

Cautions with Midrashic Hermeneutics

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Introduction

Definitions

“In its broadest sense, midrash is interpretation of any text; in its strictest sense, it designates rabbinic biblical interpretation, the modes of exegesis, as well as specific corpora of rabbinic literature from Antiquity to the early medieval period. Through the midrashic process, rabbis made the Bible relevant to their contemporaries, taught moral lessons, told fanciful stories, and created and maintained a sense of Jewishness.”

Carol Bakhos



“Midrash, searching and probing the text of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), divides into two categories. Some midrashic writing deals with practical matters of Jewish law and behavior (halacha), and is known as midrash halakhah. Most midrash explores ethical ideas, biblical characters or narrative moments, and is known as midrash aggadah. (Aggadah literally means “telling” or story.) When Jews use the colloquial “it says in the midrash,” they are usually referring to teachings of midrash aggadah, generally those found in a corpus of classical Jewish texts compiled between about 200 and 1000 C.E.”

My Jewish Learning

2 Chronicles 18:4

And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.

Brown-Driver-Briggs: to practice, study, follow, seek with application.

PaRDeS

פְּשָׁט	<p>Peshat: often inaccurately translated as literal, it comes from the root which means simple, although <i>peshat</i> is sometimes anything but simple! <i>Peshat</i> correctly means the intended, explicit meaning.</p>
רְמֵז	<p>Remez: alluded meaning (reading between the lines). Remez in modern Hebrew means hint. Traditionally, remez referred to methods such as <i>gezera shava</i> (equivalent language implying equivalent meaning) and <i>gematria</i> (word-number values)</p>
דְּרָשׁ	<p>Derash: Homiletical or interpretative meaning. The word 'midrash' is from the same root. The drash is an interpretation that is not explicit in the text.</p>
סוּד	<p>Sod: (lit. secret). The mystical or esoteric meaning.</p>

Rabbinical Midrash

- The story of Terah and Nimrod and the birth of Abraham
- The story of Abraham and the idol shop
- Rebekah was a child of either 3, 7 or 8 years old when she married Isaac
- Adam gave up 70 years of his life for David
- Esther was orphaned as an infant, and nursed by milk produced by Mordecai himself as he could not find a wet nurse

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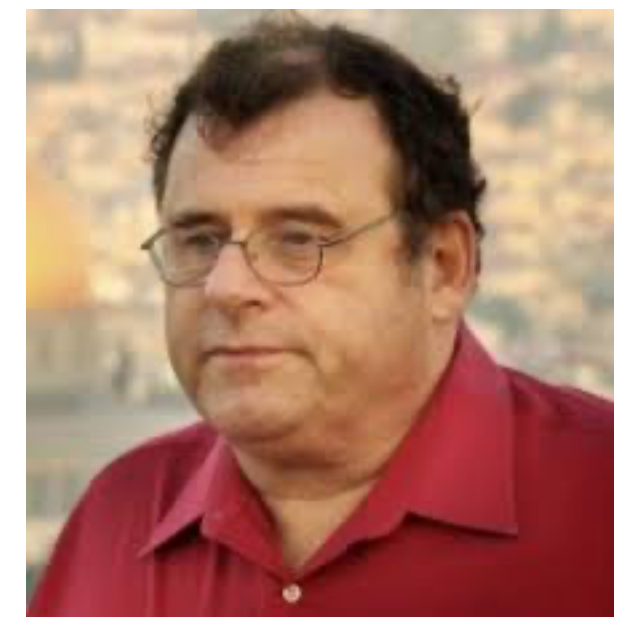


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Midrash as an Evangelical Hermeneutic

