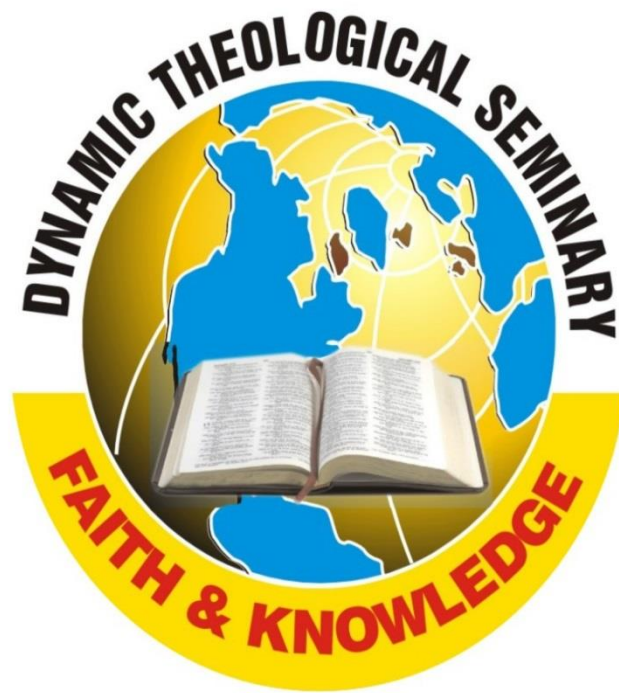


**NEGLIGENCE OF EXEGESIS
AND EMBRACING EISEGESIS: A
STUDY OF DOCTRINAL BIBLICAL
MISINTERPRETATIONS IN
THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH**

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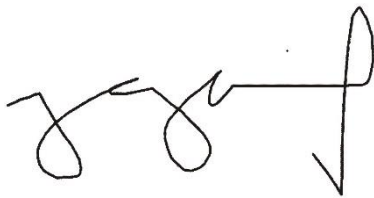
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN
THEOLOGY IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A POST-MASTERS
DIPLOMA IN BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

MAY, 2025

APPROVAL PAGE

This research work has been read and approved by Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Nigeria, an affiliate of Harvest Bible University, Los Angeles, California, United States, in fulfillment of the requirements for a Post-Masters Diploma in Biblical and Theological Education.



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Signature

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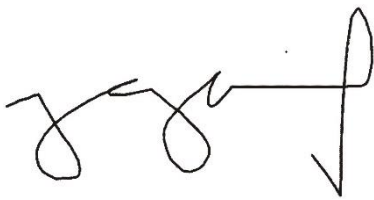
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CERTIFICATION

We certify that this Thesis was written by Dare Eriel Ehigie, with registration number DTS/PMD/2024/2025/03, of the Department of Christian Theology, for the award of a Post-Masters Diploma in Biblical and Theological Education at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Nigeria, affiliated with Harvest Bible University, Los Angeles, California, United States.



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DEDICATION

“To all who have suffered loss for the Gospel of Truth in Christ, Shalom!”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my deep gratitude to the Most High God for sparing my life during the incidents in Lomé, Togo, in 2012 and for enabling me to complete my studies at the esteemed Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State. I would particularly like to acknowledge the steadfast support, love, and prayers from my amazing Urhobo wife, Eseoghene Gift Ehigie (Mrs.), who has lovingly cared for our two wonderful children, Jerrick and Jelroi, reinforcing my appreciation for our blessed union. I am genuinely grateful to my supportive and diligent Supervisor, Professor Joselito Aguid, for his thorough review of my research work. I also thank my dedicated Chancellor and insightful teacher, Rev. Professor Gold Sunday Chukwuemeka, for his impactful teaching and for founding this Seminary. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to the Venerable Dr. Izunna Chjioke Eze, whose teachings played a significant role in the success of my program. To all the other lecturers and faculty members of Dynamic Theological Seminary in Kwale, Delta State, I sincerely appreciate your guidance and knowledge, which have enhanced every student's journey toward becoming ministers of the Most High God. I am pleased that my journey has culminated in completing a Post-Masters Degree in Biblical and Theological Education within the Department of Theology. May God reward you all abundantly. I also acknowledge the contributions of the Seminary's management team for their support throughout this process.

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the growing crisis of biblical misinterpretation in the 21st-century Church, focusing on the shift from exegetical integrity to eisegetical practice. Prompted by the widespread misuse of Scripture in modern preaching, often leading to doctrinal confusion, prosperity theology, and spiritual consumerism, the study critically evaluates ten frequently misapplied biblical texts. It aims to restore theological and interpretive clarity by reapplying traditional hermeneutical principles. The study adopts a historical-analytical research approach and employs a qualitative-exegetical methodology, guided by the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and authorial intent. These frameworks provided a structured lens through which the selected texts were re-examined in their original linguistic, historical, and theological contexts. The research critiques the influence of reader-response theory as a contrasting lens, highlighting its limitations in theological interpretation. Key findings reveal that texts like Jeremiah 29:11, John 10:10, and Matthew 7:1 are often decontextualised, resulting in doctrinal distortions. The study identifies patterns of interpretive negligence and theological fragmentation caused by experiential and motivational reading practices. It argues that sound doctrine must emerge from disciplined, context-sensitive exegesis rooted in biblical theology. The research recommends a reformation in theological education and ecclesial practice. It urges pastors, educators, and seminarians to re-centre biblical interpretation within their curricula and ministries. Furthermore, it calls for continued scholarly exploration into the cultural, digital, and psychological influences on hermeneutics.

Keywords: Biblical Hermeneutics, Eisegesis, Grammatical-Historical Method, Canonical Criticism, Theological Misinterpretation, Doctrinal Integrity

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECWA- *Evangelical Church Winning All. Referenced* in the citation of a thesis from ECWA Theological Seminary.

BCE- Before Common Era: This term is used when dating historical events, such as the Babylonian exile (e.g., 597 BCE).

NT- New Testament. While not explicitly abbreviated in all sections, it is implied in discussions of biblical passages and New Testament texts, such as John and Romans.

OT - Old Testament, similarly implying scriptures like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

cf.- *confer* (Latin), meaning "compare with." Used to refer the reader to other parts of scripture for comparative purposes (e.g., “cf. Jeremiah 29:8-9”).

Gk.- *Greek*. Occasionally used when referring to original biblical terms, such as εὐδοῦσθαι (*euodousthai*) or ὑγιαίνειν (*hygiainō*).

Heb.- *Hebrew*. It may be used implicitly when discussing texts from the Old Testament originally written in Hebrew.

