
ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract: *The study explores the ethical issues involved in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics, an emerging area of concern as digital technologies increasingly shapes theological research and scriptural interpretation. The introduction situates AI within contemporary Biblical studies, where it is employed for tasks such as textual analysis, language translation, pattern recognition, and comparative exegesis, raising important ethical questions about the role of technology in interpreting sacred texts. The primary objective of the study is to critically examine the ethical implications of AI-assisted interpretation, particularly in relation to interpretive authority, epistemological reliability, accountability, and the preservation of human agency in theological reflection. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical research method, engaging interdisciplinary literature from Biblical hermeneutics, moral theology, philosophy of technology, and artificial intelligence ethics in order to assess how AI systems function and how their use aligns or conflicts with established hermeneutical principles. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to responsible scholarship by providing ethical insight for theologians, Biblical scholars, educators, and faith communities who increasingly interact with AI-driven tools. The findings indicate that while AI offers significant benefits, including increased efficiency, broader access to scholarly resources, and enhanced linguistic and historical analysis, it also presents serious ethical challenges such as algorithmic bias, lack of transparency in interpretive processes, the risk of overreliance on computational outputs, and the potential reduction of the spiritual, contextual, and communal dimensions of Biblical interpretation. The conclusion emphasizes that AI should be understood as a supportive instrument rather than an authoritative interpreter, and argues that the development and use of AI in Biblical hermeneutics must be guided by clear ethical frameworks grounded in theological tradition, hermeneutical responsibility, and critical human judgment to ensure faithful, accountable, and academically sound interpretation of Scripture.*

Keywords: *Ethical Issues, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Biblical Hermeneutics*

Introduction

The contemporary scholarly landscape is increasingly shaped by rapid developments in digital technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), which has

transformed research methodologies across disciplines in both the sciences and the humanities. AI refers broadly to computational systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as pattern recognition, language processing, and data analysis (Russell & Norvig, 2021). Within the humanities, AI has gained prominence in areas such as linguistics, history, and literary studies, where large textual corpora demand sophisticated analytical tools. Biblical studies, as a text-centered and historically grounded discipline, has not been immune to these developments. Digital tools employing AI are now used in textual criticism, semantic analysis, translation comparison, and historical contextualization of Biblical texts.

Biblical hermeneutics, however, is not merely a technical or mechanical exercise. It is a complex interpretive discipline that involves historical awareness, theological sensitivity, ethical responsibility, and communal engagement. As Gadamer (2004) argues, interpretation is shaped by historical consciousness and dialogical understanding, rather than by neutral procedures alone. Similarly, Thiselton (2009) emphasizes that Biblical interpretation requires discernment, judgment, and accountability, particularly because Scripture functions as a sacred text within faith communities. The introduction of AI into this interpretive space therefore raises critical ethical questions about the nature and limits of technological mediation in understanding Scripture. Scholars in the philosophy and ethics of technology have long cautioned that technologies are not value-neutral but reflect the assumptions, priorities, and biases of their designers and data sources (Winner, 1980; Floridi, 2019).

In the case of AI, algorithms are trained on existing datasets that may embed cultural, ideological, or theological presuppositions. When such systems are applied to Biblical interpretation, there is a risk that certain theological traditions or interpretive frameworks may be implicitly privileged, while others are marginalized. Moreover, the increasing reliance on AI tools like BibleAi, Faithcopilot, ScriptureArk, StepBible ChatGPT and Mata AI raises concerns about the shifting locus of interpretive authority from the human interpreter accountable to scholarly and ecclesial communities, to opaque computational systems whose processes are not always transparent or explainable.

The ethical dimension of AI use is particularly significant in Biblical hermeneutics because Scripture is not only an academic object of study but also a foundational source of belief, doctrine, and moral guidance for religious communities. As Green (2017) observes, Biblical interpretation has formative implications for faith and practice, making ethical responsibility inseparable from hermeneutical method. Consequently, the uncritical adoption of AI tools risks reducing interpretation to

technical efficiency, thereby neglecting the spiritual, communal, and moral dimensions that have historically characterized Biblical hermeneutics. This seminar paper situates itself within this emerging discourse, seeking to explore the ethical challenges posed by the integration of AI into Biblical interpretation and to assess how such technologies may be engaged responsibly.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section provides the conceptual and theoretical foundations for examining the ethical issues involved in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics. Because the topic spans multiple disciplines, including computer science, Biblical studies, philosophy, and theology, a clear framework is required to define key concepts and situate them within established scholarly traditions. By clarifying the meaning and forms of AI, outlining the nature of Biblical hermeneutics, examining traditional hermeneutical principles, and engaging ethical theory, this section establishes the basis for evaluating the ethical implications of AI-assisted Biblical interpretation.

Artificial intelligence is commonly defined as the study and development of machines capable of performing tasks that ordinarily require human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, problem-solving, and language processing. A widely accepted definition is offered by Russell and Norvig (2021), who describe AI as the design of intelligent agents that perceive their environment and act rationally to achieve specific goals. This definition emphasizes functional performance rather than consciousness or moral agency, a distinction that is crucial when AI is applied to interpretive disciplines.

