What Does That Mean?: How to Interpret the Bible
Digging Deeper

How do we rightly interpret and understand the Bible? This is one of the most important questions Christians face. On the surface, it sounds like an easy question. We should take a Bible study methods class – called hermeneutics in academic circles – and we'll be on our way to a lifetime of fruitful Bible study. And yet – not so fast, my friends. There are major debates about interpretation method, sparking tens of thousands of pages of conversation. We can't cover everything tonight. In fact, we can barely scratch the surface. But I hope to give you an in-depth look at the conversation about Bible interpretation. Here are the goals for tonight…

1. That you would understand the issues. We'll introduce you to 3 different ways of reading the Bible, representing the liberal/postmodern perspective, the conservative/dispensational perspective, and the Reformed/evangelical perspective.
2. That you would have embrace the Reformed/evangelical perspective. I'm not giving a neutral presentation here. I very firmly hold to the 3rd of these perspectives, and I'm going to try to convince you to join me in taking that approach to Scripture.
3. That you would fall more in love with Scripture so that you will fall more in love with the Triune God who is revealed on its pages.

So let's start by introducing you to the 3 views.

View 1: Reader-Response View.

This is the liberal/postmodern view. William Stacy Johnson contributed a chapter called 'Reading the Scriptures Faithfully in a Postmodern Age' in the book *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Johnson writes: 'The meaning of texts is not tied to the original intention of an author, for such a thing is no longer available to us. Once in written form, texts take on a life of their own.' In essence, once an author writes, his or her contribution is done. The author is dead. The author's mind or intentions can't really be known, and each reader comes up with an interpretation of a text, and that interpretation is valid for that reader. We'll get way deeper into this after we explain the other views.

View 2: Grammatical-Historical-Literal View.

This is the conservative/dispensational view. The *Got Questions* website promotes this view in an article titled 'What is Textualism?' What they are calling textualism is what I'm calling the grammatical-historical-literal view. Here's how they define it…

'Textualism is especially appropriate in biblical hermeneutics. As conservative Bible scholars are fond of saying, "When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense." Textualism dictates that every word should be taken at its primary, ordinary, literal, historical meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and self-evident and fundamental biblical truths, clearly indicate otherwise. Text without context is pretext or a disguise for deception. Each passage of Scripture has one true interpretation, and, after that is found, we may make application, but only in view of the original context.'

View 3: Grammatical-Historical-Canonical View.

This is the view of the early church and the Reformers around the time of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Though it faded in popularity in 20th century evangelical circles as most conservatives embraced the second view, this view is now roaring back into prominence in evangelical seminaries, evangelical books, and in younger evangelical pulpits.

This view agrees with much of the second view. We would locate the meaning of the text within the text, not within readers of the text. The meaning is there to be discovered. It is not to be invented. We would agree that the author's intent matters. We would agree that the literal sense matters.

But we would go deeper. We affirm the four-fold sense of meaning, as taught and practiced by the early church. Historically this has been called the *Quadriga*, the fourfold sense.

Here's how Patrick Schreiner describes the *Quadriga*…

‘It is popular to assert that each text of Scripture has one primary meaning that can be applied in various ways. But what is the one meaning, of, for example, Acts 2? Is it about mission, the founding of the church, the restoration of Israel, the new covenant, diversity in the early church, the fulfillment of promises, the new creation, Sinai, or temple people? While some hermeneutical methods offer little help beyond the question ‘What is the meaning?’ the fourfold sense provides precise categories to describe the interpretive moves toward these various meanings of Pentecost … The fourfold senses protect against unwarranted interpretations. No method does this perfectly, but the fourfold method was meant to prevent false interpretations … The fourfold method has served as a set of guardrails to centuries of Christians seeking to do orthodox textual interpretation. The fourfold sense not only serve as a guardrail but are constructive and generative for how we can understand the divine voice found in the pages of the Bible.’

The fourfold senses were not formally written down and categorized until the Middle Ages, but we have had these four senses available to us for generations. Here’s a chart with the 4 senses.

Senses	Description	Type of Reading
Literal	What Took Place	Historical
Spiritual	What We Ought to Believe	Typological
Tropological	What We Out to Do	Moral
Anagogical	What We Strive For	Eschatological

So, having introduced the 3 views, I think we can boil things down to 2 key questions, and we’ll use these 2 questions to guide the rest of our time together this evening.