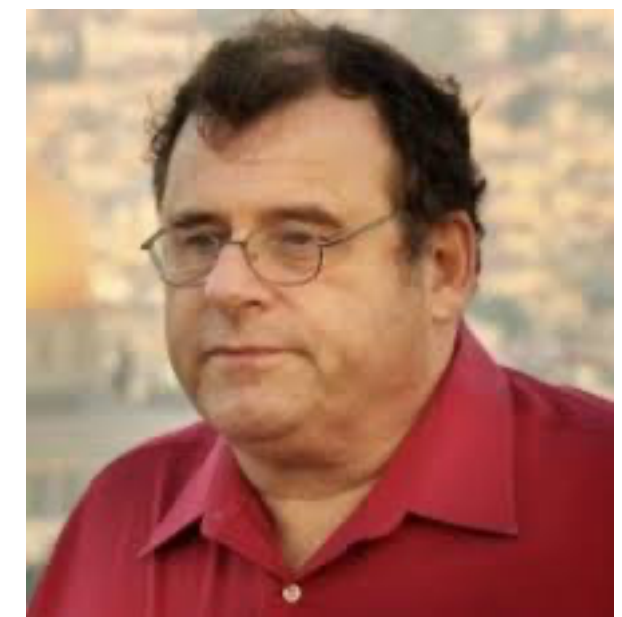
“Midrash is the method of hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation) used by the ancient rabbis in the time of Jesus and Paul. Midrash incorporates a grammatical-historical exegesis, vaguely similar to the western models of Biblical interpretation that the Reformers borrowed from 16th century Humanism, but it sees this as simply a first step.”

Jacob Prasch



“If you look at the way the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, it is clear that the apostles did not use western Protestant methods of exegesis or interpretation. Jesus was a rabbi. Paul was a rabbi. They interpreted the Bible in the way other rabbis did-according to a method called Midrash.”

Jacob Prasch



“I believe that the correct system of hermeneutics is that which may be labelled normal, plain, or literal.”

Charles Ryrie



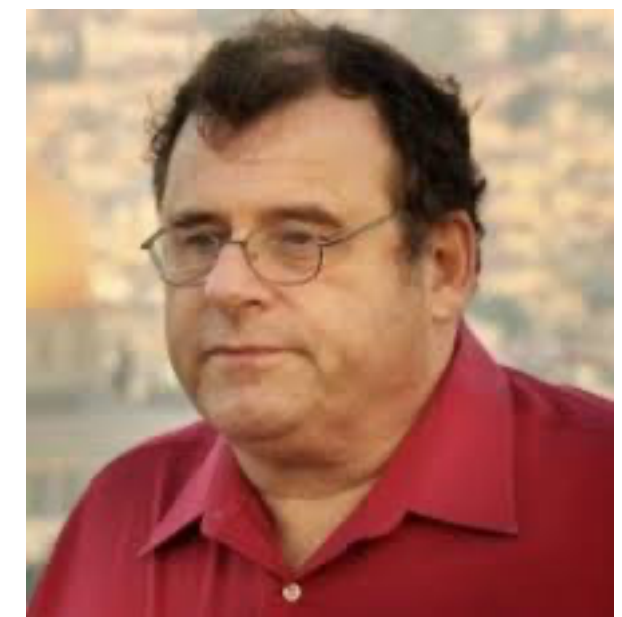
“There is one more technique used by Jewish scholars for Bible interpretation. This is d'rash or midrash. It means "to seek or search" and it implies going a little deeper in your Bible study. Early rabbis devised rules to use during this process, from the seven rules of Rabbi Hillel, to the thirteen rules of Rabbi Ishmael, then to the thirty two rules of Rabbi Eliezer. It's not a technique that would come naturally to you or me, it is unlikely that those of us brought up in Greek understandings of Scripture are going to get to the heart of midrashic techniques. It is one for the scholars and the specialists.”