Contemporary discussions of AI often distinguish between *narrow (or weak) AI* and *general (or strong) AI*. Narrow AI refers to systems designed to perform specific tasks, such as text analysis or language translation, and it constitutes virtually all current AI applications (Boden, 2016). In Biblical studies, narrow AI is used primarily in text mining, corpus linguistics, and manuscript comparison. General AI, which would possess human-like cognitive flexibility, remains theoretical and is not presently relevant to Biblical hermeneutics.

Machine learning, a major subfield of AI, enables systems to identify patterns in data and improve performance through exposure to large datasets (Mitchell, 1997). Natural language processing (NLP), in particular, has significant relevance for Biblical texts, as it allows computers to analyze linguistic structure, syntax, and semantic relationships across large textual corpora. However, scholars such as Floridi (2019) emphasize that AI systems do not “understand” texts in a human sense; rather, they

operate through statistical correlations. This limitation has important implications for interpretive and ethical responsibility in Biblical hermeneutics.

Overview of Biblical Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics refers to the theory and methodology of interpreting Biblical texts. It addresses questions of meaning, context, and application, and it is shaped by historical, literary, and theological considerations. Traditionally, hermeneutics has sought to bridge the gap between the ancient world of the Biblical text and the contemporary context of the interpreter (Kaiser & Silva, 2007). Modern Biblical hermeneutics has been deeply influenced by philosophical hermeneutics, particularly the work of Gadamer (2004), who emphasized the role of historical consciousness and the inevitability of interpretive presuppositions. Rather than viewing interpretation as a purely objective process, hermeneutics recognizes that understanding emerges through dialogue between text and interpreter.

In Biblical studies, this insight reinforces the importance of methodological transparency and interpretive accountability. Biblical hermeneutics is also distinct from other forms of textual interpretation because of the theological status of Scripture. As Thiselton (2009) notes, Biblical interpretation involves responsibility not only to the text but also to the communities for whom the text functions as authoritative Scripture. This ethical dimension makes the use of AI in Biblical interpretation particularly sensitive, as technological tools may influence theological understanding and religious practice.

Hermeneutical Principles in Traditional Biblical Interpretation

Traditional Biblical interpretation is guided by several well-established hermeneutical principles. One central principle is attention to historical context, which involves examining the social, cultural, political, and religious circumstances in which Biblical texts were produced (Hayes & Holladay, 2007). Another key principle is literary context, which requires sensitivity to genre, narrative flow, and rhetorical structure. The principle of authorial intention has also played a significant role in Biblical hermeneutics, particularly within historical-critical approaches. While contemporary scholarship recognizes the limitations of fully recovering authorial intent, the concern for historical meaning remains foundational (Vanhoozer, 1998).

Additionally, canonical and theological approaches emphasize the coherence of Scripture and its role within the life of the faith community. These principles highlight the limits of AI-assisted interpretation. While AI can support linguistic and structural analysis, it cannot exercise historical imagination, theological discernment, or moral judgment. Ricoeur's (1976) distinction between *explanation* and *understanding* is especially relevant: AI excels at explanation through pattern analysis, but understanding requires reflective human engagement. This distinction underscores the ethical necessity of maintaining human interpretive authority.

Ethical Theory and Its Relevance to Technological Use

Ethical theory provides the normative framework for evaluating the moral implications of AI use. Classical ethical traditions such as deontological ethics, consequentialism, and virtue ethics offer different perspectives on responsibility, outcomes, and moral character (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). These frameworks are increasingly applied to questions of technology and AI. Contemporary technology ethics emphasizes that technologies are not neutral tools but social systems that shape human practices and values (Brey, 2017). Floridi (2013) argues that information technologies reshape moral environments, requiring renewed attention to human dignity, agency, and accountability. In the context of Biblical hermeneutics, ethical theory helps clarify questions such as who bears responsibility for AI-assisted interpretations and how interpretive authority should be exercised. Ethical reflection therefore serves as a corrective to technological optimism, ensuring that efficiency and innovation do not override moral responsibility or theological integrity.

Relationship between Technology, Ethics, and Theology

The relationship between technology, ethics, and theology has long been a subject of critical reflection. Heidegger (1977) famously argued that technology is not merely instrumental but shapes how reality is disclosed and understood. Similarly, Winner (1980) demonstrated that technological systems embody political and ethical values. From a theological perspective, scholars such as Ellul (1964) warned against uncritical reliance on technique, arguing that technological efficiency can displace moral and spiritual discernment. More recent theologians have emphasized the need for theological ethics to guide engagement with digital technologies (Herzfeld, 2009).

In Biblical hermeneutics, this relationship is especially significant because Scripture plays a formative role in shaping belief, ethics, and communal identity. Ethics functions as a mediating discipline between technology and theology, ensuring that technological tools serve human and theological ends rather than redefining them.