KJV- *King James Version* Appears in a citation of Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock...” (Revelation 3:20, **KJV**)

NIV- *New International Version* Used in Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20, **NIV**)

NKJV- *New King James Version* Cited in Acts 2:4: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (**NKJV**)

RSV- *Revised Standard Version* Quoted in John 10:10: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, **RSV**)

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The history of biblical interpretation reflects a continuous engagement between divine revelation and human understanding. From the Patristic period to the present age, Christian theologians and ecclesial communities have wrestled with the challenge of interpreting Scripture faithfully. The Patristic era (c.100–451 CE) laid the foundation for Christian hermeneutics through a rich blend of theological, philosophical, and pastoral insights (McGrath, 2013). Centres like Alexandria and Antioch developed distinctive hermeneutical styles emphasizing allegorical and literal readings, respectively (Majawa, 2020).

As Majawa (2020) explains, the early Church Fathers emphasized the importance of "paideia," a formative and transformative model of education grounded in divine wisdom. The patristic educational style highlighted an integrated study of the Bible, dogma, and spiritual formation. Unfortunately, this model has been generally abandoned in current interpretation practices, with techniques emphasising personal perception above doctrinal truthfulness.

Contemporary biblical analysis is frequently characterized by relativistic tendencies that prioritize individual viewpoints over communal and authoritative

frameworks. According to Voigt (2016), such tendencies are signs of epistemic relativism, which weakens interpretative processes' legitimacy by separating them from consistent methodical paradigms. When transposed into the church setting, this interpretive subjectivism often results in doctrinal confusion and the misapplication of biblical texts.

Postmodern hermeneutics, particularly reader-response approaches, have further accelerated the rise of experiential theology, where the authority of Scripture is reinterpreted through the lens of personal experience rather than theological tradition (Voigt, 2016). This trend is visible in many strands of contemporary preaching, especially in the widespread adoption of prosperity theology, therapeutic gospel, and motivational Christianity (Chukwuemeka, 2022).

As Chukwuemeka (2022) argues, the 21st-century church urgently needs reformation, not merely organizational or structural but hermeneutical. He highlights the rising commercialisation of the gospel and the misapplication of Scripture to promote actions that contradict biblical truth. The abuse of texts such as Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 4:13 to promote an entitlement theology shows the repercussions of eisegetical interpretation, in which the reader's wants determine the meaning of the text.

In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need to return to exegetical integrity, grounded in the grammatical-historical method and the theological principles established by the early Church. As articulated in Paul's writings and

examined through Pauline theology, the biblical message must be interpreted within its historical, theological, and redemptive context (Tachin, 2012). This study is, therefore, anchored in the conviction that doctrinal soundness can only be achieved when Scripture is interpreted with methodological rigor, historical awareness, and theological coherence. A renewed emphasis on exegesis over eisegesis is academically necessary and ecclesially urgent.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A critical issue facing the 21st-century church is the increasing dominance of eisegesis, reading personal or cultural meanings into the biblical text, over exegesis, which seeks to extract the original, intended meaning of Scripture based on its historical and literary context. This hermeneutical shift has significant implications for theology, discipleship, and ecclesial identity.

As McGrath (2013) notes, the early church emphasized theological reflection rooted in the apostolic tradition and Scriptural coherence. However, many modern congregations have exchanged this robust interpretive tradition for highly individualistic and emotionally driven readings of Scripture. Majawa (2020) also comments that modern theology education has moved away from Patristic paradigms, losing sight of the formative and transformational biblical interpretation based on divine knowledge. This move has led to severe theological instability in many Christian groups.

According to Chukwuemeka (2022), numerous churches have adopted commercialized and motivational forms of Christianity that distort the gospel message by misapplying texts such as John 10:10 and Philippians 4:13. The result is a diluted theological foundation, in which Scripture becomes a tool for affirming personal desires rather than a revelation of God's will. Voigt (2016) links this phenomenon to the growth of postmodern reader-response hermeneutics, which values the reader's background and emotions over authorial purpose and theological tradition. In this paradigm, the authority of Scripture is replaced by the authority of experience, resulting in a collapse in doctrinal coherence and hermeneutic responsibility.

This problem is compounded in theological education by the neglect of exegetical methods and historical theology. As articulated in the National Open University of Nigeria's Pauline Theology course (Tachin, 2012), Paul's epistles reflect a coherent theological structure often overlooked due to superficial or topical reading methods. Paul's pastoral-theological writings offer a corrective to interpretive fragmentation when approached with methodological rigor. The contemporary neglect of hermeneutical accountability, especially the grammatical-historical method, has facilitated doctrinal drift and theological illiteracy. Without a return to methodological soundness and theological depth, the church risks perpetuating spiritually shallow and doctrinally hazardous interpretations.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this study is to critically engage the contemporary crisis in biblical interpretation by highlighting the effects of eisegesis on doctrinal teachings and offering a corrective through historically grounded and theologically sound exegetical practices. This objective is not only academic but pastoral, aiming to restore fidelity to the original intent of the biblical authors, especially in light of current ecclesial trends.

First, the study investigates how eisegesis, where interpreters impose personal, cultural, or ideological meaning onto the biblical text, has shaped the doctrinal framework of many 21st-century churches. The goal is to trace the development of this phenomenon and assess its impact on congregations' spiritual and theological life. Chukwuemeka (2020) points out that many believers today unknowingly follow theological constructions that are disconnected from the teachings of Christ, which is a symptom of a deeper hermeneutical issue.

Second, the study examines specific biblical texts often misappropriated or misapplied in modern theological discourse. Many churches use these texts to support doctrines and practices that are either extra-biblical or in direct contradiction to the intended message of the Scriptures. For instance, passages such as Revelation 3:20 and Matthew 18:20 are frequently drawn from their literary and theological settings and used as proof texts for evangelism or

communal confirmation. Such abuse influences the text, leading to incorrect theological conclusions and ecclesial notions.

Finally, this research intends to contribute to the growing call for a theological reformation in the church that moves beyond surface-level spirituality to embrace a robust, historically rooted, and theologically coherent understanding of Scripture. Chukwuemeka (2022) argues that reformation must begin with how Scripture is read, taught, and lived. This research will help pastors, theologians, and students establish biblical responsibility and hermeneutical authenticity frameworks.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What types of scriptural misunderstanding are prevalent in the 21st-century church?
2. What are the theological and Biblical implications of these misinterpretations?
3. How may historical and exegetical methods address the above concerns?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it has the potential to contribute to scholarly and ecclesial communities by closing the gap between rigorous biblical scholarship and practical theological application.