Question 1: Where is meaning located (in the text, the author, or the readers)?
Question 2: How many meanings are in the text (one, four, or infinite)?

The Reader-Response view will argue that meaning is located in the readers, or the reading community, and thus there are as many meanings as there are readers. The Grammatical-Historical-Literal View will argue that the meaning

is located in the text, based on the author's intent, and there is only one right meaning. The grammatical-historical-canonical view will agree that the meaning is located in the text, but it will argue that this meaning is based on both the human author's intent and the divine author's intent in placing deeper meaning in the text beyond what the human author could have fully known while writing, though it's probable the human author knew there was a deeper meaning present. Consider 1 Peter 1:10-12. So then, because there are both plain meanings and deeper meanings, it makes sense to say that there is a fourfold sense of meaning.

Let's start with the first question. Where is meaning located? Perhaps an example will help. One of the biggest current debates in modern American politics involves how to apply the US Constitution. Judges being considered for the Supreme Court are considered either 'originalists' or 'living document' proponents. Originalists say we must interpret the Constitution according to the intent of the Founding Fathers when they wrote it. In other words, it means what its authors intended it to mean. On the other hand, if the Constitution is a living document, its meaning evolves over time, taking historical precedence and current societal views into account to come up with the best reading/interpretation for our current cultural moment. That's how the 1973 Supreme Court could take the 14th Amendment's Due Process clause and find an inherent right to privacy, and thus argue that abortion must be legalized, even though the 14th Amendment, when written, had nothing to do with abortion. Scripture interpretation works the same way. Does it matter what it meant when it was written, or are we free to create new meanings based on our identities, our communities, and our values?

You might be like, 'Well obviously, what matters is what the author meant. The author wrote it, so what he meant matters.' How did we even get to the point where authorial intent didn't matter?

That's where postmodernism comes in. Jacques Derrida presented a paper at Johns Hopkins University in 1966 on the topic of structuralism. This paper sent shockwaves through the academic world and changed how many people interpret the Bible. Structuralism teaches that language depends on basic structures of language, rules about what words mean. But Derrida argued for *poststructuralism*, the idea that there is no underlying structural meaning. Our

structure was just a human invention, a guess. There is no objective reality to which it corresponds. Here's his key quote: 'Identity (the archfoundation of all our philosophical and theological foundations) is constructed when people decide that certain distinctions make a difference, and others do not.'

Richard Rorty, past president of the American Philosophical Association, and Stanley Fish took these ideas further. Rorty said that concepts do not mirror nature or represent how the world really is; they are simply tools humans use. Language is a product of our social conventions and cultural practices, and we use language not to represent what is real, but to push for what we want. So Fish comes along (and I should note that most of this section is basically me quoting from Kevin Vanhoozer's book *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*) and rejects the notion that 'getting it right' in interpretation means recovering the author's mind or intention. He says that meaning is not located in some inert objective entity (the text), but in the dynamic experience of reading. The only text in the class, and the only meaning in this text, therefore, is the text and the meaning that readers produce through their interpretive practices. The significance of Fish's position must not be underestimated: on his view, it is not the author that is the historical cause of the text and creator of meaning, but the readers. In a real sense, for Fish the commentary (interpretation) *precedes* or takes precedence over the text.

So where does all this lead? Let's let Kevin Vanhoozer, a theology professor at our denomination's seminary, Trinity, guide us. His book *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* won 3 awards for theology books published in 2024, including from Christianity Today and The Gospel Coalition.
Vanhoozer writes, 'It is a foregone conclusion in much postmodern literary theory that the author is dead, no longer there to determine or clarify textual meaning. At best, many critics treat the author's voice as but one witness to textual meaning, not an authority. At worst, they regard the author as a mere mouthpiece for the cultural ideologies of the day, in which case the critic's task is to uncover why the author wrote what he did (what power or advantage he was seeking) … So if the text was written to advance a power claim by the author and his community, each new group can interpret it to advance the power of their own community. The conflict of interpretations boils down to differences between interpretive communities, each with its own interpretive interest and corresponding method (consider Black hermeneutics, Hispanic

hermeneutics, Native American hermeneutics, feminist hermeneutics, LGBTQIA+ hermeneutics, anticolonial hermeneutics, impoverished hermeneutics, and probably now body positive hermeneutics). The conflict of interpretations quickly becomes a conflict of interpretive authority between rival interpretive communities, a conflict that eventually escalates into full-scale reading-culture wars.'