This framework supports an understanding of AI as an assistive instrument within Biblical interpretation, subordinate to human judgment and theological responsibility.

Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Biblical Hermeneutics

The application of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics forms part of the broader integration of digital methods into the humanities. Over the past several decades, Biblical studies have increasingly relied on computational tools to manage large textual corpora, analyze manuscript traditions, and examine linguistic patterns across ancient texts. While AI does not replace traditional hermeneutical practices, it offers powerful analytical support that enhances scholarly efficiency and opens new avenues for research. These applications, however, must be understood within the limits of AI's capabilities and the interpretive responsibilities of human scholars.

AI in Textual Criticism and Manuscript Analysis

Textual criticism aims to reconstruct the most reliable form of a Biblical text by examining and evaluating variant readings across manuscripts. The Hebrew Bible and New Testament are preserved in extensive manuscript traditions, making manual comparison both time-consuming and methodologically complex. Digital and AI-assisted tools have significantly enhanced the capacity of scholars to compare manuscripts systematically and consistently. Parker (2008) documents how digitization of New Testament manuscripts has transformed textual criticism by enabling scholars to access and compare high-resolution images of manuscripts. Building on such digitization, computational approaches now allow for large-scale comparison of textual variants.

Tov (2012) highlights the growing role of computerized tools in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, particularly in managing variant readings and classifying textual witnesses. AI-based clustering techniques can assist in identifying scribal habits and transmission tendencies, but scholars consistently emphasize that interpretive judgment remains essential. Textual decisions involve historical reasoning and theological sensitivity that cannot be automated. AI therefore functions as an analytical aid rather than an authoritative decision-maker in textual criticism.

AI-Assisted Translation and Linguistic Analysis

Translation and linguistic analysis are central to Biblical hermeneutics, as meaning is conveyed through ancient languages that require careful grammatical and semantic interpretation. Advances in natural language processing (NLP) have enabled

AI systems to analyze large linguistic datasets, identify syntactic patterns, and compare lexical usage across texts. These tools are particularly useful for corpus-based studies of Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek. Porter et al (2019) demonstrates how computational linguistics has reshaped the study of New Testament Greek by enabling systematic analysis of grammatical structures across large corpora.

AI-assisted tools such as BibleAi, Faithcopilot, ScriptureArk, StepBible ChatGPT, Mata AI and Gemini can identify patterns of word usage, collocations, and semantic domains, providing empirical data that supports linguistic and exegetical analysis. Such tools are also useful for comparing multiple translations, allowing scholars to trace interpretive decisions and theological lines reflected in translation choices. However, translation remains an inherently interpretive and culturally embedded task. Nida (2003) emphasizes that translation involves dynamic equivalence and sensitivity to receptor contexts, dimensions that exceed purely linguistic analysis. AI systems lack cultural awareness and theological intent, making them incapable of evaluating the doctrinal or pastoral implications of translation decisions. Consequently, AI-assisted translation must be understood as a supportive analytical process rather than a substitute for human expertise and interpretive responsibility.

Use of AI in Historical and Cultural Contextualization

Historical and cultural contextualization is essential for responsible Biblical interpretation, as Biblical texts emerged from specific social, political, and religious environments. AI contributes to this task by facilitating the organization and analysis of large bodies of historical and comparative data, including ancient inscriptions, literary texts, and archaeological records. Digital humanities approaches enable scholars to cross-reference Biblical texts with extra-Biblical sources more efficiently, enhancing comparative historical analysis. Metzger and Ehrman (2005) underscore the importance of situating New Testament texts within their broader historical contexts, a task increasingly supported by digital databases and computational tools. AI-assisted text mining can identify recurring themes or linguistic parallels across ancient sources, aiding scholars in reconstructing cultural backgrounds.

Nevertheless, historical interpretation involves narrative coherence, critical evaluation of sources, and awareness of historiographical debates. As Wright (2013) argues, historical understanding requires interpretive judgment that cannot be reduced to data analysis. AI can organize and correlate historical information, but it

cannot assess historical plausibility or theological significance. Human scholars must therefore critically interpret AI-generated insights within established historical and hermeneutical frameworks.

Digital Tools and Algorithmic Pattern Recognition in Exegesis

Exegesis involves the careful interpretation of Biblical texts through close reading, contextual analysis, and theological reflection. Digital tools employing algorithmic pattern recognition have expanded exegetical possibilities by enabling scholars to identify thematic, structural, and intertextual patterns across large textual corpora. Topic modeling, concordance analysis, and semantic mapping allow for systematic examination of textual features that may inform interpretive hypotheses. Rockwell and Sinclair (2016) argue that digital text analysis does not replace interpretation but reshapes scholarly inquiry by enabling new questions to be asked of texts. In Biblical studies, algorithmic tools can highlight recurring motifs, rhetorical structures, or lexical patterns that support literary and theological analysis.