Pastors and Church Leaders: This study gives pastors the hermeneutical clarity necessary for doctrinal soundness and effective biblical preaching. As

Chukwuemeka (2022) notes in his critique of 21st-century church practices, many church leaders have deviated from foundational biblical teachings due to poor interpretive habits. This research equips leaders to discern doctrinal integrity and resist commercial or culturally driven distortions of Scripture.

Theological Educators and Institutions: The study offers a structured model of integrating historical and exegetical theology into theological education. According to the National Open University of Nigeria's course on Pauline theology (Tachin, 2012), there is a growing need for theological institutions to train ministers in reading Scripture contextually and canonically rather than merely using it as a topical or motivational tool.

Biblical Scholars and Researchers: This study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how interpretive frameworks—especially grammatical-historical versus reader-response methods—shape doctrinal beliefs for scholars interested in hermeneutics and ecclesiology. Chukwuemeka's (2020) and Majawa's (2020) work encourages a return to patristic models of formative, ethical, and Spirit-guided biblical interpretation that resonates with this study's objectives.

Lay Christians: This research helps non-scholarly audiences develop a deeper engagement with Scripture. The study offers tools for responsible Bible reading and theological reflection in a world where many believers are influenced by digital theology and surface-level spirituality.

Ecclesial Bodies and Denominations: The research aligns with global and African calls for doctrinal renewal and hermeneutical reformation. Majawa (2020) stresses the need for the African church to reclaim the Patristic educational heritage, which this study echoes by promoting an interpretive method rooted in divine wisdom and spiritual transformation. This study is a multidisciplinary resource with implications for preaching, theological training, biblical research, and spiritual formation.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study examines ten key biblical texts frequently misinterpreted in contemporary church settings. These passages have been chosen for their doctrinal significance and the extent to which they have been subject to eisegetical treatment in popular preaching, teaching, and devotional literature.

The research primarily focuses on interpretative practices within Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic circles, where subjective, motivational, and prosperity-driven theologies dominate. Chukwuemeka (2022) notes that such traditions often prioritize experience and pragmatic relevance over exegetical fidelity, which results in the widespread circulation of doctrinal errors. However, the research aims not to critique denominational identities but to assess hermeneutical practices across these movements.

The study also excludes purely socio-political, historical-critical, or cultural Bible readings unrelated to doctrinal formulations. Instead, it squarely focuses on the

theological implications of misinterpretation and how these distortions may affect understanding salvation and sanctification, the Church, Christian life, and God's nature. Moreover, the work engages Pauline theology as a framework for explaining interpretive integrity, as Paul's epistles clarify a structured theology and are logically rooted in Christocentric and eschatological tendencies (Tachin, 2012). Though written for specific situations, Paul's letters possess realistic doctrinal depth and remain instructive for contemporary theological doctrines.

This scope is further informed by Chukwuemeka's (2020) Christological reflections, where he insists that all theology must be drawn from and measured by the teachings of Jesus Christ. His emphasis on the foundational role of Jesus' theological teachings in reforming ecclesial understanding guides the study's interest in misinterpretations that undermine Christ-centered doctrine. This research compiles interpretive misunderstandings, evaluates their theological consequences, and proposes evaluative and corrective frameworks foregrounded in sound hermeneutical and theological principles.

1.7 Conceptual Clarifications

This section defines key terms relevant to the research to ensure conceptual coherence and terminological consistency. Clarifying these concepts helps frame the study's methodology and theoretical underpinnings while equipping readers with a shared interpretive vocabulary.

- **Exegesis** refers to critically interpreting a biblical text through its grammatical, historical, and literary context. Exegesis seeks to uncover the original intent of the biblical authors as inspired by the Holy Spirit (Chukwuemeka, 2020).
- **Eisegesis:** The opposite of exegesis, eisegesis involves inserting personal opinions, theological biases, or cultural assumptions into the biblical text. It reflects a reader-centered approach to interpretation that lacks methodological rigor (Voigt, 2016).
- **Hermeneutics:** Hermeneutics refers to the theory and methodology of interpreting Scripture, particularly scriptural texts. It encompasses a range of interpretive models, including grammatical-historical, reader-response, and theological hermeneutics (McGrath, 2013).
- **Doctrine:** In theological studies, doctrine refers to established beliefs and teachings derived from Scripture, often formalized in creeds, confessions, or theological systems. Doctrinal integrity depends on sound interpretation (Tachin, 2012).
- **Misinterpretation:** This term describes the incorrect or distorted understanding of Scripture, typically resulting from eisegesis, lack of historical context, or disregard for theological coherence (Chukwuemeka, 2022).

- **Canon:** Canon refers to the authoritative collection of biblical texts recognized as divinely inspired and normative for faith and practice. Canonical interpretation considers Scripture's unity and theological continuity (Majawa, 2020).
- **Reader-Response:** A modern hermeneutical approach that emphasizes the reader's role in constructing textual meaning. While it may enhance personal engagement, it often undermines textual authority when unregulated (Voigt, 2016).
- **Authorial Intent:** The biblical author's intended meaning of the Scriptures, as analysed through historical, literary, and linguistic criticism. This principle is fundamental to grammatical-historical interpretation of the Scriptures and ensures faithfulness to divine revelation (Tachin, 2012).
- **Inerrancy:** This means believing that Scripture, in its original manuscripts, is without error in all that it affirms. This doctrine undergirds the trustworthiness of biblical insight and influences careful hermeneutics (McGrath, 2013).

1.8 Research Approach

Historical and analytical research approaches are employed in this study, providing a robust framework for evaluating the evolution, misapplication, and doctrinal consequences of biblical interpretation within the 21st-century church.

Historical Approach: The historical dimension of the study draws on the foundational premise that theological inquiry must be contextually grounded. It explores the interpretive practices of significant epochs, including Patristic theology, Reformation hermeneutics, and modern theological discourse, and their impact on contemporary biblical engagement. According to Vos (as cited in Tachin, 2012), Pauline writings illustrate the complexity of reconstructing theology from occasional and pastoral letters. This approach encourages an in-depth appreciation of the way doctrinal integrity is preserved across time when exegesis remains consistent with theological tradition. Furthermore, the historical approach addresses the challenges the historical distance poses between modern readers and the original biblical contexts. Ricoeur (1981d) and Schwandt (2000) observe that hermeneutics evolved from theological text interpretation to a broader human science, allowing interpreters to reconstruct meaning by tracing a text's cultural and doctrinal lineage.

