In our last session we discussed issues related to translation and particularly translation philosophy, looking at two major philosophies that stand on opposite sides of a spectrum. One was a more formal equivalent that focused on reproducing the form of the text, and a second which was more of a dynamic equivalent that focused more on clarity and the response of the reader being able to understand accurately trying to reproduce the equivalent response in the modern reader as the ancient readers of the ancient texts.

We also talked a little bit about gender-neutral translation by giving some examples. What is important to understand about gender neutral translations is that they are simply attempts to not necessarily, although they can be, but not necessarily promote an agenda to tamper with Scripture by prioritizing, updating it and prompting the feminist agenda as opposed to being more accurate. But gender neutral translations are an attempt to capture the meaning of the ancient text where the Hebrew or Greek language used masculine language such as the masculine pronoun or masculine words that are usually translated “him” or “he” or “man” but when they use those in a context where clearly all humanity is intended, both male and female, then a gender neutral translation tries to capture that and wants to make clear that that’s what the original text was intending.

As the examples that we looked at Psalms and Hebrews of where a previous translations that maintained the gender language, the masculine language, might have the potential of being misunderstood in our modern day society where often, and this is sometimes the debate, but it appears that often masculine language in English is understood to refer exclusively to males, but if the context clearly makes the case that male and female are being referred to, then the gender translation brings that out clearly, where as if only males are being referred to in
the original context then gender translations still maintains that masculine language to make it clear that males are being referred to.

**Four Guidelines for using Translations**

So issues of gender translations fit within our discussion of a more formal equivalent, do I maintain the exact form in a more literal wooden translation, or do I change the form and sometimes sacrifice form in order to communicate more accurately? How do I use a translation then in interpretations, or what translation is the best one? What I want to do is just give you four guidelines that I see in my opinion as important, and again these are just general. There are other things that could be said, but four guidelines for using translations in interpretations of the biblical text.

First of all is simply: know what kind of translation your dealing with when you use a modern day translation or even whether it’s an ancient translation like the King James Version or a more up to date modern translation. Know what kind of translation your dealing with. Know where it falls on the spectrum from a more formal equivalent, more wooden types of translations, to more dynamic equivalent translations. So know where your translation falls.

The second thing is: understand that no translation, and we’ll bring this up on the last point as well, but understand no translation completely captures the meaning of the original text. That’s because again, not only back to our discussion of the distance that exists between us but also the original readers and the context and author and the original political and historical situation that cannot always completely or exhaustively be overcome.

So not only is there distance, but we’ve already seen that languages don’t overlap. Part of that linguistic difference or distance that we talked about, and since languages don’t completely overlap no one translation can completely capture all of what is involved in understanding the biblical text.

For example, sometimes especially in some of the Psalms and some of the Hebrew poetry you might have a text that is arranged according to the alphabet;
each line or each verse begins with a Hebrew letter of the alphabet, the first word does. That’s impossible to capture in English. Certain types of poetic structures are sometimes sacrificed, or even sometimes figures of speech in one language might not be a figure of speech in another language. Some of those will obviously be missed, or we might not fail to capture it precisely. Again there may be a motive or effectual impact of a text that’s going to be lost in the modern day translation.

So the point is: recognize that no translation captures all the nuances and meaning of the biblical text even if it can capture its meaning substantively and accurately, no one claims necessarily that it does so exhaustively and perfectly. So recognize that.

The third thing is: for non-Hebrew and Greek students usually the standard advice is to use a fairly literal translation, at least as one of the tools you use. A translation that is more formally equivalent that will at least to some degree be close to and expose you to the structure, and expose you to the grammar of, and the form as close as possible to the original text. So most who do not read Greek or Hebrew will probably at some point avail themselves of a more wooden translation that might be again, not perfectly or exhaustively but somewhat closer to the structure of the original languages themselves and there’s a variety of more wooden often called literal translations, that are more formally equivalent that do that.