So where does all this lead? Let's check in with Dave Tomlinson, who wrote a book called *The Post-Evangelical* in 2003. Though the book is becoming dated, Tomlinson articulates the Reader-Response view. This view argues that the human authors 'faced the limitations and the relativity of their time and culture.' Thus, 'the entire Bible is human word, subject to the strains, weaknesses, and errors of any human product, and therefore requires examination and study with all the critical methods available.' This view even spills into my friend Nijay Gupta's otherwise solid new book *Strange Religion: How the First Christians were Weird, Dangerous, and Compelling*. Toward the end of the book, he says that, even in the Bible – and he makes clear that he does not hold to 'biblical exceptionalism,' where biblical authors are seen as divinely inspired and so speaking for God even when speaking strongly – even in the Bible, early Christians slandered each other and used judgmental speech. He goes so far as to write: 'I wonder if Paul would have edited his speech if he had known that millions upon millions of people would read his words' – in reference to 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, where Paul said the Jews killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, a claim Gupta claims has fueled Christian anti-Semitism. I just can't go there with my friend Nijay. The Bible is not just a human document. It is also a divine document, and therefore it is not subject to error and human sinfulness.

But if you relativize the Bible, you can them re-imagine the Bible. Tomlinson says we can picture, portray, receive, and practice the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, unexamined lens. He's talking here about dominant culture, the idea that my group's views are inherently right. This is the foundation of the White privilege movement, now applied more broadly to the Bible. Tomlinson wants us to use imagination to see the world as it might be rather than as it is. In this view, the text is a launching point for social justice interpretations. The text is a living document, able to be re-read by interpretive communities who want to do

good in the world. And since no reading community has inherent rightness over any other, the only way to judge between readings is to decide which reading is more 'just.'

This feels like confirmation bias, where progressive leaning people decide that the arc of history bends toward justice, and then they define a just world as a world where all their progressive policy goals are realized. And that's exactly how it plays out. Let me give you two examples.

Example 1: Brian McLaren, in his book *A New Kind of Christian*, the first of an important 3-part trilogy about postmodern Christianity, writes this: 'You're aware of how conservative Christians in the United States just 150 years ago used the Bible to defend slavery, just as they did in Jamaica? And now you'd say that those chaps were dead wrong, would you not? … How can you be sure that some of your ironclad interpretations today aren't similarly fueling injustice? … If you have an infallible text, but all your interpretations of it are admittedly fallible, then you at least have to always be open to being corrected about your interpretations, right? So the real authority does not reside in the text itself, in the ink on paper, which is always open to misinterpretation – sometimes, history tells us, horrific and dangerous misinterpretation. Instead, the real authority lies in God, who is there behind the text or beyond it or above it, right? In other words, the authority is not in what I say the text says but in what God says the text says.' And up to this point, I'm nodding in agreement. That's all true. But here's where we part company. I would say, well then, we must be motivated to deeper study, to discover the actual meaning of the text. But McLaren writes, 'Our interpretations reveal less about God or the Bible than they do about ourselves. They reveal what we want to defend, what we want to attack, what we want to ignore, what we're unwilling to question. When Judgment Day comes, God might ask a lot of us how we interpreted the Bible – not to judge if our interpretations are right or wrong but to let our interpretations reveal our hearts. That will be telling enough.' So this gets tricky, because McLaren is much more eloquent than many progressive Christians. He's close to the truth. Yes, God might judge our interpretations because they reveal our sinful hearts. But this doesn't mean that the rightness or wrongness of our interpretation suddenly doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that the rightness or

wrongness of our interpretation can't be checked against the text, to see if the text confirms or denies our interpretations.

Why do I press this point? Because if interpretations can't ultimately be known to be right or wrong, the only criteria we can use is, 'Do they advance the causes of justice and righteousness, what I believe the Kingdom of God to be?' And that, of course, depends 100% on whose view of justice and righteousness we set as our baseline.