Analytical Approach: The analytical dimension of the research focuses on interpreting and evaluating theological constructs that emerge from distorted readings of Scripture. Drawing from Ricoeur's model of the hermeneutic arc, this

approach includes three interpretive movements: surface interpretation, structural analysis, and critical evaluation. Ricoeur (1981b) emphasizes that meaningful analysis includes the interpreter's subjective experience and objective textual structures. This model allows the study to assess patterns in doctrinal misinterpretation, such as prosperity gospel teachings and exaggerated Pneumatological expressions, by scrutinizing how Scripture is handled across diverse denominational contexts. As Armstrong (1983) and Prasad (2002) suggest, effective interpretive research lies in its ability to provide defensible and reflexive interpretations while avoiding arbitrary relativism. The integration of historical and analytical approaches provides a comprehensive framework for examining the trajectory of biblical interpretations and the theological consequences of hermeneutical ignorance. These approaches direct the research in identifying where doctrinal mistakes arise and how exegetical methods grounded in historical and theological contexts may offer well-researched interpretative evaluations.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Grammatical-Historical Method

Theologian Martin Luther, in 1515, opposed the elaborate four-fold hermeneutic that had been prevalent throughout the Medieval centuries. This resulted in some far-fetched allegorizing of the Bible, leaving scriptural interpretation in the hands of experts, who alone were capable of deciphering the secret meanings of Bible

passages. This eventually led to the Great Protestant Reformation, primarily a hermeneutical fight. Instead of the allegorical hermeneutic, Luther offered a "grammatical-historical" hermeneutic.

The grammatical-historical method is a cornerstone of classical biblical interpretation. This approach seeks to evaluate and understand the biblical text by analyzing its grammatical structure and the historical context in which it was written. As Kassis (2023) outlines, the primary aim is to determine what the text meant to its original audience before making theological applications for today. This interpretive method emphasizes a "plain sense" reading of Scripture, where the original language, literary genre, and socio-historical backdrop work together to convey authorial intent. The grammatical component involves the analysis of sentence structure, syntax, word usage, and literary devices in the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). It focuses on the meanings of the words (semantics) within their immediate context, ensuring that bias in translation or assumptions of modern linguistics do not distort the text. Also, the historical element involves comprehending the passage's cultural, religious, political, and geographical context. For example, interpreting a Pauline epistle without recognizing the Judaic-Gentile tensions of the early church may lead to doctrinal misapplication and misinterpretation (Tachin, 2012).

This method protects against hyper-allegorical and reader-centered approaches to the Scriptures, ensuring that the interpreter does not impose subjective arguments

or meaning onto the text. As opined by Kassis (2023), the strength of this method lies in its ability to anchor theological interpretation in textual fidelity, authorial intention, and canonical coherence. Unlike methods that privilege subjective or contemporary perspectives, the grammatical-historical method allows the Bible to speak within its theological universe before drawing applications for today's context. In this study, the grammatical-historical method addresses doctrinal misinterpretations by returning each biblical text to its original linguistic and situational framework. As Paul's writings demonstrate, accurate theology emerges only when Scripture is handled with integrity and methodological care. The use of this method across the ten analyzed texts will illuminate how interpretive negligence, when this method is ignored, results in theological confusion and ecclesial drift. In this way, the method not only recovers the meaning of Scripture but also re-establishes its doctrinal authority in the life of the Church.

Canonical Criticism & Authorial Intent

Canonical criticism, developed prominently by Brevard S. Childs in the 1970s, is a theological method emphasizing reading the Bible in its final, canonical form. Childs argued that the Bible's canonical shape reflects a historical collection of documents and a theological unity intended to guide faith communities (Childs, 1979). Rather than isolating texts or treating them purely as historical artifacts, canonical criticism insists that the whole meaning of Scripture emerges when

interpreted within the context of the entire biblical canon. This method discusses the theological message in the received text with much importance, thus integrating historical and literary dimensions while resisting overly fragmented or purely critical approaches. Each passage is interpreted within this framework with a broader scriptural emphasis, providing coherence, continuity, and theological depth. *Gesamtbiblische Theologie* (holistic biblical theology), suggests that canonical criticism offers an interpretive strategy honouring textual integrity and ecclesial application.

The important personalities linked with authorial intent are Wimsatt and Beardsley, who fought against its application, and Barthes and Foucault, who questioned the author's whole idea. These thinkers investigated various aspects of how authorial intent relates to literary analysis and interpretation, with Wimsatt and Beardsley opposing using the writer's intent as a standard for evaluating a work of art and Barthes and Foucault challenging the very concept of the writer as a central figure for comprehending literature. The concept of authorial intent is closely related, a principle shared by both grammatical-historical and canonical approaches. Authorial intent seeks to determine the original purpose and meaning that a biblical author intended for his audience. As Tanselle (1989) argues, the integrity of a text depends on preserving its authorial intention, which becomes the standard for distinguishing valid interpretation from distortion.

In biblical interpretation, authorial intent is grounded in the conviction that Scripture was divinely inspired but communicated through human authors within specific historical contexts. The canon's theological unity relies on retrieving these intentions. When we ignore what the author meant, we open the door to personal interpretations, making the text susceptible to being shaped to fit today's ideas. We use canonical criticism and the author's intent to make sure we understand verses on their own and that they fit with the rest of the Bible. This keeps theology consistent, respects how God and humans worked together for inspiration, and strengthens the rules we must follow to avoid twisting doctrine.

Reader-Response Theory (critical contrast)

Reader-response theory came about in the late 1960s and 1970s. It marked a strategic change in the way of looking at texts, which focused on the text itself. This theory puts the spotlight on how readers create meaning from texts. Wolfgang Iser, a German literary expert, was one of the main people behind this idea. His work showed how texts and readers interact in a lively way. Iser (as mentioned in Trisnawati 2016) thought a text is incomplete until someone reads it, and its meaning comes to life through the reader's response. This theory differs from old-school interpreting methods, like the grammatical-historical method. Instead of figuring out what the author meant or putting the text in its historical setting, the reader-response theory looks at how each reader understands and recreates meaning. This depends on their experiences, cultural background, and

emotional connection to the text. As Trisnawati (2016) explains, this approach positions the reader as an active agent, often described as a "re-creator," who shapes the interpretation of a literary or sacred text. Louise Rosenblatt, another foundational voice in this school of thought, argued that reading is a transactional process involving the text and the reader's lived experiences. The text serves as a stimulus, but the meaning is not fixed; it evolves with the interpretive community (Rosenblatt, 1995, as cited in Trisnawati, 2016). Similarly, David Bleich (1978) emphasized that meaning is a negotiated product within a community of readers who share, evaluate, and refine their interpretations.