These tools are particularly valuable for tracing intertextual connections within the Biblical canon. At the same time, algorithmic pattern recognition raises hermeneutical concerns. Patterns identified computationally may lack literary or theological significance unless interpreted within a coherent hermeneutical framework. Ricoeur's (1976) distinction between explanation and understanding remains relevant: while digital tools excel at explanation, understanding requires reflective human engagement. Ethical and methodological caution is therefore necessary to ensure that digital exegesis remains grounded in theological and interpretive responsibility.

Ethical Issues Arising from AI-Assisted Biblical Interpretation

The ethical challenges associated with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics are multifaceted, touching on questions of authority, bias, transparency, reductionism, and the spiritual purpose of interpretation. Because Biblical interpretation functions not only as an academic discipline but also as a formative practice within faith communities, ethical evaluation is essential. This section examines the primary ethical issues raised by AI-assisted interpretation, situating them within established hermeneutical theory and contemporary ethics of technology.

Interpretive Authority and Human Agency

A central ethical concern in AI-assisted Biblical interpretation is the question of interpretive authority. Traditionally, Biblical hermeneutics has emphasized the role of the human interpreter, whose task involves historical judgment, theological discernment, and accountability to scholarly and ecclesial communities. As Thiselton (2009) argues, interpretation is not a neutral activity but a responsible act that shapes belief and practice. The introduction of AI tools raises concerns that interpretive authority may be displaced from human agents to computational systems. AI systems can generate analyses, correlations, and summaries that appear authoritative, particularly when presented with technical sophistication. Floridi (2019) cautions that such systems operate without understanding or intentionality, yet their outputs can be mistaken for objective truth. In Biblical hermeneutics, this creates an ethical risk: interpreters may defer judgment to AI-generated results rather than engaging critically with the text themselves.

Human agency is essential because interpretation involves normative decisions that cannot be automated. Ricoeur (1976) emphasizes that interpretation requires reflective appropriation, not merely explanation. AI can assist with explanatory tasks, such as identifying patterns or variants, but it cannot assume responsibility for meaning. Ethical interpretation therefore requires maintaining a clear distinction between analytical assistance and interpretive authority. Preserving human agency also safeguards the communal nature of Biblical interpretation. Interpretation emerges through dialogue within scholarly traditions and faith communities. AI systems cannot participate in such dialogue or bear responsibility for its outcomes. Ethical use of AI must therefore affirm that final interpretive authority remains with human interpreters who are accountable to both academic standards and theological commitments.

Algorithmic Bias and Embedded Assumptions

Another significant ethical issue in AI-assisted Biblical interpretation is algorithmic bias. AI systems are trained on existing datasets that reflect the cultural, ideological, and scholarly assumptions of their creators. As Noble (2018) demonstrates, algorithms can reinforce dominant perspectives while marginalizing alternative voices. In Biblical hermeneutics, this raises concerns about whose interpretive traditions are encoded within AI tools. Biblical interpretation is shaped by diverse theological, cultural, and historical contexts. If AI systems are trained primarily on

Western academic literature or dominant theological traditions, they may unintentionally privilege certain interpretive frameworks while excluding others. Brey (2017) notes that ethical evaluation of technology must account for systemic effects, not merely individual intentions. Algorithmic bias thus becomes an ethical concern with theological implications.

Bias is particularly problematic because it may be invisible to users. Interpreters may assume that AI outputs are neutral or comprehensive, when in fact they reflect selective data inputs. Floridi (2013) argues that ethical responsibility requires awareness of how information systems shape knowledge environments. In Biblical hermeneutics, this includes examining how AI tools frame interpretive possibilities. Addressing algorithmic bias requires critical scrutiny of data sources, design choices, and interpretive assumptions. Ethical guidelines must encourage transparency and pluralism, ensuring that AI-assisted interpretation does not narrow theological discourse or reinforce interpretive dominance. Human oversight is essential for identifying and correcting such biases.

Transparency, Explainability, and Accountability

Transparency is a foundational ethical requirement in both hermeneutical scholarship and AI ethics. Biblical interpretation has long emphasized methodological clarity and self-reflection, enabling scholars to evaluate and critique interpretive claims (Gadamer, 2004). However, many AI systems particularly those based on machine learning operate as “black boxes,” making it difficult to explain how specific results are produced. Burrell (2016) highlights the ethical problem of algorithmic opacity, noting that lack of explainability undermines accountability. In Biblical hermeneutics, this is especially problematic because interpreters must be able to justify their conclusions and methods. If AI-generated insights cannot be explained or critically examined, they fall outside accepted scholarly norms.

Accountability is closely linked to transparency. Floridi et al. (2018) argue that ethical AI requires clear lines of responsibility for how systems are used and interpreted. In Biblical studies, this means scholars must disclose the role of AI tools in their research and remain accountable for interpretive outcomes. AI cannot bear responsibility; humans must do so. Ensuring transparency also supports trust within faith communities. When AI tools influence teaching, preaching, or theological education, communities deserve to know how interpretations are formed. Ethical use of AI therefore requires explainable methods that align with the hermeneutical commitment to openness and critical dialogue.

