

Guiding Principles for Historical Grammatical Exegesis

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Well-known, traditional, conservative definitions for hermeneutics and exegesis are as follows: Hermeneutics treats of the laws of interpretation and exegesis applies those laws in dealing with the text of Scripture. Actually the Greek word *ermeneia* in its various forms includes the concepts of *explanation*, *interpretation*, *language* (i.e., expressing thoughts in words, either in audible or written form) and *translation*. Likewise the Greek word *exegesis* and its several forms, in addition to the idea of *lead* or *lead out*, carries similar meanings of *exposition*, *explanation* and *interpretation*.¹ Therefore, it is quite obvious that linguistically there is a considerable similarity in meaning between these two Greek terms. Although a concept of history is not explicitly conveyed in the primary meaning of either of the two Greek words, the idea is certainly implicit for the very idea of explaining and interpreting suggests taking into account the historical background and culture of the author and his readers.²

In this presentation, what is discussed as guiding principles for historical grammatical exegesis will be developed from the viewpoint that there is an inter-action and inter-relation between *ermeneia* and *exegesis* and that they both are concerned with the principles of interpretation which the interpreter applies to the ancient text of Scripture to determine its meaning in its own setting and culture and to “translate” or make meaningful that message to the lives of the interpreter and those to whom he propounds the message. James Robinson has correctly criticized any form of conservative hermeneutics that takes a very superficial view in the hermeneutical task in applying the principle of “understanding” the text to “simply explaining where ideas or influences come from, rather than penetrating into the meaning of the text.”³

In the definition of hermeneutics, stress must be placed on the fact that meaning or understanding involved in *ermeneia* and *exegesis* must include the two foundation stones of grammar, language and historical background. Kimmerle has stated that “hermeneutics ultimately is always hermeneutics of language, of words and sentences, of meanings

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