The reader-response theory offers some pedagogical advantages. It gets students more involved, gives them freedom to interpret, and puts the focus on the learner. However, this approach causes big problems when used for studying theology. By putting the reader's personal views ahead of what the author meant and the text's original setting, this method can weaken the consistency of Biblical teachings. In the church, this has resulted in the proliferation of theological relativism, where multiple, often contradictory interpretations coexist without any objective standard of correction. The reader-response theory is employed critically, not as a recommended model for biblical interpretation but as a contrasting lens that helps explain the rise of experiential and motivational preaching that often misappropriates Scripture. Its critical inclusion allows the researcher to diagnose hermeneutical trends within the church while affirming the

necessity of returning to text-centered, historically grounded interpretive methods.

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, created in 1978 by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, stands as a key declaration to confirm the truth and dependability of the Holy Scriptures. This document addressed rising worries about how liberal theology, higher criticism, and relativistic interpretation weakened the Bible's authority. Over 200 evangelical scholars and leaders, including well-known figures like R.C. Sproul, J.I. Packer, and Norman L. Geisler, wrote and supported the statement. It expresses a strong belief that Scripture, in its original form, has no errors in anything it states. The preamble emphasizes that the Bible is "to be received as the authoritative Word of God" and that inerrancy is foundational to the Christian faith and proper theological formulation (Karanga 1990, in The Gospel Coalition, 2023).

The document consists of a preface, a short statement, and a series of 19 Articles of Affirmation and Denial, covering areas such as inspiration, truthfulness, authority, and the role of human authorship. Of particular importance is the affirmation that inerrancy does not negate the use of literary forms, cultural idioms, or theological emphasis, but insists that these elements must be understood in light of God's intent and not human error. The Chicago Statement is a guideline for understanding the Bible, ensuring that beliefs are based on a

clear and consistent standard of divine truth. It talks about inerrancy, which means the original meaning from the authors is important, and it supports using solid methods like the grammatical-historical approach to interpret Scripture. The Chicago Statement is a key reference point for checking if doctrines have been misinterpreted in this study. It stresses the need to see the Bible as a unified, inspired work instead of something that can be easily changed based on personal opinions. This is especially important when examining how some biblical passages have been twisted to back up biblical errors. The commitment to inerrancy ensures that Scripture is approached not merely as literature but as a revelation, authoritative, trustworthy, and sufficient for faith and practice.

1.10 Methodology

The **qualitative methodology** is adopted in this study due to its analytic and exegetical nature, which requires no numerical data analysis. This research's qualitative-exegetical methodology complements its theoretical base by emphasizing close textual reading, doctrinal discernment, and theological synthesis rather than statistical generalization. Grammatical-historical analysis is employed to interpret the selected texts in their literary, historical, and syntactical contexts, ensuring fidelity to the biblical authors' intent. Authorial intent, as a framework, is deeply embedded in this method. It insists that theological meaning must be derived from what the inspired human authors, under divine guidance, intended to communicate. This harmonizes with the exegetical emphasis on

uncovering embedded truths rather than projecting contemporary meanings onto ancient texts. Furthermore, the methodology's qualitative nature accommodates sermons, theological writings, and doctrinal materials as rich interpretive data sources, which are analyzed through canonical, historical, and thematic lenses.

This study examines how specific Bible texts are misunderstood in today's Christian circles and what those misunderstandings mean for beliefs. It examines the texts closely, focusing on their context and theological points, which aligns with how we approach the history and analysis of these scripts. The research is about understanding the text and its themes. We read the Scriptures carefully to determine what the authors meant and how the passages should be sceptically interpreted historically, culturally, and contextually. This helps us understand biblical semantics and evaluate what is sometimes misinterpreted. Furthermore, this methodology will help to demonstrate how returning to the grammatical-historical method can restore doctrinal clarity. Paul's writings, for instance, offer a well-structured theological framework that reflects a deep concern for doctrinal precision and ecclesial health (Tachin, 2012). Paul's epistles serve as an ideal test case for showing how proper exegesis reveals the coherence and unity of Scripture. Furthermore, by examining misinterpretations of Paul's teachings, the study will clarify how sound theology must emerge from sound hermeneutics.

Data Collection: The data for this research is primarily documentary. It includes the Bible (in multiple translations), biblical commentaries, peer-reviewed theological journals, doctrinal statements, sermons, Christian books, and online resources. Sources were selected based on their influence on popular theology and their engagement with the selected texts. The collection process also incorporates secondary literature on biblical hermeneutics, interpretive theory, and church history.

Data Analysis: The analysis is rooted in the grammatical-historical method and involves several layers:

- **Exegetical analysis:** Focused on each passage's original context, grammar, and syntax.
- **Thematic coding:** Identifying recurring theological errors or patterns in interpretation.
- **Comparative analysis:** Contrasting proper exegesis with common exegetical interpretations in sermons or writings.
- **Canonical synthesis:** Aligning individual verses with the larger redemptive and theological narrative of Scripture.

Validity and Reliability: To ensure methodological integrity, this study applies triangulation by consulting multiple reputable sources for interpretation, including historical commentaries, modern exegetical works, and theological

evaluations. This approach helps mitigate bias and enhances the credibility of findings. Scholarly alignment with traditional orthodoxy and confessional documents (e.g., the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy) provides an additional layer of validation.

Ethical Considerations: The study deliberately avoids personal attacks or denominational critique. This study examines patterns in doctrine and trends in interpretation, rather than focusing on individuals or specific churches. Citations are used carefully, and the discussions are approached with an open mind regarding academic and theological views.

1.11 Organization of Study

The research is divided into six chapters, each building on the one before it to present a clear and structured argument.

Chapter One (General Introduction): This chapter sets the stage for the study, explaining the background, the main issue at hand, the purpose and importance of the research, the questions being asked, and what the research will cover. It also discusses the research methods and the framework supporting the inquiry. This chapter is key to understanding why the research and its academic context matter.

Chapter Two (Literature Review): This chapter reviews existing research on biblical interpretation, looking at traditional and modern approaches. It points out

trends in exegesis and eisegesis and examines their impact on doctrine. The chapter connects the theory to the research approach by discussing the strengths and limitations of earlier studies, ultimately highlighting the gap this study aims to address.

Chapter Three (Textual Analysis 1- Wealth and Success Theologies): This chapter applies the grammatical-historical method to selected biblical passages commonly misinterpreted in the context of prosperity and motivational theology. Texts such as Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 4:13, and 3 John 1:2 are analyzed to uncover their true contextual and theological meanings.

