

BGM BIBLE COLLEGE

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

INTRODUCTION

A brief introduction was given earlier, and now the subject before us is *Biblical Hermeneutics*. In Urdu it is called **Bāiblī ‘Ilm-ul-Tafsīr**, that is, the sacred discipline of interpreting the Holy Scriptures.

Yesterday I shared a little concerning the term “Biblical.” When we say *Biblical*, we mean that the centre of our attention, the focus of our interpretive labour, and the foundation of all principles we shall learn, shall be drawn from the Holy Bible itself. Our hermeneutics shall be taught with the Scriptures in view; for our faith and our deeds are bound to the Word of God.

WHAT THE BIBLE IS

Before we begin to study the interpretation of Scripture, we must first learn *what* the Bible is.

The Bible is above the word of man; for the testimony of man is not final, but the Word of God *is* final. A man may advance in philosophy, in research, in learning, and in all sciences; yet the ultimate verdict belonged unto the Scriptures alone. Yes, the Bible pronounced the final word in all matters of truth.

Some of you seem very quiet—do not be troubled, for when the class becomes very solemn, I may lighten the moment a little. I desire my students to rejoice in learning.

THE BIBLE CONTRA HUMAN PHILOSOPHY

In the ancient Greco-Roman world there arose certain philosophers whose school of thought maintained that God created the world and then withdrew, standing afar off as a spectator. Such ideas may appear philosophical, yet they are not Biblical.

For the Biblical testimony is this:

The God who made the world did set His tabernacle among men.

He doth not stand afar to behold a spectacle, but He draweth near unto man. And when man was estranged from Him, He gave the name **Immanuel**, being interpreted, *God with us*. Here lieth the ancient conflict between human philosophy and the doctrine of Scripture.

THE BIBLE AS THE ONE TRUE REVELATION

The Holy Bible is the sole and absolute truth. One hath said wisely that ten things cannot be “truth,” for truth is ever one. The Bible alone is that unique truth which teaches rightly concerning God, and revealed unto us the mystery of His being.

Therefore, the foundation of our faith is the Bible. Had the Bible not existed, how should man have known the path of righteousness? How should he have discerned the way of God? How should he have known who God is?

Thus the foundation of our **faith** is the Bible, and the foundation of our **works** is likewise the Bible; for as a man believeth, so shall he act.

If a man's belief is that two marriages are lawful for him, then within six months he may take a second wife; his belief hath given birth to his deed. Your belief is that by attending this class you shall learn the Word of God; and behold, your faith hath produced the action of coming here.

Hence, if one desired to correct a man's actions, he must first correct his faith. And if one desired to correct his faith, he must read the Bible. For observe the flow: the Bible produced faith, and faith bringeth forth works. Therefore is it written, "*Faith without works is dead.*"

THE BIBLE REVEALETH BOTH GOD AND MAN

The Bible guided us that we may know what our faith ought to be, and thus what our conduct ought to be. And from this we learn another truth: the Bible revealed not only the nature of God, but also the nature of man.

You may have heard the word **Anthropology**, the study of man. For the Scriptures speak of the *pneumatikos anthrōpos*—the spiritual man.

THE SPIRITUAL MAN (PNEUMATIKOS ANTHRŌPOS)

The term *pneumatikos anthrōpos* signified "the spiritual man." Hence the question arises: *What is Anthropology?* Anthropology is 'ilm-ul-insān, the study of man. It inquired, *from whence came man? What is man?* Is he a composition of three parts—spirit, body, and soul? Or do some reckon the spirit and the soul as one, so that he is composed of but two parts? Is man to be understood through **trichotomy** or **dichotomy**? This is the study of man, and in this field men pursue even their PhDs.