Overreliance on Technology and Hermeneutical Reductionism

A further ethical concern is the risk of overreliance on AI, leading to hermeneutical reductionism. Biblical texts are complex, multilayered, and theologically rich. While AI excels at identifying patterns and correlations, it may encourage interpreters to prioritize what is computationally measurable over what is spiritually or theologically significant. Ricoeur's (1976) distinction between explanation and understanding is again instructive. Explanation involves analytical description, whereas understanding requires interpretive depth and reflection. AI supports explanation but cannot achieve understanding. Ellul (1964) warned that technological efficiency can displace wisdom, a concern that remains relevant in digital Biblical interpretation.

Overreliance on AI may also discourage slow, attentive reading of Scripture. Hermeneutical traditions emphasize patience, humility, and attentiveness to textual nuance (Thiselton, 2009). When AI tools dominate interpretive practice, there is a risk that interpretation becomes driven by speed and output rather than discernment. Ethically responsible interpretation therefore requires resisting technological determinism. AI should enhance, not replace, careful engagement with the Biblical text. Maintaining balance ensures that technological assistance does not flatten the interpretive richness of Scripture.

Impact on Spiritual, Communal, and Theological Dimensions

Biblical interpretation serves spiritual and communal purposes beyond academic analysis. Scripture functions as a formative text that shapes faith, ethics, and communal identity. As Green (2017) emphasizes, theological interpretation aims at the formation of faithful communities. The use of AI in Biblical hermeneutics raises ethical questions about how technological mediation affects this formative role. AI systems cannot participate in spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, or moral discernment. When interpretation becomes heavily mediated by technology, there is a risk of distancing interpreters from the relational and transformative dimensions of engaging Scripture. This concern is particularly relevant in pastoral and ecclesial contexts.

Ellul (1964) warned that technological systems can reshape human priorities, privileging efficiency over meaning. In Biblical interpretation, this may result in treating Scripture primarily as data rather than as a living text encountered within community. Ethical reflection must therefore consider not only academic outcomes but

also spiritual consequences. Preserving the spiritual and communal dimensions of Biblical hermeneutics requires intentional limits on AI use. Technology must serve the purposes of faith, formation, and ethical reflection rather than redefining them. Ethical engagement with AI thus involves safeguarding the theological integrity of interpreting sacred texts.

Critical Evaluation of Artificial Intelligence Through Hermeneutical and Ethical Lenses

This section offers a critical evaluation of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics by bringing classical hermeneutical principles into dialogue with contemporary ethical theory. While previous sections have outlined the applications and ethical challenges of AI-assisted interpretation, this section moves further by assessing whether and to what extent AI can be used responsibly in Biblical interpretation without undermining its theological, ethical, and communal foundations. The evaluation is structured around compatibility with hermeneutical principles, human responsibility, the theological limits of AI, and the establishment of ethical boundaries.

Compatibility of AI with Classical Hermeneutical Principles

Classical Biblical hermeneutics is grounded in principles that emphasize historical situatedness, textual coherence, and interpretive responsibility. As articulated by Gadamer (2004), interpretation is not a mechanical process but a dialogical engagement shaped by tradition, historical consciousness, and the interpreter's horizon. From this perspective, meaning is not simply extracted from texts but emerges through interpretive encounter. AI, by contrast, operates through formalized rules and statistical correlations, raising questions about its compatibility with such dialogical understanding.

AI tools are compatible with hermeneutical principles only insofar as they support explanatory tasks rather than replace interpretive judgment. Ricoeur's (1976) distinction between *explanation* and *understanding* is crucial here. Explanation involves analytical processes such as identifying linguistic patterns or textual structures areas where AI excels. Understanding, however, requires reflective appropriation and meaning-making, which remain irreducibly human activities. AI can assist in preparing the ground for interpretation, but it cannot fulfill the hermeneutical task itself.

Moreover, traditional hermeneutics emphasizes the importance of context, including historical, literary, and canonical dimensions (Hayes & Holladay, 2007). While AI can process contextual data, it lacks the capacity to weigh competing contextual factors or discern theological significance. Thus, AI is compatible with hermeneutical principles only when it is subordinated to human interpretive authority and employed transparently as an analytical aid.

Human Responsibility and Moral Accountability in AI-Assisted Interpretation

A central ethical concern in AI-assisted Biblical hermeneutics is the question of responsibility. Ethical interpretation requires that interpreters remain accountable for their methodological choices and interpretive conclusions. As Beauchamp and Childress (2019) argue, moral responsibility cannot be delegated to non-moral agents. AI systems, lacking consciousness and moral agency, cannot bear responsibility for interpretive outcomes. Floridi (2013) emphasizes that responsibility in digital contexts lies with the human agents who design, deploy, and interpret technological systems.