Chapter Four (Textual Analysis II: Ecclesiology and Pneumatology): This chapter examines passages such as Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:4, Isaiah 54:17, and Romans 8:28 to uncover misinterpretations that can impact church practices and beliefs about the Holy Spirit. It uses specific texts and authors to keep everything theological.

Chapter Five (Text Analysis III: Soteriology and Eschatology): Here, we focus on verses such as Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10. These texts are examined in their proper literary and theological contexts to highlight common misconceptions in understanding salvation and Christian hope.

Chapter Six (Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations): In this final chapter, we summarize our findings, present conclusions from the research, and offer practical advice for both academics and everyday individuals. It also

considers the impact of the theories and methods used and points out where we could go next in studying biblical interpretation and theology.

Sectional Summary of Chapter One (General Introduction)

Section	Summary
1.1 Background of the Study	Explores the historical development of biblical interpretation, the rise of eisegesis, and the need to return to exegetical methods.
1.2 Statement of the Problem	Identifies the doctrinal confusion caused by interpretive subjectivism and the neglect of hermeneutical discipline.
1.3 Purpose of the Study	The study aims to address doctrinal misinterpretations through sound exegetical and theological frameworks.
1.4 Research Questions	Lists three core questions exploring misinterpretation patterns, doctrinal impact, and hermeneutical corrections.
1.5 Significance of the Study	It highlights the study's benefits for pastors, theologians, scholars, students, lay Christians, and denominational bodies.
1.6 Scope of the Study	Defines the focus on ten commonly misinterpreted verses and limits the study to doctrinal implications within specific church traditions.
1.7 Conceptual Clarifications	Clarifies key terms, including exegesis, eisegesis, doctrine, hermeneutics, inerrancy, and authorial intent.
1.8 Research Approach	Employs historical and analytical approaches to examine interpretive practices and their doctrinal effects.
1.9 Theoretical Framework	Presents four theoretical frameworks: the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, authorial intent, and reader-response theory, with critiques.

1.10 Methodology	Describes the qualitative and exegetical methodology for data collection, analysis, validation, and ethical engagement.
1.11 Organisation of the Study	Outlines the structure of the study from chapter one through six, including the objectives and content of each chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Overview of Biblical Interpretation

The interpretation of the Bible has undergone several transformative stages, shaped by theological, philosophical, and socio-political factors across different epochs. Central to this development has been the tension between exegesis, interpreting Scripture with attention to its historical and grammatical contexts, and eisegesis, where meaning is often projected onto the text from external sources, particularly the interpreter's assumptions or cultural milieu. The historical trajectory of biblical interpretation is not merely academic but foundational to understanding the doctrinal misalignments in the 21st-century church.

The Alexandrian School and the Rise of Christian Hermeneutics

The Catechetical School of Alexandria played a pivotal role in shaping early Christian interpretation. Figures such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen were foundational in integrating biblical exegesis with classical philosophy. Their work marked one of the first systematic attempts to create a theological framework grounded in the Scriptures but informed by rational inquiry and spiritual discipline (Oliver, 2018). Origen, in particular, developed a multilayered hermeneutical approach, literal, moral, and allegorical, that influenced Patristic thought and laid the groundwork for canonical coherence (Ramelli, 2023).

Willem Oliver and Mokhele Madise (2014) argue that Alexandria should be recognized as a geographic centre and as the intellectual and theological cradle of Christian doctrinal formation. Alexandria's theological reasoning and doctrinal articulation were shaped by a confluence of Platonic and Stoic philosophies, adapted to express Christian truths. This is consistent with the grammatical-historical method, which, although more fully developed later, finds early antecedents in this attempt to preserve authorial intent while also integrating broader philosophical concerns.

Philosophical Foundations in Patristic Theology

The Alexandrian Fathers understood that Christianity, a faith centered on the *Logos* (the Word), necessitated philosophical and logical articulation. According to Ramelli (2023), early Christian thinkers such as Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, and even Justin Martyr perceived theology as an inherently rational enterprise. These early theologians did not see a dichotomy between divine revelation and reason. Instead, they utilized Greco-Roman philosophical categories to articulate doctrines like the Trinity and Christology, especially during the early Ecumenical Councils. This theological integration undergirded the Church's commitment to exegesis that was both faithful to Scripture and intellectually robust, a methodological anchor that contemporary reader-centered models have largely abandoned. The **methodological implications** of such historical and theological developments strongly validate canonical criticism and

authorial intent in this study, aligning doctrinal interpretation with historic orthodoxy.

The Decline and Challenge of Enlightenment and Positivist Legacies

The Enlightenment introduced a radically different hermeneutical climate that discredited ecclesial traditions and posited reason and empiricism as superior to faith-based interpretations. As Baghos (2018) explains, Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Gibbon caricatured Christian theology as irrational and regressive. This epistemological shift led to the widespread adoption of positivism, which denied the interpretive and theological dimensions of sacred texts in favour of so-called “objective” analysis. This period marked a significant departure from both the Patristic exegetical tradition and the grammatical-historical method, instead promoting the fragmentation of the biblical canon into disparate historical-critical units. Such developments have had enduring effects, creating an interpretive environment prioritizing skepticism and fragmentation over doctrinal continuity and theological unity.

Patristic Revival and Contemporary Implications

Rito Baring (2020) highlights a renewed interest in Patristic and medieval frameworks of interpretation in contemporary Bible reading. His empirical research among students suggests that early exegetical attitudes, particularly those emphasizing divine authority, theological coherence, and spiritual formation, continue to resonate, even implicitly. This observation affirms the

relevance of returning to early models of interpretation, especially as modern hermeneutics becomes increasingly experiential and subjective. The historical approach employed in this study enables us to recover the theological wisdom embedded in these early traditions and contrast it with current trends that foster eisegesis. Furthermore, the analytical approach supports the thematic and doctrinal evaluation of selected biblical passages to uncover the implications of neglecting historical and theological contexts.

This historical overview demonstrates that contemporary misinterpretations in the Church are not isolated phenomena but are the culmination of a long departure from historically grounded and theologically coherent interpretive traditions. From the theological innovations of Alexandria to the philosophical grounding of Patristic theology, early Christian interpretation was rigorous and deeply spiritual. However, the rise of Enlightenment skepticism and modern subjectivism has obscured these traditions. This chapter thus lays a crucial foundation for examining doctrinal misinterpretations through exegetical and theological lenses in the following chapters.