The last thing I want to say about translation, actually the other thing I want to say in that connection “no translation can completely capture all the meaning.” It is the goal of interpretation not just to produce a translation, especially if you work with Hebrew and Greek. The primary goal is not just to produce a translation. Again, translations don’t capture the entirety of the meaning. That’s where at times, commentary and explanation and your exegesis come in. That’s why you do interpretation, don’t think that a translation will or has to capture everything in the text. It is in my Greek exegesis that I teach, I am at times a little bit flexible on translation, there are good ones and there are bad ones, but at the
same time I am not looking at the translation to capture everything. I’m looking at the explanation, the commentary, the exegesis and the interpretation themselves to capture all the meaning and nuances of the text.

But that brings me to my last comment. Probably the best use of translation, in my opinion, is to use as many as you can because of the things we’ve just said. Because there are different philosophies of translation, because no translation can capture everything, it’s probably best to use as many translations as possible. Sometimes the differences in the translations can do one of two things. Probably more but I’ll highlight these two.

Number one: the difference might capture nuances that are both intended in the text, the Greek or Hebrew text, but can’t be brought out in one English translation. The other thing is that sometimes where translations differ will reveal an interpretative issue or difficulty you need to deal with if you’re reading three or four translations. If they all, or at least a couple of them, differ significantly, sometimes it’s that difference in the way they’ve translated that might reveal an interpretative problem. Sometimes the differences are just stylistic, as far as making it a smoother reading or something like that. But at other times the difference might reveal a significant interpretive issue that you’ll have to deal with in interpreting and understanding a biblical text.

For example, in Ephesians chapter five, and this is verse twenty-one. It’s interesting when you compare translations, chapter five verse twenty-one comes halfway through chapter five, and why I say that is because the first half of chapter five, towards the end of that first half we find that famous text “be filled with the Spirit. Don’t be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit” and then what follows are a number of, what in the Greek text are participles, or a numbers of phrases or clauses that further define or describe what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Now if you start looking at translations, what is interesting is that same translation actually begins a new paragraph and most English translations, but not
all of them, but a lot of them, kind of to make it easier to read and digest will break the text down and give you paragraph headings. A lot of them begin a new paragraph at chapter five verse twenty-one of Ephesians; “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” and the rest of the text talks about, wives submit to your husbands, husbands love your wives, and the long comparison between the husband’s love for his wife and Christ’s love for the church.

Some translations will begin a new paragraph at verse twenty-one. They’ll break it off from verse twenty and perhaps even have a paragraph heading. Other translations, such as the one I’m looking at, actually include verse twenty-one with verse twenty, actually with the verses nineteen through twenty of Ephesians chapter five. That makes quite a big difference. In other words, in verse twenty-one, “submit to one another out of reverence” does Paul begin new topic at this point? Is he beginning a new section in his letter? Or, if I take verse twenty one with the previous verses, then “submitting to one another out of reverence from Christ” is further explaining what it means to be filled with the Spirit. In verse eighteen “do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery instead be filled with the Spirit,” and then verse nineteen and twenty give examples of what this means. Should we include twenty-one with that so that submitting to one another is an example of what it means to be filled with the spirit. Or does twenty-one begin a brand new section in Paul’s letter?

So looking in a number of translations and where they divide Ephesians five reveals, I think an interpretative issue in the text that you’re going to have to deal with. That’s true elsewhere, as hopefully you know, the paragraph divisions and headings in your Bible were not placed there by Paul, Matthew, Mark, Isaiah, Daniel, or whoever, but are the result of the modern translators in the editions and the translations they’ve produced. They’re there just to help us break the text down, and it can be a little bit unwieldy and difficult to read the entire book of Ephesians without a break, but just so you know that these are human inventions. These are the decisions of the translation community. They are not put there by
Paul and so they’re not inspired and they’re going to differ at times. But you’ll notice the more you read translations, sometimes, but not always, sometimes where translation can maybe divide a text or where that differs between translations, sometimes might reveal an interpretative issue and might make a difference in how you read the text.