Example 2: Let's go back to William Stacy Johnson. How do we decide which interpretation is best? Johnson is a great example of many progressive scholars, because he argues that the best interpretation comes from people with lived experience of oppression, because they see most clearly. Who are these people with superior interpretative insight? 'The poor, the oppressed, the weak, the widow, the orphan, the stranger in our midst,' he claims – and if he was writing in 2025 instead of 2003, he probably would include the undocumented and the transgender, because these are seen as the key oppressed people in our day – and he then argues that we need to focus 'specifically [on] the liberating state of affairs that is yet to come, the future that is still awaited as a realm of justice and peace.

Leave it to Vanhoozer to spell out the implications for us. He says…

'Identity politics dominates large swathes of biblical interpretation. The updated 4th edition of one of the standard hermeneutic textbooks now features a section on 'Exegesis: Identity and Advocacy' (*Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* by John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, Westminster John Knox Press (Louisville), 2022). Reading the Bible in a way that furthers the interests on one's gender, ethnicity, and social class have, for many, become their exclusive interpretive strategy: 'Interpretive approaches closely related to the identity of the reader quite naturally give way to advocacy.' Various liberationist, postcolonial, and feminist approaches to biblical interpretation focus on promoting shapes of human freedom and flourishing, not on reconstructing 'what actually happened.' For example, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorneza denies revelatory status to any biblical text that is not emancipatory for women, deeming any interpretation that is not emancipatory for women to be unethical … Instead of asking whether a reading conforms to this or that

critical method, David Janzen thinks we should ask whether a reading contributes to the emancipation of oppressed minorities and to greater justice for all. The best way to ensure justice, he argues, is to privilege readings that comes for the two-thirds world and from the various colors in the Rainbow Coalition or the LGBTQIA+ community whose voices have been suppressed or excluded from the discussion. The strategic goal is liberation, and the ethical reading is the one that contributes to greater emancipation of the oppressed, whether or not it conforms to standardized exegetical methods … If this is right, then what is 'modern' about biblical interpretation is not simply its scientific probing of the text but its subordination of biblical interpretation to political ends and ultimately a 'secular magisterium.' … D.C. Schindler, a critic of modernity, describes this liberative aim as a flight from reality, by which he means the created order, the only objective criterion for assessing what is truly good for human beings. When democracy (freedom *from* an authoritarian state) does not correspond to created nature (freedom *for*), it tears apart the fabric of society as individuals go their own way, in interpretation and elsewhere. This is Augustine's City of Man, a place marked by love of oneself (and others like oneself), pride in oneself (and one's identity group), and advocacy for oneself.'

So what is the alternative? Do we just not acknowledge oppression and injustice? Do we not agree that people from different backgrounds might find different insights in the text that can help us? Of course we acknowledge those truths, but we don't stop there. The best interpretation is not the interpretation of the most oppressed community, as though we need to count up suffering points to decide who gets to determine what the Bible means. Rather, we do what Vanhoozer commends Esau McCaulley, a Black Wheaton prof, for doing…

'Esau McCaully's *Reading While Black* is an important [book]. He draws on the experience of the Black church to foreground certain questions (about policing and politics) that white interpreters typically do not raise. However, unlike many contextual interpreters, McCaulley does not fall into the trap of simply asserting the superiority of his frame of reference, nor does he allow his own context to trump the biblical text … He realizes there is 'a difference between acknowledging the social location of interpretation and letting said interpretation eclipse the text itself.' In short, he realizes that interpretive

communities must not pursue their own narrow interpretive interests only. 'The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs,' as C. S. Lewis stated in *The Last Battle*, but in the church of Jesus Christ, it must not be the case that the Blacks are for the Blacks, or the whites for the whites, and so forth. Hence McCaulley rightly calls for the varied interpretive communities to turn 'to the text in dialogue with one another to discern the mind of Christ.'

And that's the key. We want to understand the mind of Christ. So how do we discover the mind of Christ? This is where the second guiding question comes into play.

Question 2: How Many Meanings are in the Text?

The reason so many people adopted the Grammatical-Historical-Literal interpretation strategy is because it is clear, clean, and simple. One text. One context. One meaning.

There are a few problems with this view, however.

Problem 1: The New Testament doesn't interpret the Old Testament this way. Consider how Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.' In Hosea 11, God's Son is clearly the nation of Israel. In Matthew 2, God's Son is clearly Jesus Christ. So how can a passage about national Israel be fulfilled in Jesus Christ?