In Biblical hermeneutics, this means that scholars, educators, and faith leaders must remain accountable for how AI tools influence interpretation. Treating AI outputs as neutral or authoritative risks obscuring human responsibility and undermining ethical transparency. This concern is particularly acute in theological contexts, where interpretations may shape doctrine, ethics, and communal practice. Thiselton (2009) stresses that Biblical interpretation involves ethical accountability precisely because it affects lived faith. Ethical use of AI therefore requires explicit acknowledgment of human oversight, critical evaluation of AI-generated results, and willingness to justify interpretive decisions independently of technological outputs.

Theological Limitations of Artificial Intelligence

From a theological perspective, AI faces fundamental limitations that preclude it from serving as an autonomous interpreter of Scripture. Theology is concerned not only with information but with meaning, truth, and formation. As Vanhoozer (1998) argues, interpretation involves communicative action between author, text, and reader, situated within a community of meaning. AI systems lack the relational and intentional capacities necessary for such engagement. Ellul (1964) warned that technological systems tend to prioritize efficiency and control, potentially displacing wisdom and moral discernment. In Biblical hermeneutics, this risk manifests when computational efficiency is valued over theological depth or spiritual formation.

AI cannot participate in faith, prayer, or ethical deliberation, all of which shape responsible engagement with Scripture. Biblical interpretation is often oriented toward transformation rather than mere cognition. Green (2011) emphasizes that theological interpretation seeks to form communities in faithful practice. AI-generated analysis, while informative, cannot participate in this formative process. Recognizing these theological limitations is essential for establishing appropriate boundaries for AI use in Biblical hermeneutics.

Ethical Boundaries for the Use of AI in Sacred Texts

Given the ethical and theological concerns outlined above, clear boundaries are necessary for the responsible use of AI in Biblical interpretation. First, AI should function as an assistive technology rather than an interpretive authority. Its role should be limited to analytical tasks that enhance human understanding without supplanting interpretive judgment. Second, transparency is essential. Scholars must disclose how AI tools are used and critically assess their assumptions and limitations. Burrell (2016) highlights the ethical importance of explainability in algorithmic systems, a principle that aligns closely with hermeneutical demands for methodological clarity.

Third, ethical evaluation must consider the broader impact of AI use on faith communities. Winner (1980) reminds us that technologies shape social practices and values. In Biblical hermeneutics, this means reflecting on how AI influences teaching, preaching, and theological formation. Ethical boundaries should therefore be guided not only by technical feasibility but by theological purpose and communal well-being. Ultimately, ethical evaluation affirms that AI can serve Biblical hermeneutics only when it remains firmly embedded within human responsibility, theological reflection, and ethical accountability. This balanced approach preserves the integrity of Biblical interpretation while allowing for thoughtful engagement with emerging technologies.

Implications for Biblical Scholarship and Faith Communities

This section examines the broader implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for Biblical scholarship, theological education, church practice, and future ethical engagement. While earlier sections addressed applications and ethical concerns, this section focuses on how AI reshapes scholarly practice and communal engagement with Scripture, highlighting both opportunities and responsibilities.

Implications for Academic Biblical Studies

The integration of AI into academic Biblical studies has significant implications for research methodology and scholarly practice. One major impact is the expansion of analytical capacity, particularly in handling large textual corpora and complex manuscript traditions. Digital tools enable scholars to conduct comparative and linguistic analyses with greater speed and scope than traditional manual methods (Parker, 2008). This has the potential to deepen textual awareness and encourage more data-informed scholarship. At the same time, the use of AI challenges established norms of scholarly expertise. Biblical scholarship has traditionally emphasized close reading, historical sensitivity, and methodological self-reflection (Hayes & Holladay, 2007). When AI tools are introduced, there is a risk that technical proficiency may be mistaken for interpretive competence. Scholars must therefore develop critical digital literacy to evaluate AI-generated results rather than accepting them uncritically.

Another implication concerns the nature of scholarly argumentation. AI-assisted research may shift emphasis toward quantitative patterns and correlations, potentially privileging what is computationally detectable over what is theologically or historically significant. As Gadamer (2004) cautions, interpretation cannot be reduced to method alone. Academic Biblical studies must therefore retain interpretive judgment as a central scholarly virtue, even as digital tools expand research possibilities. Finally, AI raises questions about accessibility and equity within Biblical scholarship. While digital tools can democratize access to resources, they may also reinforce disparities between well-funded institutions and under-resourced scholars (Brey, 2017). Ethical engagement with AI in Biblical studies must therefore include reflection on institutional responsibility and scholarly inclusivity.

Implications for Theological Education and Training

Theological education plays a formative role in shaping future interpreters of Scripture, and the introduction of AI into Biblical studies has important implications. Seminaries and theological institutions increasingly rely on digital tools for research, language study, and textual analysis. When used responsibly, AI can support students in developing linguistic competence and engaging complex textual data more effectively (Porter, 2016). However, theological education is not solely about skill acquisition; it also involves moral, spiritual, and intellectual formation. As Green (2017) emphasizes, theological interpretation aims to form faithful readers rather than merely informed technicians. Overreliance on AI risks encouraging passive

consumption of interpretive outputs rather than active engagement with texts. Educators must therefore ensure that AI tools are integrated in ways that foster critical thinking and interpretive responsibility.