So it’s important to compare translations. To not only perhaps see some added nuance, but to see where they differ or where they may reveal an interpretive issue or significant problem perhaps. Again the Ephesians five text is a good example. I think you could make a good argument based on the Greek text itself that verse twenty-one goes with verses eighteen through twenty. It’s a further explanation of what it means to be filled with the spirit. So verse nineteen “speaking to one another with songs, hymns, sing to the Lord,” Verse twenty “always giving thanks to the father for everything,” twenty-one “submitting” or “submit to one another out of reverence.” That goes back to verse eighteen further describing what it means to be filled with the spirit.

So be aware of even how a text will divide or how a translation will divide the text into paragraphs, and again realizing those are were not Paul’s, John’s or whoever, those are the decisions of the translators and sometimes you might disagree with those. Having said that, even more generally, chapter divisions and verse divisions, hopefully you know to ignore those as well. They’re simply there to help us get to the same place in our learning. You can imagine a pastor trying to tell help his audience find the right text and somewhere in the middle of the book of Isaiah without chapter or verse divisions, but other than that they may or may not indicate how the text is to be divided or how it develops or unfolds.

Another example, again I’ll use a New Testament example, one that we’ve already mentioned is back in chapter five of Galatians the well-known “fruit of the Spirit” passage where Paul contrasts the works of the flesh, which I think he’s referring to the works of the law. The reliance on the law ultimately does not overcome the works of the flesh rather it’s by living in the spirit in chapter five.
However what is interesting in verse five through sixteen, when he introduces this contrast between the flesh and the spirit, is the “spirit” or referring to the Holy Spirit?

Again as kind of an aside, this is interesting because the Greek New Testament, for example, did not use capitalization or use lower case letters. In fact, in our discussion of textual provision we talked about uncial script or manuscripts, that most likely the original manuscripts would have been written in capital letters and would have had no spacing in between words. Because of that it is interesting when you come across a word like “spirit,” if you find that capitalized in your English text that’s an interpretive decision. Again Paul did not originally capitalize the words “spirit” or the Greek word pneuma. He did not write that as a capital “P” in Greek for pnemua or capital “S” for English, so whether we say “spirit” with a small “s” referring to just a spirit or a human spirit or capital “S” the Holy Spirit again is an interpretive decision made by translations. There may be some verses where some translations would translate it with a small “s” referring to the human spirit, where in the same verse another translation might use a capital “S” referring to the Holy Spirit. So even then things like punctuation, is again, punctuation was not present in the original text whether a words is capitalized or small letters, most of that is the decision of modern translators.

So chapter five verse sixteen of Galatians begins “so I say, live by the Spirit” capital “s” making clear that the translators thought this word refers to the Holy Spirit. “So I say live by the Spirit,” and this is where it becomes interesting. Again I’m going to contrast the older NIV and the new, 2011 NIV. The older NIV translates it like this, “so I say live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” and notice that phrase, “the sinful nature,” suggesting perhaps that they have interpreted this as that we have some impulse, some inclination, some nature inside that is bent towards evil.

But the Greek word there is, we’ve talked about this already, the Greek word is actually sarx. A single word sarx which interestingly other, more literal
translations, try to find a single word in English, and the word they usually chose is “flesh.” So we’re prone to think of this phrase this text in terms of the contrast between the spirit and the flesh. But interesting the word Paul uses is the Greek word *sarx*, the spirit. But in chapter five verse sixteen, the old NIV said translated it “the Spirit and the sinful nature.” Now notice what the new NIV does the 2011, it says, “live by the Spirit,” almost using the identical wording found in the old NIV, “live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” In going back in the more, the single word “flesh.”

So now again my purpose is not to try to solve this issue right there. We’ll actually talk about the word “flesh” later on in the course when we deal with semantics and word studies and lexical analysis. The point is, when I compare even the two same translations, the NIV, one an updated edition, as well as other translations and I see one translation saying, “the sinful nature” and another translating it “flesh,” that then raises the question in my mind, how should I understand this word? What is going on? Why the difference in translation? On one level one can see that the word “flesh” in 21st century English might suggest the physical body, that something is wrong with the physical body, or it’s the seed of sin is somewhere in the physical body. Maybe Paul has gnostic tendencies where he denigrates the physical body itself, but the original NIV was trying to avoid that I think by trying to bring out what Paul meant by “flesh” by saying “sinful nature.”