The short answer is that Jesus Christ is true Israel. Galatians 3:16 confirms that Jesus Christ is the true seed, or offspring, of Abraham. But the longer answer is that Hosea 11 has multiple meanings. It had a literal meaning about national Israel in Hosea 11, and it has a figural, or typological, meaning, in Matthew 2.

Typology is the 2nd sense of the *Quadriga*. James Hamilton defines typology this way in his short book *What is Biblical Theology?*, 'The two key features of biblical typology are historical correspondence and escalation. The historical correspondence has to do with the way that real people, events, or institutions match each other – Noah and Moses really were persevered through waters in which others died, for instance. The escalation has to do

with the way that as we move from the initial instance, which we might call the archetype, through the installments in the pattern that reinforce the significance of the archetype, we gather steam in the uphill climb until the type finds fulfillment in its ultimate expression.

Problem 2: The Bible uses words in multiple senses. Here's Vanhoozer on the word 'Exodus'…

The 'exodus' refers not simply to a past event (God's delivery of Israel from bondage in Egypt) but to a characteristic pattern of divine saving action that culminates in what God is doing in Christ, which is why Luke described Jesus' impending death as a 'departure' or *exodos* (Luke 9:31), the ultimate realization of the deliverance that Israel's exodus from Egypt foreshadowed and prefigured. The biblical figures make up not only a symbolic universe but a coherent narrative, connected not only chronologically but by 'providential affiliation through time, as later and earlier witnesses are canonically associated.'

Consider 1 Corinthians 10:1-6. Vanhoozer says 'I have argued that figural readers *discover* a divinely intended meaning already present in the Old Testament.' In other words, 'The spiritual sense is the eschatological fulfillment of the literal sense.' When Paul says that Christ was the Rock and that these things took place as examples for us, how does that work literally? Was the Rock literally Jesus? There must be symbolic language at play here.

Craig Carter helps us here in his book *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*. He writes, 'When we use the world 'literal,' we can refer either to the proposition being asserted or to the figure of speech used to assert the proposition.' He gives a sport example. If you hear, 'Byron Buxton stole second last night,' you'd think the Twins star ran to second while the pitch was going to the plate and beat the tag on the throw from the catcher. You wouldn't assume he grabbed the bag on his way out of Target Field to take it home for the night, which would be a more literal meaning. Carter writes, 'Theological liberals often equate the 'meaning' of biblical metaphors with their own common sense or progressive thoughts or higher religious sentiments in such a way that no one can specify the exact nature of the connection between the biblical text and what the

metaphor in the text supposedly signifies. That lack of connection allows the worldview of the interpreter to become the real source of theological convictions, thus silencing the Bible, which then is reduced to functioning as a symbol of contemporary culture's highest values. Anything that erases the vital connections between what the text says and the content of the doctrine taught in the church undermines the authority of Scripture. This is the legitimate source of the suspicion of any sort of spiritual sense of Scripture, and we must ensure that in talk about any deeper or fuller or Christological meaning attributed to the text, especially that of the Old Testament, we articulate the way in which this meaning is related to the literal sense. If it is not related to the literal sense – that is, to the meaning conveyed – it undermines the authority of Scripture.'

Problem 3: The Bible interprets itself with a view toward Christ's ultimate work (this is called eschatological interpretation).

Let's start by acknowledging that every biblical text has 3 contexts. Trent Hunter (a friend of mine from Moody) co-wrote a great book called *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* with theologian Stephen Wellum. They outline the 3 contexts as…

1. Close Context – The words in their immediate context, both in the literary story and the historical culture.
2. Continuing Context – We look back to see how these words fit into the progressive revelation God is unfolding throughout Scripture.
3. Complete Context – We look ahead, even in parts that precede the coming of Jesus, to consider how every part of every story conveys a message that is centered on Jesus.