Another concern is transparency. Students must be taught not only how to use AI tools, but also how to evaluate their assumptions, limitations, and ethical implications. Floridi (2013) argues that ethical awareness is a necessary component of digital literacy. In theological education, this includes reflecting on how technology shapes interpretive habits and theological imagination. Ultimately, the responsible use of AI in theological training requires a balanced approach that integrates technological competence with hermeneutical wisdom. AI should serve as an aid rather than a substitute for disciplined study, communal dialogue, and spiritual discernment.

Implications for Church Teaching and Pastoral Practice

Beyond the academy, AI-assisted Biblical interpretation has implications for church teaching, preaching, and pastoral ministry. Scripture occupies a central role in shaping doctrine, ethics, and communal identity, making interpretive practices ethically consequential. As Wright (2013) notes, Biblical interpretation directly influences how communities understand authority, vocation, and moral responsibility. AI tools may assist pastors and church leaders by providing access to linguistic data, historical background, and comparative interpretations. Such tools can enrich sermon preparation and teaching by expanding interpretive resources. However, ethical concerns arise when AI-generated material is used without discernment or pastoral sensitivity. Interpretation in ecclesial contexts requires attentiveness to lived experience, suffering, and communal formation dimensions beyond the reach of AI.

Moreover, pastoral interpretation is relational. It involves dialogue, empathy, and spiritual guidance, which cannot be replicated by technological systems. Ellul (1964) warned that technological efficiency can undermine human presence and moral attentiveness. In church contexts, uncritical reliance on AI risks reducing Scripture to information rather than a living word encountered within community. Therefore, churches must approach AI with theological caution. Pastoral leaders should remain accountable for how AI tools shape teaching and practice, ensuring that technology supports rather than displaces relational, ethical, and spiritual engagement with Scripture.

Emerging Challenges and Future Ethical Considerations

As AI technologies continue to develop, new ethical challenges are likely to emerge for Biblical hermeneutics. One pressing concern is the increasing sophistication of generative AI systems, which can produce coherent interpretive narratives that may appear authoritative. Burrell (2016) notes that as AI systems become opaquer, evaluating their influence becomes more difficult. This raises concerns about discernment and accountability in interpretive contexts. Another future challenge involves the globalization of Biblical interpretation. AI systems trained primarily on Western academic sources may inadequately represent non-Western hermeneutical traditions. This risks reinforcing interpretive dominance rather than fostering global theological dialogue (Thiselton, 2009). Ethical engagement with AI must therefore include attention to cultural plurality and contextual theology.

There are also institutional challenges related to governance and responsibility. Floridi et al. (2018) argue that ethical AI requires shared responsibility among designers, users, and institutions. In Biblical studies, this means that scholars, educators, and faith leaders must collectively establish norms for responsible AI use rather than treating technology as a neutral tool. Looking ahead, ethical reflection must remain ongoing rather than reactive. As technology evolves, Biblical hermeneutics must continually reassess how new tools align with its theological commitments and interpretive responsibilities. Sustained dialogue between theology, ethics, and technology will be essential for ensuring that AI serves human understanding rather than redefining it.

Guidelines for the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Biblical Hermeneutics

This section proposes ethically grounded guidelines for the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Biblical hermeneutics. Drawing on established hermeneutical theory, ethics of technology, and theological reflection, the section outlines principles intended to preserve interpretive integrity, human responsibility, and theological accountability while allowing for constructive engagement with digital tools.

Human Oversight and Interpretive Responsibility

A foundational guideline for the ethical use of AI in Biblical hermeneutics is the preservation of human oversight in all interpretive processes. Biblical interpretation has historically been understood as a human task that requires discernment, historical

awareness, and moral accountability. As Thiselton (2009) argues, interpretation involves judgment and responsibility because it shapes belief and practice within faith communities. AI systems, lacking moral agency and intentionality, cannot assume this responsibility. Human oversight ensures that AI-generated analyses remain subordinate to scholarly and theological evaluation. Floridi (2013) emphasizes that responsibility in digital environments rests with human agents who design, deploy, and interpret technological systems. In Biblical hermeneutics, this means scholars must critically assess AI outputs rather than treating them as neutral or authoritative conclusions. Ethical interpretation requires that humans remain accountable for both the use and the consequences of AI-assisted interpretation.

Moreover, human oversight protects against the erosion of interpretive agency. Overreliance on AI risks shifting interpretive authority away from trained interpreters toward computational systems. Ricoeur's (1976) insistence on reflective understanding underscores the necessity of human engagement in meaning-making. AI may assist with analysis, but understanding emerges through reflective human encounter with the text. Finally, maintaining human oversight reinforces the communal dimension of Biblical interpretation. Interpretation is shaped by scholarly discourse, ecclesial tradition, and lived experience. AI systems cannot participate in these relational contexts. Ethical guidelines must therefore affirm that AI serves human interpreters and communities rather than redefining the locus of interpretive authority.