Now one may disagree with that, I myself think “sinful nature” is not a good translation of *sarx*tes, but at the same time you can understand that you can see the difference in translation philosophy in trying to avoid perhaps a misunderstanding. But when I read these two texts, at the very least I have to ask, why the difference that probably reveals an interpretive issue. So I need to go back and figure out what is it that Paul’s trying to communicate and then see if you can explain the differences between the translations.
So it’s in my opinion and I think the best move in utilizing translations in hermeneutics and in interpretation is to use as many translations as possible to compare them number one, to perhaps see different nuances from different translations, but second also to note where they differ. Some difference may be rather inconsequential as a result of style, but of the difference whether it’s the way they divide the text, the words they used to translate, where they might stop a sentence and begin a new one, those kind of differences may reveal an interpretive issue that as an interpreter you’re going to have to deal with. So hopefully now you understand a little bit more about what a translation is, the philosophy that lies behind it and also how to use translations in an effective way.

**Early Biblical Interpretation**

Alright, what I want to do now is move down the line a little bit further and even historically. We’ve looked at the origin of Scripture in process of inspiration and how that influences hermeneutics. We’ve looked at the transmission process in terms of reconstructing through textual criticisms what most likely was the original text of the Hebrew and Greek Old and New Testament as a basis for interpretation. Then even further in the process of transmission is how that has been translated, how that text has been made available to readers in our contemporary world and their languages.

**Inner biblical Interpretation**

But now I want to move along a little further and talk about early biblical interpretation, begin to talk about hermeneutics or biblical interpretations especially. Actually, I want to begin and the beginning that might sound kind of silly but why I say that is when you pick up a text, and I’ve said this already but it’s worth reiterating, when you pick up the Bible and begin to interpret it you are not the first one to do so. You’re not the first one to interpret the Bible but you stand in a long tradition of interpreting the biblical text, of engaging the biblical text, of trying to make sense of it and understand it that goes all the way back, not
only to the first Christians of the first century but all the way back to the Bible itself.

Yes, the Bible itself reveals that interpretation has already taken place in or within the biblical text. That is, biblical authors as you’re already aware of, the Bible is produced over quite a span of time so that often biblical authors will pick up earlier texts, biblical texts and interpret them and apply them to their own day and age and for their own unique situations. So that the author would pick up and reformulate, reinterpret for his own day and for his own audience previous biblical texts. Scholars often refer to this as inner biblical interpretation, but the point is that interpretation is already taking place within the Bible itself. Authors take earlier texts and try to make sense of them, try to apply them and understand them for their own context. Again, the goal was to make previous texts relevant to the modern reader. So it wasn’t just theoretical to explain the meaning of an obscure text, although that could be true, but it was often to demonstrate that the text was still relevant as the word of God was still relevant to later generations of God’s people.

One very good example of this, we’ll look at a couple examples of this in detail, but especially the prophetic literate in the Old Testament. Sometimes earlier predictions and prophecies of prophets are picked up by later prophets, such as after the exile when Israel goes into exile, and then they finally return back to the land. Sometimes you have prophets after the exile picking up earlier texts and interpreting them and demonstrating that they’re still relevant and they are reasserting them for their people to demonstrate that God is still in control, that God still keeps his promises, the promises haven’t failed, the prophecies haven’t failed, that God will indeed bring them to pass and bring them to fulfillment.

So let me give you some examples in both the Old Testament and also some of the Jewish interpretations of the day and then in the New Testament. Again, my purpose is not to give a detailed account of the interpretative activity in the Old or New Testament, or the theory or the theological assumptions behind it
or exactly what they were doing, but mainly to give you just a flavor of what or how within the Bible itself earlier texts are being interpreted and applied and utilized in a way to make it relevant to latter generations of God’s people.