So let's pick a totally non-controversial passage, Genesis 1, and apply this matrix. There is nothing preceding it, so the continuing context doesn't apply as much. But there is a big debate between the Answers in Genesis crowd and the Reformed canonical context crowd about Genesis 1. Craig Carter represents my position, which is that the Answers is Genesis crowd is not necessarily wrong, but they are incomplete in their reading, because they only focus on a scientifically literal meaning and don't allow room for the deeper

meaning, the complete context, that Moses (through the Holy Spirit's dual authorship) embedded into the text. Let me quote Carter at length…

'In talking to laypeople and pastors, I find that most who insist on a 'literal' interpretation of Genesis 1 do so because, in their experience, it is the only way to protect the meaning of creation *ex nihilo*, and I share that concern. After all, many of those who have claimed that we ought to take Genesis 1 as a metaphor (or parable, poetry, or allegory) actually have been interested in substituting a very different creation story for the orthodox one … If refusing to take Genesis 1 'literally' ends up meaning that we accept a pagan myth as literally true, then it seems like a shell game designed to deceive the faithful into accepting what the apostle Peter referred to as 'cleverly devised myths' (2 Peter 1:16) … We need to let the literal meaning of Scripture control the interpretation of the text, but doing so does not necessitate ruling out a spiritual meaning that can be described as a *sensus plenior* (deeper meaning) or the spiritual or Christological sense of the text.'

Where does that leave us in interpreting Genesis 1? Vanhoozer describes an early church father like Augustine interpreting Genesis 1 and says, "Although they acknowledged that the people, things, and events that make up the biblical story may mean *more* than history, they do not mean *less* … For example, Augustine saw the literal sense of Genesis as *historia*, a true account of what happened, the basis for further transhistorical truths (i.e., spiritual senses) … While Augustine was open to interpreting the river that flowed out of Eden to become four rivers as referring to the four classic virtues or the four gospels, he nevertheless insisted on their literal meaning too: 'No one, then, forbids us to understand Paradise according to these, and perhaps other, more appropriate, allegorical interpretations, while also believing in the truth of that story as presented to us in a most faithful narrative of events.'

So how do we find the meaning of Scripture?

Notice that the grammatical-historical-canonical approach shares the first 2 words with the grammatical-historical-literal approach.

We believe that there is an actual verbal (here's the grammatical part) meaning that can be discovered in each text. Each individual word has less a

set meaning than a semantic range (consider the word ‘hot’ which means something quite different if you’re talking about a stove vs a shooting guard vs a profile picture on a dating app). The goal of grammatical-historical interpretation is to discover which possible meaning from the semantic range of a word best fits the context of the passage.

You can see how the literal and canonical approaches are quite similar. Thus, the question really isn’t: Is there a literal meaning? There must be. The more important question is: Does God limit his intentions as the co-author of Scripture to only what the human author intended to communicate, or does the divine authorial intent *run deeper and further* that the human authors could have intended? I argue that it does.

Yes, we have the literal sense, the first part of the *Quadriga*. It remains fixed for all time, as it depends on what the human author intended to communicate. Bible students need to study context and language to understand this literal meaning, and though we may not be able to know it perfectly, we should be able to understand it reasonably well, and increasingly more as we learn more about the culture and language of the era in which each passage was written. But we also have deeper meanings.

One last in depth Vanhoozer quote: ‘If [grammatical-historical-canonical, which he calls transfigural] interpretation is reading for the divine intent in canonical context, we read with one exegetical eye fixed on what the words meant in their original context, while the other follows the divine authorial intent across the canonical figures until it is finally figured out in Christ. Our interpretation respects the literal sense by following the direction of the letter from its original sense and historical referent to its final eschatological referent. Eschatology broadens, but does not negate, the historical frame of reference typically associated with literal interpretation. We remind ourselves that everything starts with the letter of the text and with the way the authors, human and divine, make the words run. Second, we remind ourselves that we will understand what the Bible is ultimately about only when we read it with an eschatological frame of reference. The problem with grammatical-historical-literal exegesis is that it can be done with an immanent frame of reference, looking only at bare facts instead of deeper, spiritual truths.

Let me give you three examples of how this plays out in 3 OT passages, and then we'll finish with 10 rules of Reformed Bible Interpretation.

