language to convey a deeper and “spiritualized” meaning as opposed to that which appears on the surface.
4. The allegorical approach was used to interpret the Bible during the Middle Ages and was influenced and restrained by three factors: (1) the prevalence of illiteracy among both the clergy and the congregation, (2) the study of Scripture was restricted primarily to monasteries; and (3) the desire to support the dogmas of Rome.
5. By the late fifteenth century the biblical legitimacy of Catholic doctrines came into question. Three men who challenged Roman orthodoxy became prominent in the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin.
6. The primary complaint among these protesters concerned hermeneutics. The Reformers rejected the allegorical approach and promoted the literal-historical-grammatical method.
7. This system demanded a return to the original languages of Scripture, the Hebrew and Greek, rather than the inferior Latin translations referenced by the Catholic Church.
8. Once returned to the original manuscripts, the reformers were able to allow the grammar and the historical setting of the text to lead them to a correct translation.
9. The Greek language developed around 1500 B.C. and by the time of the Alexandrian conquests of the mid fourth century B.C. it had splintered into various dialects caused by the topography of Greece.
10. Following the conquests of Alexander a common tongue developed throughout the Macedonian empire known as Koine Greek.
11. This dialect became the lingua franca of the Roman Empire during the two centuries of 1 B.C. and A.D. 1. The books of the New Testament are written in this dialect: the common or Koine language of Greece.
12. However, during the time of Roman domination Christian theologians lost touch with the Koine and assumed the New Testament was written in either Classical Greek or in a mystical “Holy Ghost” Greek.



13. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Herman von Soden, Adolf Deissmann, William Moulton, A. T. Robertson, and others made the most important discovery of post-Reformation history.
14. By examining the Greek that appeared on ancient papyri, inscriptions on stones, and ostraca on potsherds, they were able to confirm from its vocabulary that New Testament Greek was Koine.
15. This discovery came at a time when the United States were the client nation. The flexibility of the English language and its vast vocabulary provided theologians with a magnificent tool by which to translate Scripture.
16. With this breakthrough, several prominent theologians rediscovered literal hermeneutics and dispensational theology enabling them to teach doctrine to those who had a hunger and thirst for the Word.
17. The revival of the literal-grammatical-historical system of hermeneutics allowed the divine framework of human history to emerge in the theology of dispensationalism.
18. The theologians who spearheaded the revival of dispensationalism included John Nelson Darby, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John F. Walvoord, and Robert B. Thieme, Jr.
19. The discoveries that the New Testament was written in Koine Greek plus the knowledge that the original hermeneutic practiced in the second century was literal enabled these theologians to reintroduce doctrines that had been lost for centuries because of the dominancy of the allegorical approach.
20. Some of the major doctrines included the Rapture of the church, pretribulationism, and premillennialism. The literal analysis of passages that address the Rapture indicates it is imminent but which we also learned does not necessarily mean that it is immediate.
21. Many who allegorized Rapture passages were unable to distinguish the difference between the Rapture and the Second Advent.