So, for example, in the Old Testament, just to give some very common typical examples, but not to spend any time in them, 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles take up material for example from 1 and 2 Kings. And there may be a similar relationship between those books as there are between Matthew, Mark and Luke the so-called Synoptic Gospels that we’ll take about later. But 1 and 2 Chronicles probably takes up material from 1 and 2 Kings and now interprets this for a new setting that is a time after the exile, perhaps a post-exilic perspective on these events. Again, the goal is to reassert God’s word or to make God’s word relevant to a new situation; to demonstrate how it addresses God’s people in a new setting, and to show that God’s word is still valid. God’s word still speaks. God’s promises in his word have not failed.

We find, as we’ve already said, something similar going on in the prophetic literature. Often I think, later prophetic texts and writers will pick up earlier prophetic texts sometimes, and especially those prophecies that were unfulfilled that for some may have seemed to be failed predictions or prophecies. The authors picked them up to demonstrate and to reassert them, to demonstrate that, indeed, God will fulfill them. Especially the basis seems to be that these prophecies are still valid, these prophecies are still the word of God, that God is faithful to keep his promise too. The prophets can pick them up and reassert them and demonstrate that they still will indeed be fulfilled and God will indeed accomplish his purposes. So they take up these prophecies and assert them for a new generation.

So, for example, a number of earlier prophets, and a number of prophets anticipated a restoration of the Temple when Israel was in exile and the Temple was destroyed. A number of prophets promise and predict that God indeed will fulfill his promises by bringing his people back into the land, restoring them to the land and rebuilding the Temple. You find that perspective especially in the first
thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah. Ezekiel 40-48 goes into some detail about the reconstruction and rebuilding of the eschatological Temple, the new Temple where God will dwell with his people. So early prophets anticipate this restoration of the people from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple where God in the new covenant relationship will dwell with his people in the Temple and in the land. But interestingly the situation in exile, according to some of the prophets, doesn’t quite measure up to and match up to those expectations as you find in Isaiah or Ezekiel. So because of that you do find later prophets still anticipating the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of God’s people.

For example, if I can find it tucked away in the minor prophets, the book of Haggai in chapter 2. Listen to Haggai chapter 2, “on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people and ask them, Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’”

So it’s as if the prophet is assuring them that after they come back from exile, God indeed is still with his people, and you’ll notice the repetition of the covenant formula, “I am with you.” But then he goes on to say “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘The silver is mine, the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory
of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace.’"

So, it’s almost as if in the situation after the exile, when the people have returned from the land now doesn’t quite measure up to the great prophets and the prophecies. So now Haggai reaffirms that God still will fill this house with his glory and still make spectacular vision that one finds in the prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel. So later prophets often take up earlier prophet texts, again not because they’re trying to save face or correct a mistake, but I think because they’re convinced that despite appearances, God’s promises are still valid, God is still in control and will indeed fulfill his promises. So they picked them up again and demonstrate that they are still relevant for the people of God. God has not forgotten his people and God will indeed fulfill his promises.

So the Old Testament itself reveals that the process of interpretation is already taking place. Again whenever you pick up your Bible to read it, you stand in line of a long tradition of taking up, reading, understanding and interpreting biblical texts, attempting to make it relevant to yourself and to the modern reader. Interpretation is nothing new; it’s already taking place within the biblical texts themselves, by the biblical authors themselves.

**Early Jewish Interpretation**

To move on, especially in a relationship to the Old Testament, we have other examples of very early attempts to interpret the biblical text. For example, rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism of the early centuries even leading up and into the first century, the New Era, reveals a number of attempts and a number of ideas related to how the Old Testament text was taken up and interpreted and understood. Again, the main goal, it appears to me, is as we saw in the Old Testament, to demonstrate how these texts are relevant. It wasn’t only intellectually to uncover the bare meaning of the text, but to ask how are these texts are relevant, how do they continue to speak to the people?
What I want to focus on is three of four main bodies. Actually I’ll focus on four main bodies of work that are associated with rabbinic Judaism, Judaism’s attempt to come to grips with its own scripture and understand it and make it relevant. It’s important to understand much of this. Much of this, the bodies of literature that I’m going to talk about, much of it was written down even after the New Era, especially with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and even after that much of this was committed to writing, but it still probably and in many places reflects interpretive activity that was already taken place long before it was ever written down.