Steve Maltz



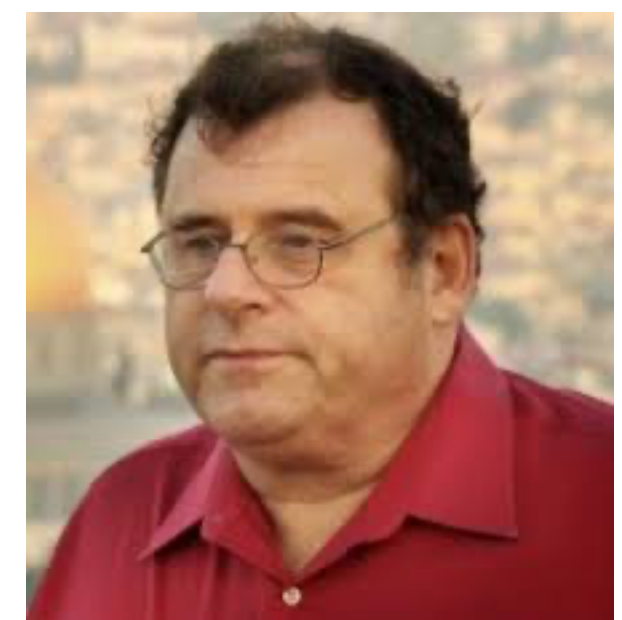
“You will never understand the Book of Revelation with the kind of limited approach to biblical interpretation that is taught in Protestant seminaries. Midrash is like a quadratic equation or a very complex second order differential equation, a thirteen or fourteen step equation. Some people take the first step of grammatical-historical exegesis and think the equation is solved. There is nothing wrong with what they do, but there is plenty wrong with what they don’t do. The equation is not solved. There is nothing wrong with grammatical-historical exegesis. It is a necessary first step, it is a necessary preliminary, and it is okay for reading the Epistles. But that is all.”

Jacob Prasch



“The ancient Jewish mind that produced the New Testament looks at prophecy, not as prediction, but as pattern. To understand what is going to happen in the future, you look at what did happen in the past. There are multiple fulfillments, and each successive fulfilment teaches something about the ultimate one.”

Jacob Prasch



Midrash compared with Grammatical-Historical hermeneutics

“Those who make these arguments believe in “double fulfilment” of certain prophecies. This view is fundamentally wrong. We have come to know that the prophecy about Immanuel refers to the virgin birth of the Messiah—and there is only one true Messiah. If there could be a “double fulfilment,” then why shouldn’t there be a third, fourth and so on? If God was working this way, He would make it impossible for us to follow the fulfilment of His promises. Bible prophecy would become void of any meaning.”

Meno Kalisher



“This author does not accept the validity of the principle of double fulfilment... A single passage can refer to one thing only, unless stated otherwise, and if it is prophecy, it can have only one fulfilment unless the text itself states that it can have many fulfillments.”

Arnold Fruchtenbaum



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Arnold Fruchtenbaum



“Ancient rabbis said there are multiple interpretations of Scripture. Jesus agrees with the rabbis, not the Reformers.”

Jacob Prasch

“Jesus, himself, used midrash.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

This saying uses a midrashic technique known as kal vachomer, meaning "light and heavy". What this really means is that if a minor thing is true, then so would a major one, but more so. Or, if something light is true (e.g. owing someone \$100 is a problem), then something heavy is also true (e.g. owing \$200 is a bigger problem). So, if lusting ("light") after someone is a sin, then how much more a sin would be the actual act of adultery (“heavy”).

Jesus uses kal vachomer a lot and nowhere does it need to be understood more than in the following verses.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30)

The essence is that if a sin can be nipped in the bud while it is still in its "light" stage (just your right hand) then you can be prevented from the implications of the "heavy" stage (going to hell). It is important to see these verses as a figurative example, rather than being taken literally, otherwise there would be a lot of Captain Hooks in heaven!””

Steve Maltz



Some Examples

“In Hebrew, the word *pardes* comprises four Hebrew letters: *pe*, *resh*, *daleth*, and *samech*...The gospel writers were Jewish writers who would have used this familiar way of quoting the Hebrew Bible and in fact, Matthew chapter two has one example of each of these four categories.

Dr. David L. Cooper, the late founder of The Biblical Research Society and well versed in Jewish usage has provided English equivalents to these four categories: literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment; literal plus typical; literal plus application; and summation.”