Example 1: Isaiah 7:14. An immanent frame of reference can only see the author's immediate context, so the argument is that *alma* means 'young woman,' not 'virgin,' and the text is talking about a sign baby born in view of King Ahaz's court to confirm God's word through the prophet that Aram and Israel would not be able to topple Ahaz from Judah's throne. But we know the *alma* was not just the young woman who gave birth in Ahaz's time. It also looks forward to the Virgin Mary who gave birth to Jesus (Matthew 1:22-23). It was a prediction about Jesus Christ. We have to read deeper, to find the way God embedded deeper meaning in the text that would only be understood eschatologically, or as Paul said, 'in the fulness of time when God sent his Son' (Galatians 4:4).

Example 2: The Passover and the Plague

An immanent frame of reference says these are great historical reminders of God's faithfulness to Israel during their time of slavery in Egypt. But these concepts keep showing up later in Scripture. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that 'Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Revelation 8 and 16 picture the trumpet and bowl judgments as re-enactments of the 10 plagues in Egypt. Did God intend for us to read Scripture in patterns, as a preview of how he would work in the future? I argue yes. That is grammatical-historical-canonical interpretation.

Example 3: Genesis 1

So I brought up Genesis 1 and argued that it had a deeper meaning. I shared Augustine's idea that the deeper meaning was that the 4 rivers mean 4 gospels or 4 virtues, which I think is ingenious but wrong, because while the 4 rivers are rooted in the text, the fulfillment he proposed was rooted in his speculation, not in a later text. I think that grammatical-historical-canonical interpretation is guarded by ensuring that both the original point of comparison and the fulfillment are rooted in the text.

That's why so much prophecy talk is wrong. It's ironic because it's the grammatical-historical-literal guys who most often do this. For example, one prophecy conference I attended featured a speaker arguing that the pale green horse (the 4th seal) in Revelation 6 meant that Islam would conquer the world, because the pale green color corresponds to their color of Islam's flag. That has no connection with the text. It's speculation based on random correspondence. Biblical figural reading grounds itself in the text on both ends.

What is the deeper meaning in Genesis 1 then? There are so many options that I can only give you a brief smattering of ideas. Consider how light came into the world before the sun was created. Light came on day 1. The sun and moon came on day 4. This corresponds to the idea that Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12) and explains why the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, because the glory of God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb. Do you see how this idea is deeper than what Moses could have intended? Do you also see how this idea is rooted in the text on both ends?

We could talk about how Eden functioned as a sacred Temple with Adam and Eve acting as royal priests for God, ideas that lay the foundation for the entire Scriptural narrative (consider how the story begins in a Temple and ends with the New Jerusalem as a cubed, Holy of Holies style, end times Temple-City).

The point is this: If you only read Genesis for the surface level story or to defend against evolutionary teaching, you miss the deep, rich theology that God the divine author has embedded in the text. We don't want you to give up and concede that God didn't create the world. No, we want you to see all the riches of theology available to see and to savor in this section of Scripture, riches of theology that show the beginnings of God's great redemptive story that centers on Christ.

So let's finish by listing out the 10 rules of Reformed Hermeneutics. This list comes from Brandon Smith's book *Taught by God: Ancient Hermeneutics for the Modern Church*...

1. The meaning of a biblical text is not exhausted by the original intention of the author.
2. The most primitive (oldest) layer of biblical tradition is not necessarily the most authoritative.
3. The importance of the OT for the church is predicated upon the continuity of the people of God in history, a continuity which persists in spite of discontinuity between Israel and the church.
4. The OT is the hermeneutical key that unlocks the meaning of the NT and apart from which it will be misunderstood.
5. The church and not human experience as such is the middle term between the Christian interpreter and the biblical text.
6. The gospel and not the law is the central message of the biblical text.
7. One cannot lose the tension between the gospel and the law without losing both gospel and law.
8. The church that is restricted in its preaching to the original intention of the author is a church that must reject the OT as an exclusively Jewish book.
9. The church that is restricted in its preaching to the most primitive layer of biblical tradition as the most authoritative is a church that can no longer preach from the NT.
10. Knowledge of the exegetical tradition of the church is an indispensable aid for the interpretation of Scripture.

Smith helpfully concludes 'Israel rejected their Messiah in part because they could not move past the literal sense to seeing Christ in their Scriptures.' But all Scripture is about Christ. (Luke 24:44, John 5:46). That is what we want you to embrace, not an overly literal interpretation that cannot see the deeper meaning, but a redemptive-historical approach to the Bible that sees Jesus as the central theme of Scripture, the point of every story, and the goal of our faith.