So for example, one body of literature is known as the Mishnah. The Mishnah is basically the written codification of the oral interpretation of the law by the rabbis of the day. In other words, along with the written law of Moses grew up a body of oral teaching and literature that later on, about AD 200, so two hundred years roughly after the birth of Christ. Two hundred years after that you have the Mishnah produced which is then the literary encoding of this oral tradition. So again although this, the Mishnah, occurs and emerges in written form much later than the New Testament writing, probably written towards the end of the first century; it probably still embodies interpretive activity and understanding of the Law that occurred much earlier than that. So the Mishnah is the written form of the oral law. The oral law was committed to writing in the form of the Mishnah.

Another body of literature is what is known as the Talmud, and again I’m just giving the very brief descriptions. There are actually two bodies, two Talmuds you might say. One was known as the Palestinian Talmud, and the other one was the Babylonian Talmud, you might see those two names utilized. They were produced about 400 AD and 600 AD respectively. Again, although these were committed to writing much later, they once again may embody a very early interpretative activity by Jewish interpreters. Basically, what the Talmud was was a further commentary on the Mishnah. Again the Mishnah itself seemed in need of
updating and so the Talmud is further commentary and further explanation of the Mishnah, which was the committing to writing of the oral law.

Another, the third body of literature briefly to emphasize this is the Midrash. Midrash was basically kind of a running commentary on the biblical text where often a biblical text was treated like this: a line of a verse of a text was quoted and then it was unpacked and then it was interpreted. Often texts were brought in from the Old Testament, which were used to interpret it, and the compilation of what Rabbis were saying about this verse. So the Midrash was kind of a running commentary on the biblical text, not unlike what some preachers Sunday morning do where they work verse by verse though the text with their commentary and their explanation.

Then a final and fourth body of literature is, could be, the Targums. The Targums were basically Aramaic translations or paraphrases of the Old Testament. As Aramaic became the standard language there was a need then for the Bible to be communicated in Aramaic. Most think that the Targums had their origin in the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures in the synagogues in Aramaic. Again, later on, those were committed to writing in the form that we now have as the Targums. Once again the Targums were written, most of them much later than the Old Testament or New Testament, but probably a lot of times embody and contain interpretative activity and paraphrases that are much earlier than the date that they were actually committed to writing.

Within the Rabbinic literature there were often rules that characterized the Rabbinic interpretive activity. One feature of this, without going through all the rules, there are plenty of text books that go through them, but just to highlight a couple of them, a couple of rules, and there’s even debate whether they are rules they followed or just explanations that tie in what they did and where those originated. I won’t go into that. For example, one of the so called rules of rabbinic interpretative activity is to argue from the lesser to the greater. That is, if something that is less important is true, than the greater must also be true. Perhaps
we find this type of argumentation present in Jesus’ parables where presently he argues from lesser to the greater. In the Sermon on the Mount he argues that if God cares about the birds, and clothing them and caring for them, the lesser; then certainly he cares about the greater, which would be humanity, which would be the climax of creation, which is human beings.

So you’ll see Jesus arguing that way, even in his parables as well. If an unjust judge, if a human unjust judge would treat, finally treat a woman justly, certainly the lesser truth, certainly the greater is true, that God will seek justice for his people who ask him. So, one feature was arguing from the lesser to the greater.

Another one feature is that you often find, and I mention these two because I think you do find them often in the New Testament, as another feature is interpreting a text, an Old Testament text in light of other Old Testament texts that have similar wording or vocabulary. Sometimes it’s only one word that links them together and taking a biblical text with that word and finding another Old Testament text with a similar word and using it to help fill out and unpack and interpret that text. They’re kind of linked together by common vocabulary or theme. But again, the importance of this activity is to demonstrate how early interpreters understood their own Scripture and the importance of studying how Old Testament authors used earlier Old Testament texts or looking at rabbinic bodies of literature.

How they interpreted Old Testament texts shed light on how early interpreters understood their own Scripture and how they interpreted it. Also they raise the question, how might this affect how New Testament authors interpreted and read and utilized Old Testament texts as well.