Arnold Fruchtenbaum



Matthew 2:4-6

1. *Pshat*: Literal Prophecy Plus Literal Fulfillment

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Micah 5:2

1. *Pshat*: Literal Prophecy Plus Literal Fulfillment

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.

Matthew 15:7-9

2. *Remez*: Literal Plus Typical

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

Isaiah 29:13

2. *Remez*: Literal Plus Typical

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Matthew 2:17-18

3. *Drash*: Literal Plus Application

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Jeremiah 31:15

3. *Drash*: Literal Plus Application

Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not.

“The context of Jeremiah 31:15 speaks about the Babylonian Captivity, which was neither historical nor prophetic, but a current event of Jeremiah’s own time. As the captivity was starting, the picture is that the Babylonians gathered all the young Jewish men together at a meeting point where they would then begin marching these young sons away to Babylon. On the way, they went by the town of Ramah near where Rachel was buried. In the Old Testament, Rachel became the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As the young Jewish men were being taken away into captivity, Jewish mothers began weeping for sons they would never see again. Jeremiah pictured this as *Rachel weeping for her children; And she would not be comforted, because they are not*. Rachel weeping symbolized Jewish mothers weeping because their sons were being taken away from them. They were weeping for sons they would never see again. That is the literal meaning of Jeremiah 31:15: Jewish mothers weeping for sons they would never see again. Because of one simple point of similarity, that verse is quoted in the New Testament. It is not a literal fulfillment nor a full-scale typology, but simply an application because of one point of similarity.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum



Matthew 2:23

4. *Sod*: Summation

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23

4. *Sod*: Summation

“The fourth category is a summary of Old Testament teaching, not a direct quotation from the Old Testament. The clue in most cases is when the word “prophet” is used in the plural, as it is used here... Rather than quoting a single prophet, the author is summarizing what the *prophets* said. In this case, the *prophets* said that *he should be called a Nazarene*... In those days, calling someone a *Nazarene* meant he was despised and rejected. The Messiah would be a despised and rejected individual. That is a summation, not a quotation.”

Arnold Fruchtenbaum



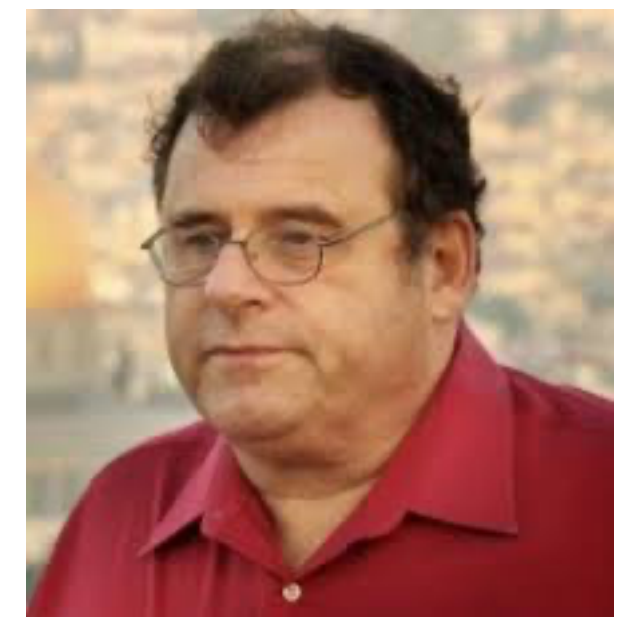
Jacob Prasch's use of Midrash

- The ultimate meaning of "coming out of Egypt" is the resurrection and rapture of the Church.
- The bones of Joseph represent the dead in Christ at the rapture.
- "In six tribulations He will keep us, in seven He will deliver us". ([Job 5:19](#))- Refers to the rapture
- The storm tossed boats in Mark 4 & 6 are a type of the church in the tribulation period, as well as Paul's shipwrecked boat in Acts 27
- The interim period between the ascension and pentecost is a pattern for the tribulation period, with the church on earth, and the Spirit removed and 'only in us.'
- The book of Revelation is a midrash on the book of Joshua:
 - The shutting of the gates of Jericho at night (Jos 2:5) is an 'eschatological nuance'
 - The seven days of marching with 7 marches on the 7th day symbolises the seal and trumpet judgments
 - Rahab symbolises the church in the tribulation and her rescue symbolises the rapture.