Transparency and Methodological Disclosure

Transparency is a central ethical requirement for the responsible use of AI in Biblical hermeneutics. Hermeneutical scholarship has long emphasized methodological self-awareness and critical reflection as essential components of responsible interpretation (Gadamer, 2004). When AI tools are used, scholars must be explicit about how these tools function, what data they use, and how they influence interpretive outcomes. Burrell (2016) highlights the ethical problem of algorithmic opacity, particularly in machine learning systems whose internal processes are difficult to explain. In Biblical interpretation, lack of transparency undermines scholarly accountability and weakens the credibility of interpretive claims. Ethical guidelines therefore require that AI-assisted methods be explainable, documented, and open to critical evaluation.

Methodological disclosure also enables peer review and scholarly dialogue. Biblical studies depend on shared standards of evidence and reasoning (Hayes & Holladay, 2007). If AI-generated insights cannot be scrutinized or replicated, they fall outside accepted norms of academic interpretation. Transparency ensures that AI

functions within, rather than outside, established scholarly practices. In addition, transparency supports ethical pedagogy and ecclesial trust. Students, pastors, and faith communities must understand how technology shapes interpretation. Clear disclosure prevents the uncritical acceptance of AI outputs and fosters responsible engagement with Scripture in both academic and pastoral contexts.

Ethical Accountability and Scholarly Integrity

Ethical accountability is essential for maintaining scholarly integrity in AI-assisted Biblical hermeneutics. Accountability requires that interpreters remain answerable for interpretive decisions, regardless of the tools employed. Beauchamp and Childress (2019) emphasize that moral accountability cannot be transferred to non-moral agents. AI systems cannot bear responsibility for theological claims or interpretive consequences. Scholarly integrity also involves resisting the temptation to prioritize efficiency over rigor. Ellul (1964) warned that technological systems often privilege efficiency at the expense of wisdom and reflection. In Biblical hermeneutics, ethical accountability requires that AI-generated results be evaluated carefully and integrated thoughtfully rather than accepted uncritically.

Furthermore, accountability includes attention to bias and representation. Noble (2018) demonstrates that algorithmic systems often reproduce existing power structures and exclusions. In Biblical interpretation, ethical accountability requires vigilance regarding whose voices, traditions, and perspectives are reflected in AI training data and interpretive frameworks. Finally, ethical accountability reinforces the moral purpose of Biblical scholarship. Interpretation is not merely an academic exercise but a practice with ethical and theological implications. Maintaining integrity ensures that AI serves truth-seeking and faithful interpretation rather than distorting or commodifying Scripture.

Integrating Technology with Theological Wisdom

The final guideline emphasizes the integration of AI with theological wisdom rather than technological dominance. Theology offers critical resources for evaluating technology by addressing questions of meaning, purpose, and moral formation. As Vanhoozer (1998) argues, interpretation involves communicative action within a community of meaning, not merely technical analysis. AI must therefore be situated within a broader theological vision. Integrating technology with theological wisdom requires discernment regarding the goals of Biblical interpretation. Green (2017) emphasizes that theological interpretation seeks the formation of faithful

communities, not simply the accumulation of information. AI tools should be evaluated based on whether they support or hinder this formative purpose.

This integration also calls for humility regarding the limits of technology. Heidegger (1977) cautioned that technological thinking can obscure deeper ways of understanding reality. In Biblical hermeneutics, ethical use of AI requires resisting the assumption that more data or faster analysis necessarily leads to better interpretation. Ultimately, integrating AI with theological wisdom affirms that technology is a servant rather than a master. Ethical guidelines grounded in theology ensure that AI enhances human understanding while preserving the relational, spiritual, and moral dimensions of engaging Scripture.

Conclusion

This study has affirmed that artificial intelligence presents both advantages and disadvantages for Biblical hermeneutics. While AI can enhance analytical capacity and expand access to textual resources, it also challenges traditional assumptions about interpretation, authority, and responsibility. Ethical engagement with AI therefore requires discernment rather than uncritical adoption. Biblical hermeneutics has always been shaped by tools, traditions, and communities. However, as Gadamer (2004) reminds us, interpretation is ultimately a human endeavor grounded in dialogue, history, and understanding. AI must be situated within this interpretive horizon rather than allowed to redefine it.

Theological reflection offers essential resources for evaluating technology. By emphasizing human dignity, moral responsibility, and communal formation, theology provides criteria for discerning the proper role of AI in interpreting sacred texts (Green, 2017). Ethical guidelines grounded in these values ensure that technology serves faith rather than displacing it. Ultimately, the responsible use of AI in Biblical hermeneutics depends on recognizing its limits and affirming the irreplaceable role of human interpreters. When guided by ethical accountability and theological wisdom, AI can support Biblical scholarship while preserving the integrity and purpose of interpreting Scripture.

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