2.2 Contemporary Trends in Interpretation

Contemporary biblical interpretation has evolved amidst significant sociocultural, technological, and philosophical shifts. These shifts have contributed to an increasingly pluralistic and subjective hermeneutical landscape within the 21st-century Church. Unlike the Patristic and Reformation periods,

which were rooted in theological coherence and grammatical-historical rigor, modern interpretive approaches often prioritize contextual flexibility, reader autonomy, and technological mediation. This section critically examines key interpretive trends, including digital preaching, reader-centered methodologies, and online spirituality, demonstrating their influence on the proliferation of eisegetical practices and the neglect of doctrinal exegesis.

The Rise of Reader-Centered Hermeneutics: Reader-response theory continues to dominate interpretive discourse in academic and ecclesial settings. According to Bressler (1999), this approach emphasizes shifting the interpretive authority from the author and text to the reader. Iser's theoretical contribution (as cited in Trisnawati, 2009) foregrounds the reader as a co-creator of meaning, allowing subjective experiences, preferences, and cultural frameworks to shape textual interpretation. This model, though pedagogically engaging, has profound theological implications. It decentralizes the authority of the biblical text and undermines authorial intent—a core component of the grammatical-historical method embraced in this study. The reader becomes the arbiter of meaning, often leading to doctrinal relativism and theological distortion. As Van der Merwe (2015) explains, while such interpretive liberty may foster dialogical richness, it often lacks the theological discipline necessary for doctrinal soundness.

Digital Hermeneutics and Online Preaching: The digitalization of Christian communication has redefined the platforms and dynamics of biblical

interpretation. Potgieter (2019) notes that the emergence of virtual churches and online spirituality has reshaped how Christians engage Scripture and community, often in isolation and through highly curated content. Sermons consumed through screens are easily customized to avoid theological discomfort, reducing the challenge and transformation that traditional preaching entails. Similarly, McClure (2017) and Bingaman (2020) observe a correlation between increased internet use and religious disaffiliation, as digital natives increasingly construct personalized spiritualities that reject ecclesial authority and embrace interpretive pluralism. These trends weaken doctrinal accountability and encourage interpretive practices that elevate individualism over communal and canonical theology, precisely the form of hermeneutical negligence this thesis critiques.

Preaching in the Age of Therapeutic Religion: Modern preaching has undergone a dramatic shift in purpose and form. As Agboada (2017) contends, contemporary sermons often prioritize emotional resonance over theological accuracy, turning biblical texts into tools for personal empowerment and psychological affirmation. Preaching that was once focused on doctrinal proclamation and Christocentric exposition now mirrors motivational speaking, emphasizing “Christlike character” and “practical relevance” over soteriological or ecclesiological depth. This trend is not merely homiletical but hermeneutical. The preacher engages in eisegesis under the guise of relevance by distorting texts like Romans 8:28 or Philippians 4:13 into affirmations of personal ambition

rather than theological declarations of divine sovereignty and contentment. As Van der Merwe (2015) warns, such interpretations often ignore the Scripture's literary wholeness and canonical coherence in favour of reader-centered spirituality.

Implications for Doctrine and Church Practice: The combined effects of reader-response dominance, digitalization, and therapeutic preaching culminate in what this thesis defines as the ecclesial crisis of interpretive relativism. Biblical texts are frequently divorced from their historical, grammatical, and canonical contexts, resulting in theological confusion and spiritual superficiality. Van der Merwe (2015) calls for an integrated hermeneutical approach that acknowledges the roles of the author, text, and reader but anchors interpretation in theological tradition and canonical structure. This resonates with the present study's emphasis on the **grammatical-historical method** as a corrective to these prevailing trends. Similarly, Köstenberger's "hermeneutical triad," comprising history, literature, and theology, offers a balanced interpretive model that guards against the excesses of subjectivity and digital disembodiment.

2.3 Theological Impact of Eisegesis

Eisegesis, the interpretive practice of reading personal ideas, cultural assumptions, or theological biases into the biblical text, represents a critical threat to theological integrity in the 21st-century Church. Eisegesis subjects Scripture to the interpreter's agenda rather than deriving meaning from the text as initially

intended by its divine and human authors. The consequence is the emergence of theological constructs that are not only doctrinally inconsistent but pastorally and ethically misleading.

Doctrinal Fragmentation and Theological Drift: Doctrinal fragmentation is the primary theological danger of eisegesis. When Scripture is read in isolation from its canonical, historical, and theological contexts, it becomes vulnerable to distortion. Tolentino (2025) argues that the selective use of Scripture, often as “cherry-picking” verses to support personal or institutional agendas, leads to doctrinal incoherence, promotes exclusivist ideologies, and erodes congregational trust. He cites examples where isolated proof-texting encourages sectarianism or theological exclusivity, such as the practices seen in sectarian movements like the Iglesia Ni Cristo.

Williams (2022) adds that in many African Pentecostal contexts, the misinterpretation of prosperity-related texts, such as Malachi 3:10 or Philippians 4:13, fosters the belief that material wealth evidences spiritual health. This erroneous hermeneutic gives rise to a theology of entitlement and merit, which departs from the biblical themes of suffering, humility, and redemptive grace. Kasera (2022) concludes that prosperity theology, built on misread texts, is based on “faulty hermeneutics” that fail to offer theologically sound or contextually sustainable solutions to poverty. In Namibia, for instance, prosperity teachings

have deepened the gap between spiritual hope and material reality, often trivializing suffering and spiritualizing wealth acquisition.

Displacement of Theological Centrality: Eisegesis often results in the displacement of Christocentric theology. As Ifediora (2013) explains, Patristic hermeneutics sought to safeguard the centrality of Christ in interpreting both the Old and New Testaments. Early Christian exegetes such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr contended that the coherence of biblical theology lies in its Christological fulfillment. However, when texts are detached from this theological centre and manipulated to serve contemporary agendas, they lose their redemptive coherence and become tools for ideological or psychological affirmation.

De Villiers (2019) furthers this concern by noting that theological interpretation today must strive for unity between historical and theological approaches. Historical criticism alone may expose original intent, but it remains spiritually sterile without theological orientation. Eisegesis, in contrast, collapses theological reflection into personal application, resulting in doctrinal dilution and existential confusion.

Ethical and Missional Implications: The ethical implications of eisegesis are profound. Kasera (2022) notes that prosperity teachings often generate unrealistic expectations, leading to spiritual disillusionment, financial exploitation, and moral compromise. Congregants may be encouraged to give sacrificially,

expecting divine reward without adequate theological grounding in suffering, stewardship, or divine sovereignty.