Further Problems

“It is the limitation of one’s hermeneutic to a narrow grammatical-historical approach alone which has most resulted in heresy, which is evident in the source criticism and form criticism of almost any faculty of divinity in almost any major university in the world. Not ironically, it has been midrash that has provided conservative scholars with an apologetic against liberal presupposition that we should not take Scripture literally because the New Testament authors did not take the Old Testament literally.”

Jacob Prasch



“It was the devil who tried to pick apart one verse with a pair of tweezers and a magnifying glass with “this is what it says” verse-by-verse exegesis. The church in its hermeneutics is following the method of the devil more than the method of Jesus.”

Jacob Prasch



“Scriptures can only be properly interpreted and understood by consistently applying a literal/normal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic which recognizes the author’s original intent, including the use of literal language, imagery, and figures of speech.”

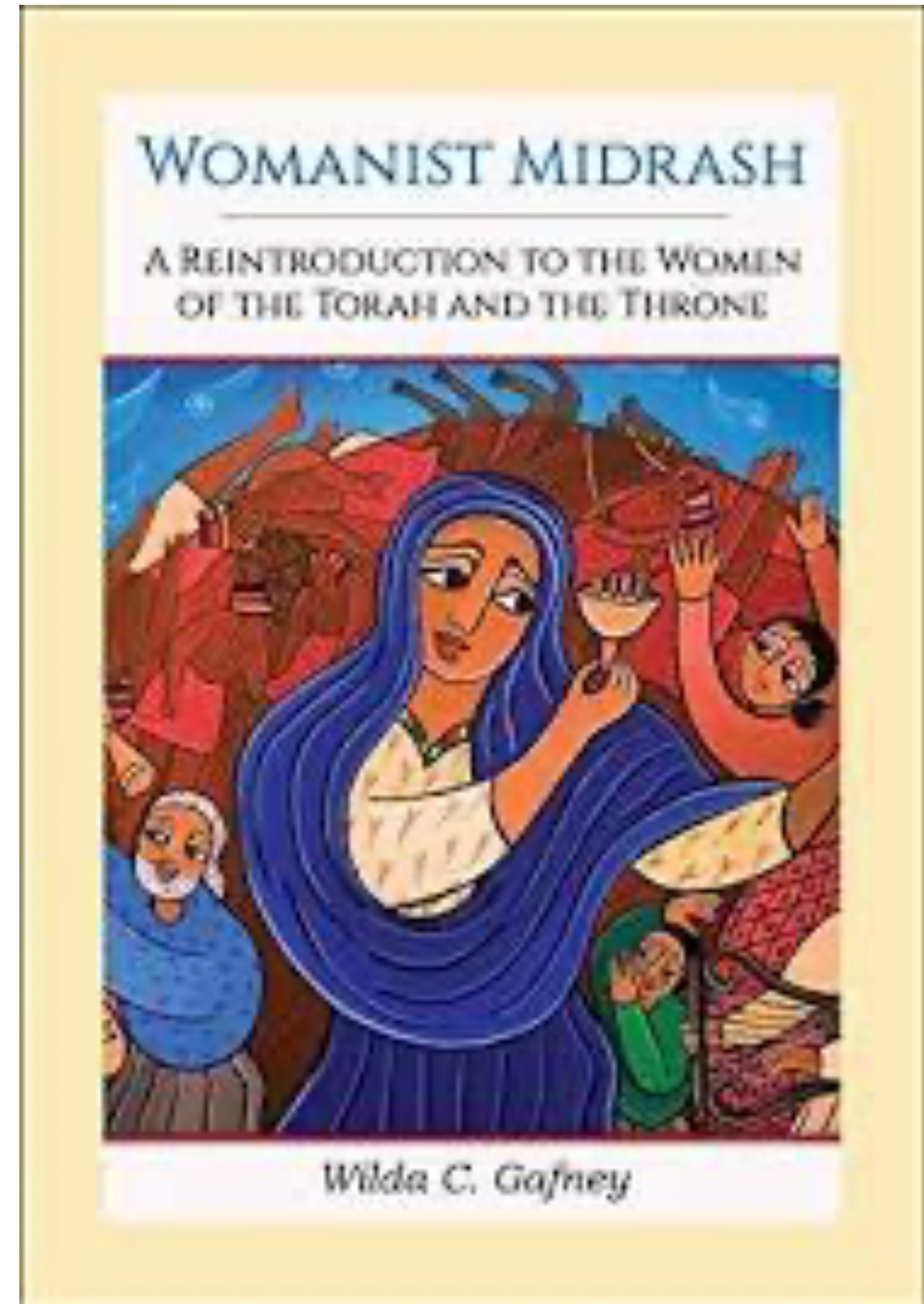
ISBH Doctrinal Statement (biblicalhermeneutics.org)