**Qumran: Dead Sea Scrolls and Interpretation**

Another non-biblical source of interpretation, an attempt to interpret and wrestle with Old Testament texts is the Qumran literature, which comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Qumran community was a sect that secluded themselves in a community near the Dead Sea, hence the title, the Dead Sea Scrolls. They found
themselves at odds with what was going on with the establishment, the status quo, and priesthood in Jerusalem. They responded to that influence by excluding themselves and forming their own community where they would await God’s kingdom and even expected that God would rebuild the Temple. In the meantime they were the Temple, the eschatological Temple of God where God dwelled. No one else not even other Jews, they alone were the true people of God and God dwelled in their midst. They were the true Temple that one day God would build a Temple in the midst of.

But the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding biblical interpretation is that Qumran found in the Old Testament justification for their own existence. They read Old Testament texts almost prophetically as anticipating and justifying their existence. Some of us might read some of the Qumran texts and think that they’re allegorical and their playing fast and loose with the Scripture, but again they’re attempting to provide justification for their own existence. They’re trying to explain and provide a reason for their own existence, their own activity, and their own expectations and hope, given their situation.

There are all kinds of examples in the Qumran literature. Sometimes the Qumran literature reveals simply editions, or manuscripts of Old Testament texts just copying of Old Testament texts themselves. Sometimes it reveals texts that are more geared toward providing guidelines, rules and regulations for life and the community. In other times, some of the texts are interestingly more like the Midrash that we’ve talked about; they are commentaries on biblical texts.

A very interesting open and revealing one and one of the more famous ones is the Commentary on Habakkuk, the Habakkuk Pesher. But an even more interesting one I think, or at least as interesting is the Isaiah Pesher or the commentary on Isaiah. What it does, much like what we talked about with Midrash, is that, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls are fragmentary and so we don’t have a complete commentary or complete text. But often what they’d do is work their way through a biblical text, line by line and interpret each line. They’ll
quote a line and then they interpret it and expound upon it, demonstrating how it applies to their own community and how it applies to their own situation.

One intriguing text is the commentary or the Midrash on Isaiah chapter fifty-four. Chapter fifty-four is a prophecy of restoration. Again Israel has gone into exile because of their idolatry and sin and Isaiah anticipates a time of restoration where God will bring his people back to the land and restore them and enter into a covenant of relationship with them ultimately in new creation towards the end of the book. But chapter fifty-four is very intriguing, and in verses eleven and twelve we find a very interesting explanation of the restoration of Jerusalem and its people.

You can remember they’re in exile, and now Isaiah anticipates a time of restoration. Verses eleven and twelve “O afflicted city,” that could be God’s people Israel and Jerusalem that is to be destroyed and overrun by foreigners to take them into exile as a punishment for their sins. Now the prophet says, “O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,” now here’s the construct, “I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of ruins, you gates of sparkling jewels and all your walls of precious stones.” Then in verse thirteen “all of your sons will be taught of the Lord and great will be your children’s peace. In righteousness you will be established and tyranny will be far from you.”

So, the situation of exile will be reversed. They will be brought back. The city will be restored but the author describes it in terms of being rebuilt with these precious stones and jewels and stones. Notice that he itemizes the main features of the city: the foundations, the stones that make up the city, the battlements the gates, and the walls, et cetera. The city is portrayed in terms of these precious jewels that will make it up when it is rebuilt.

Now the point I want to make about this is that it’s interesting what the Qumran community does with this text. What they do is they take all of the stones and the parts of the city and they allegorize them to refer to members of the
community. So the original founding members of the community, the council of the Qumran community, the chief priests and other groups are equated with these pieces of the city, these architectural features of the city and the jewels, which make them up. So the Qumran community found in the text a justification for their own existence. They thought that Isaiah was really predicting and anticipating the founding of the Qumran community. So it’s interesting that they found in this not a prophecy of a literal rebuilt city, but they allegorize the parts of the city of Isaiah 54:4-12 to refer to actual persons. This is not unlike what Paul and other New Testament authors do when they equate building blocks of the city, or stones of the city, or parts of the Temple with the people of God. So that even Peter can talk about the fact that God’s people are part of the stones that are being built up, and Paul can talk about the people as a temple being built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets; Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone.