Thus Anthropology speaketh concerning man. But when unto it is joined the word **Biblical**, then no longer is our target what philosophy saith, nor what scholars declare, nor what science proclaimed, nor what man thinketh of himself. Our concern becomes this alone: **What saith the Bible concerning man?**

If a matter be called merely *marriage*, one may say, "These persons are wed; their union hath been established; they are joined to one another by name and covenant." This is marriage. But if we say **Biblical Marriage**, then we speak of that holy union concerning which the Bible itself declared its mind.

Even so, Anthropology is the study of man; but **Biblical Anthropology** is the study of man according to the Scriptures. Without the word *Biblical*, the meaning is this: What saith philosophy? What say the scholars? What saith science? What saith man? But when we add *Biblical*, then it meant: **What saith the Bible concerning man?**

THE CALL TO BE BIBLICAL CHRISTIANS

Therefore we must become **Biblical Christians**—not merely Christians by name or tradition, but those whose belief and conduct are shaped by the Word of God. We must be such Christians as are formed by Scripture, rooted in Scripture, governed by Scripture.

THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

We now proceed to consider the Holy Bible. I speak here of the **Protestant Bible**, which consisted of sixty and six books. These sacred writings were compiled over a span of fourteen hundred years; and in some books the process extended unto fifteen hundred years. But for most, the compilation is within fourteen centuries.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 — THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.”

Every writing that beareth the name of God, every Scripture that is of divine origin—this is the Word of God.

2 PETER 1:20–21 — PROPHECY NOT OF PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

“Knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Therefore beware of prophecies and of ministers who utter predictions out of their own minds. Many say, “A prophecy came unto me, and I uttered it.” But the Bible is exceedingly clear: prophecy proceeded only when men are **moved by the Holy Ghost**, and not by their own desire or imagination.

In this present age, the Church is beset with many false prophets and false teachers; for oftentimes a notion arises in a man’s heart, and he uttered it in the name of the Lord. Yet Paul saith unto the Thessalonians, “*Prove all things.*” And how shall all things be proved? By the Holy Scriptures.

THE CERTAINTY AND AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Every scroll, every line, every word of the Holy Bible is the Word of God. Therefore give thanks unto God, for in your hands you possess the Book that is the very Word of the Living God. It feared nothing; it standeth unmoved.

REVELATION 1:1–2 — THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN

Next reference: **Revelation, chapter one, verses one and two.** The Scripture saith:

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John:

Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.”

Thus John bare witness of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all the things which he beheld.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE STUDY OF HOLY WRIT

The Witness of the Revelation

Amen. The Revelation of Jesus Christ also is found for us in the Word of God. It is said—I think it was Augustine, Saint Augustine—who perchance declared (yet do thou verify it), that, “If the creation be so beautiful, then how exceedingly beautiful must the Creator Himself be.” Many have inquired, saying, “Could we not have known who God is without Jesus Christ? Could we not, by beholding creation alone, render praise unto God?”

Yet Biblical scholars affirm that the Holy Bible, and the Person of God manifested in Jesus Christ, have declared unto us concerning God that which mere creation could never have revealed. Therefore the study of Holy Scripture, and of its exposition, is most essential.

The Weight of Teaching Holy Scripture

The study of the Holy Bible—reading it, learning it, and learning how to expound it—is exceedingly important because herein thou dealest directly with God. And if thou commit error in exposition, then hast thou erred concerning the very Person of God, which the LORD in no wise approved. Therefore it is written that not many should become teachers, for teachers shall receive the greater condemnation. And this is true: to be a teacher of the Word is a great responsibility.

The Threefold Division of the Old Testament

Let us now swiftly behold: the Old Testament is divided into three principal parts. Though further divisions may be made, yet we shall consider the main three.

1. The Books of the Law (Torah / Toret)

These are the Books of the Law, also called *Torah* or *Toret*, which were given unto us by the hand of Moses:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

2. The Prophetic Books

The second division is the Books of the Prophets, which in English are called *Prophetic Books*. The Jews likewise acknowledge the Old Testament, and in their tongue they call the Law *Torah*, the Prophetic Books *Nebiim*, and the Writings *Ketubim*.