Womanist Midrash

Wilda C. Gafney

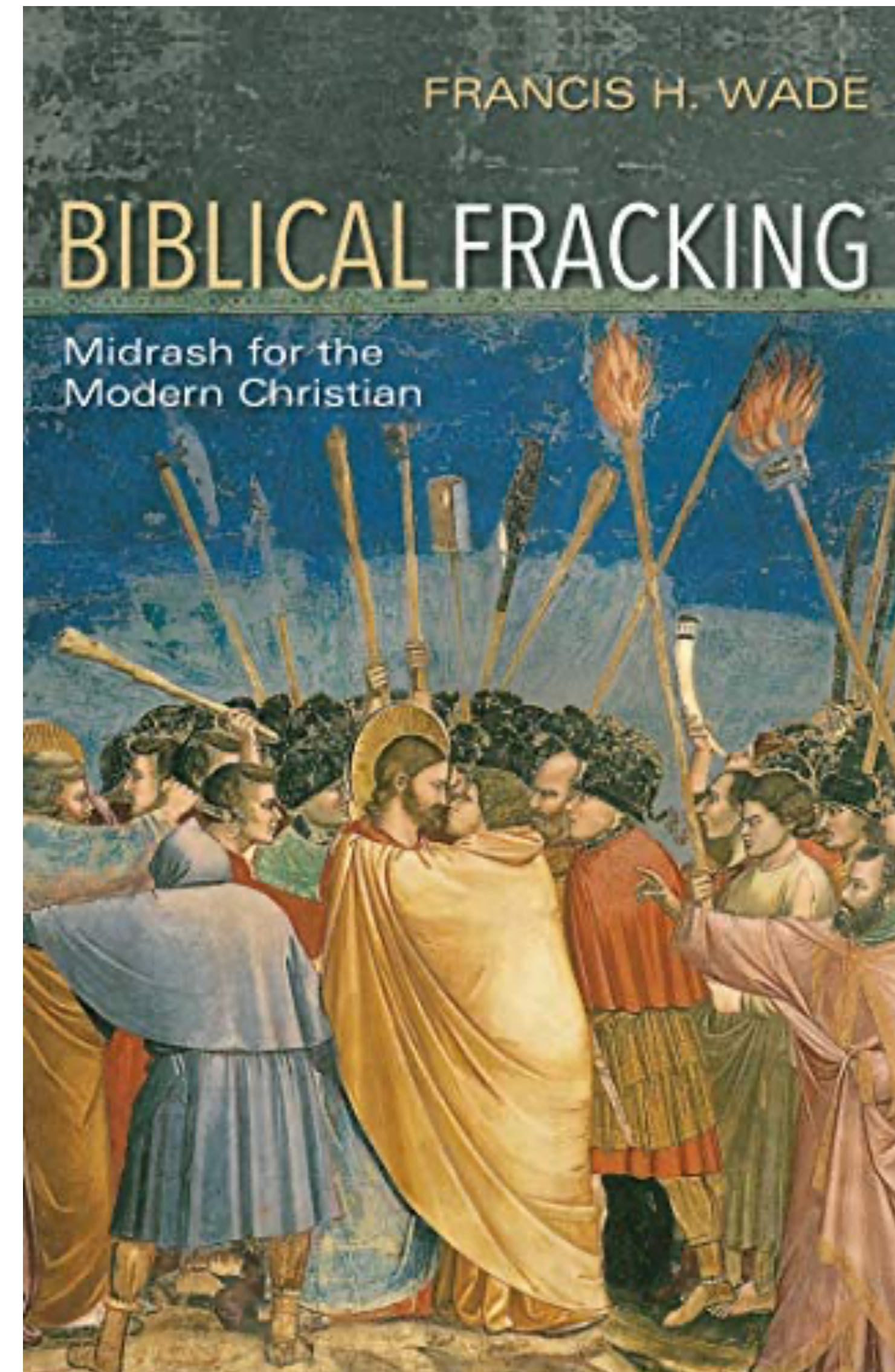
Womanist Midrash is an in-depth and creative exploration of the well- and lesser-known women of the Hebrew Scriptures. Using her own translations, Gafney offers a midrashic interpretation of the biblical text that is rooted in the African American preaching tradition to tell the stories of a variety of female characters, many of whom are often overlooked and nameless. Gafney employs a solid understanding of womanist and feminist approaches to biblical interpretation and the sociohistorical culture of the ancient Near East. This unique and imaginative work that is grounded in serious scholarship will expand conversations about feminist and womanist biblical interpretation.