So the Qumran community read this text, as I think, justification of their existence and establishment to show that the very founding as a community is nothing less than what Isaiah himself was predicting. They can find in the Scripture anticipation of their own existence and justification for their existence.

So again the Qumran community is another example of taking biblical texts and taking them up, interpreting them, or reinterpreting them, to refer to their own existence, to refer to their own community, to make them relevant as God’s people, to demonstrate how they can have ongoing significance and validity. Again the Qumran community and others are not just trying to, they don’t just look at the text as a bare artifact to be exegeted and to draw out the original historical meaning, but it is interesting they are attempting, to whether we would agree with what they are doing or not, or whether, however silly it seem to us, they are trying to take the text and show its relevance and validity for the people of God, for their day.
Interpretative Activity in the New Testament

Now moving on to the New Testament we find that interpretive activity continues into the New Testament. One of the questions is, because most of the New Testament authors are Jewish or have their backgrounds in Judaism, to what extent are they simply reflecting and following standard methods of interpretation such as we find in Rabbinic interpretation? Again, I don’t want to address that issue specifically. We might get a few examples where they might be following similar techniques, but the key is, in my opinion, because of the coming of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ comes to bring to fulfillment to the Old Testament, the New Testament authors for the most part read the Old Testament though the lens of fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They saw the entire Old Testament as pointing to Christ.

In fact, Jesus Christ himself may be responsible for this very perspective. One of the most well-known texts that suggest something like this is the one found in Luke chapter twenty-four and verse twenty-seven. After Jesus resurrects he appears to two men on the road to Emmaus, and he begins to converse with them. Luke 24:27 is one of the more interesting verses. Verse twenty-five begins, “Jesus said to them,” to these two men “how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets had spoken. Did not Christ have to suffer these things and enter his glory?”

It’s interesting to think that Jesus himself thinks his suffering is predicted in the prophets. And then verse twenty-seven, which perhaps encapsulates Jesus approach to the Old Testament, however that’s understood and probably lays the basis of how his followers interpret the Old Testament. Jesus says, or Luke goes on and says “and beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them” Jesus, “what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself.”

So based on a the text like this, most likely the New Testament authors read the Old Testament through the lenses of its fulfillment in Christ. They ultimately, whatever else they do with it, they ultimately see Jesus Christ as the climax of Old
Testament revelation, as the fulfillment of what the Old Testament was ultimately pointing to.

So they read the Old Testament finally in the light of fulfillment in Christ. But to give you some examples of the New Testament interpretation and to demonstrate the range of interpretive activity of even with the New Testament authors, it’s interesting that we can see anywhere from more literal interpretations, to interpretations that we’ll demonstrate are more kind of analogical or typological. That is sometimes New Testament authors appear to find rather straightforward what we would say are literal fulfillments of Old Testament texts, and other times when you read it it’s not quite so clear as to how the New Testament authors think that Jesus or some event fulfills this Old Testament text. In those cases the connection may not be one of prediction or fulfillment, but may be more analogical or typological. That is, the author sees repeated patterns: the same way God worked in the Old Covenant in the Old Testament, now he’s working in a similar, but greater way, under the New Covenant is brought about through fulfillment in Christ.

There are also a number of other ways that the New Testament authors utilized Old Testament texts. So in our next session we will look at a couple of specific examples of how New Testament authors utilize Old Testament texts. Then we’ll move on in looking at the history of interpretation. We’ll leave some rather large gaps, we’ll leap over a lot of the periods of church history, again to paint in rather broad strokes and to touch on main figures of interpretation, and how they affect the way we approach hermeneutics and how we participate and engage in biblical interpretation, again remembering we’re not the first ones to pick up and read this text. When you pick up and read the text you do not do so in isolation. You do not do so in a vacuum, you come to it, whether you realize it or not, as influenced by and taking your position in a long line of those who have gone before, who attempted and tried to understand and make sense of the biblical text.