3. The Poetic Books (The Writings)

The third division is the Poetic Books, also called the *Writings*. In Hebrew these are called *Ketubim*. In the Hebrew tongue, when the ending **-im** is added, it beareth the plural sense. Thus *Nabi* is a prophet; *Nabiim* denoted prophets. Likewise *talmeed* is a student, and *talmeedem* many students. Even the Urdu *talib-e-ilm* beareth likeness unto this, for Hebrew

and Urdu share many similarities. In Hebrew the word for road or street is *darekh*; Urdu calleth it *sarak*. When I studied Hebrew, I memorized vocabulary by likening its words unto Urdu words.

Thus we have: **Torah, Nebiim, and Ketubim**—the threefold division of the Old Testament.

The Fourfold Division of the New Testament

The New Testament is divided into four parts.

1. The Gospels (The Injil)

The first is the Gospels—**Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**—the *Anajeel-e-Arba* (the Four Gospels).

2. The Historical Book (Acts)

The second portion is the Book of Acts. Though called *Acts of the Apostles*, many Biblical scholars classify it also as an historical book, for therein is found the history of the beginning of the Church. In *Unger's Handbook of the Bible*, *Lion's Handbook to the Bible*, and various Bible dictionaries, Acts is described as historical, for it recorded how the Church began, and how the missionary work commenced after the ascension of Jesus Christ.

3. The Epistles

The third section consisted of the Epistles. I once read an article by Thomas Ranner wherein he distinguished between *letters* and *epistles*, yet we shall not pursue that matter today.

4. The Apocalyptic Book

The final section is the Book of Revelation. Many call it an *Apocalyptic Book*. This word *apocalyptic* cometh from the Greek *apokalupsis*, meaning *the unveiling*, or *the revealing of that which was hidden*. And what is the Book of Revelation but the unveiling of things that were hidden? When hidden matters were shown unto John, he wrote, saying that he saw such things in heaven; yet concerning some things he declared, “*It is not lawful for a man to write of them.*” Therefore Revelation is called an Apocalyptic Book, for it declared things of the future—matters concerning the coming of Christ and the doctrines of the Last Things, which I taught thee previously under the subject of *Eschatology*.

The Unity of Scripture

There are sixty and six books. Yet the Bible is in its essence one, unified, harmonious. There is no contradiction among its books, for the same Holy Spirit moved the writers. Its message also is one. Later I shall unfold what that message is.

The Seriousness of Biblical Interpretation

When we speak of hermeneutics, we must understand: thou holdest not an ordinary book in thine hands. Thou holdest not a textbook of science. The Book which thou didst take from thy

home, and place into thy purse or bag, and bring hither—the Book which I and thou call the Holy Bible, the Word of God—this is no common book. It is the inspiration of God in written form. Now thou art to interpret it, and to proclaim it unto the people. Therefore thy manner must not be careless.

There was once a man—thou mayest have heard this tale before—who said, *“I shall open the Bible at random, and whatever word appeared shall be God’s command unto me.”* But he did not even pronounce it rightly; he said *baibal*, not *Bible*. We must teach the people that the word *baibal* in Urdu signifies *nonsense, foolish talk*. Therefore one must say *Bible*, not *baibal*.

This man opened the Bible at random. The first time, it fell upon a verse saying that God would bless him, and bless his bread and water, and he rejoiced greatly. The next day he did the same, and it fell upon a word declaring that God would enlarge his borders and bless him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He rejoiced again.

But on the third day he opened randomly, and the verse said, *“Judas went and hanged himself.”*

Behold the folly: if thou countest the first two openings as God’s word directly unto thee, then must thou also count the third. Therefore the Bible is not a lottery; it is not a game. One must not trifle with Scripture. One must handle it with reverence. For this cause a course on Biblical interpretation is being taught unto you.