Biblical Fracking

Francis H. Wade

Christian theology has lacked a tradition resembling Jewish midrash ("inquiring" or "expounding") to explore beyond the literal texts of Scripture. Francis H. Wade fills that gap with **Biblical Fracking: Midrash for the Modern Christian**. As he writes in the introduction, "Biblical fracking, in the spirit of its historical roots and its geological namesake, means reaching into the cracks and crevasses of the biblical narrative to extract the richness that lurks there." All forms of fracking have potential for benefit as well as abuse. Wade leads us on the narrow path to where we can hear God's word in fresh ways.



“The line is thin between extrapolating new meanings from ancient scriptures (borrowing the authority of the old) and actually composing new scripture (or quasi-scripture) by extrapolating from the old. By this process of midrashic expansion grew the Jewish *haggadah*, new narrative commenting on old (scriptural) narrative by rewriting it. *Haggadah* is a species of *hypertext*, and thus it cannot be fully understood without reference to the underlying text on which it forms a kind of commentary. The earliest Christians being Jews, it is no surprise that they practiced haggadic expansion of scripture, resulting in new narratives partaking of the authority of the old. The New Testament gospels and the Acts of the Apostles can be shown to be Christian haggadah upon Jewish scripture.”

Robert M. Price



“But in the end the result is a new perspective according to which we must view the gospels and Acts as analogous with the Book of Mormon, an inspiring pastiche of stories derived creatively from previous scriptures by a means of literary extrapolation.”

Robert M. Price



Conclusion

Conclusion

- Midrash has both a broad and a narrow meaning.
- Ancient Jewish rabbis used midrash to create fanciful elaborations and interpretations of the Biblical text.
- As an evangelical hermeneutic, midrash is presented as a method of interpretation that seeks a deeper, fuller or hidden meaning in order to be able to fill in the gaps of Scripture.
- Whilst elements of what some call midrash are evident in the text of Scripture, these are discoverable by employing a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic, and those midrashic elements and idioms do not justify the use of midrash as an additional and distinct hermeneutic.
- Midrashic hermeneutics goes beyond the simple, plain, normal literal meaning of the text, seeing several different valid interpretations to any one passage of Scripture, and is an elitist method that is subjective, creative and imaginative, and is incompatible with dispensationalism.