Furthermore, the Church's witness is compromised when it perpetuates theological messages that are empirically untrue and biblically unsubstantiated. According to Williams (2022), the rise in religiously motivated financial crimes and ritualism in parts of Africa has been exacerbated by theological messages that commodify divine blessing. Tolentino (2025) emphasizes that theological misrepresentation weakens spiritual formation and undermines the authority of the pulpit. A pulpit that routinely misuses Scripture becomes a platform for manipulation rather than transformation.

The Hermeneutical Imperative: These impacts demonstrate the urgent need to return to rigorous, historically grounded, and theologically faithful interpretation. Hamadi et al. (2023) advocate for literal interpretation guided by grammatical, genre-sensitive, and historical principles as essential tools for curbing eisegetical tendencies. When Scripture is read carefully to its original meaning and canonical coherence, theological clarity and ecclesial health are restored. De Villiers (2019) further asserts that proper biblical interpretation is not simply about excavating historical facts but enabling transformative theological encounters. The spiritual power of Scripture emerges when its theological thrust, centered in Christ, framed by the canon, and governed by divine intent, is preserved and proclaimed. The theological consequences of eisegesis are not limited to academic errors; they

reverberate through the Church's doctrine, ethics, mission, and credibility. As the data from the reviewed documents confirm, neglecting the grammatical-historical method and embracing subjectivist interpretations can lead to doctrinal deviation, spiritual exploitation, and ecclesial disunity. As supported by scholars across denominational and geographical contexts, the way forward lies in reclaiming exegetical responsibility, theological depth, and hermeneutical integrity.

2.4 Assessment of Theoretical Frameworks

Evaluation of the Grammatical-Historical Method: Strengths and Challenges: The grammatical-historical method (GHM) of biblical interpretation has long been heralded as a foundational tool for achieving exegetical precision and doctrinal fidelity. Its core strength lies in its commitment to uncovering the original meaning of a biblical text by analyzing its linguistic structure (grammar) and the historical context in which it was produced. This fidelity to authorial intent and historical realism is vital when subjective and ideological readings dominate theological discourse. However, while the method boasts notable strengths, it is not without significant challenges, particularly when applied in isolation or misunderstood by interpreters lacking theological depth.

At its best, the grammatical-historical method ensures theological clarity and textual fidelity. Adjei (2024) notes that the approach guards against allegorical excesses and speculative interpretations by tethering meaning to the author's original intent, revealed through careful analysis of grammar and syntax within

the passage's socio-cultural and redemptive-historical framework. This is crucial for safeguarding against eisegesis, particularly when emotionally or culturally charged readings seek to reframe Scripture around modern preferences.

Moreover, by emphasizing grammatical nuance and historical situatedness, GHM offers interpreters a bridge between the ancient text and contemporary application. For instance, Trupbergenov (2022) demonstrates that a synthesis between the historical-grammatical method and intertextual analysis enhances the theological depth of passages such as Matthew 2:15 by situating them within their prophetic and canonical context. This ability to preserve theological continuity across the canon is especially valuable in addressing doctrinal misinterpretations, which often stem from isolated readings devoid of historical layering and literary cohesion. The method's emphasis on literal meaning as foundational also provides an essential corrective to theological relativism. Kamai (2022) emphasizes this in his call for a hermeneutic that stings the conscience and transforms the reader, not merely informs. According to him, when employed alongside theological hermeneutics (as advocated by Ratzinger), the method leads to intellectual understanding and spiritual formation, aligning human interpretation with divine intent.

Despite its strengths, several challenges confront the grammatical-historical method, especially in postmodern or pluralistic contexts. First, as Kamai (2022) rightly critiques, the method can become overly academic when divorced from

theological and pastoral sensibilities, leading interpreters to “withdraw into a philological and critical role” and fail to bring out the text's doctrinal and spiritual significance. This technical reductionism risks turning biblical interpretation into a sterile exercise that neither convicts nor edifies the Church. Another limitation arises from the assumption that historical data is always accessible or sufficient for interpretation. Adjei (2024) shows in his historical-grammatical study of Genesis 3:15 that lexical and contextual analysis alone may not fully grasp the theological weight of “enmity” as it unfolds across the biblical narrative. Some elements, such as messianic anticipation or spiritual typology, require theological discernment that transcends strict historical reconstruction. In such cases, interpreters must balance linguistic and historical precision with theological and canonical coherence, a balance not always easy to maintain.

Furthermore, GHM faces criticism for its vulnerability to secular presuppositions. As Kamai (2022) observes, many scholars influenced by historical-critical paradigms treat Scripture as merely human literature, undermining its divine authority. This leads to skepticism about supernatural elements and spiritual unity within the text, which GHM must affirm if it is to serve a theological purpose. Thus, when employed purely critically, the method may unintentionally facilitate theological skepticism rather than resolve it. Another challenge lies in the method's occasional incompatibility with oral cultures or reader-centered contexts, where theological reflection often arises from community interaction

with the text. While GHM excels in textual reconstruction, it may struggle to resonate with interpretive communities emphasizing lived experience and oral transmission. This is not to suggest that GHM should be abandoned but contextualized and supplemented with canonical, theological, and pastoral insights, as Trupbergenov (2022) suggests in his integrative model.

In the context of this thesis, the grammatical-historical method serves as a methodological backbone for evaluating ten frequently misinterpreted biblical texts. Its strength lies in its ability to reorient the interpreter to the original intent of Scripture, which is crucial in challenging the eisegetical practices prevalent in prosperity theology, therapeutic Christianity, and motivational preaching. However, as the challenges above indicate, the method must be practiced with theological sensitivity, spiritual discernment, and pastoral awareness. This integrative use of GHM ensures that doctrinal fidelity is preserved while maintaining the transformative power of the Word.

Canonical Criticism & Authorial Intent: Their Role in Preserving Theological Unity: Canonical criticism and the principle of authorial intent are indispensable frameworks in preserving the theological unity of Scripture amidst a fragmented interpretive landscape. In a time when interpretive subjectivity, driven by postmodern reader-centered models, threatens the cohesion of biblical theology, these approaches return the focus to the integrity of the text as a

theological whole and to the divine-human intentionality embedded within Scripture.

Canonical criticism, popularized by Brevard S. Childs, is not merely a literary strategy but a theological necessity. It assumes that the final form of the biblical canon carries an inherent theological message, one that emerges only when texts are read in their canonical context. Pereira (2015) explains that the canonical approach enables readers to "illuminate the exegetical task" by prioritizing the theological significance encoded in the biblical canon's narrative, structure, and unity. This is especially crucial in Christian hermeneutics where theological interpretation must move beyond atomistic, historically isolated readings toward an integrated view of Scripture as divinely orchestrated revelation.

Indeed, Pereira (2015) emphasizes that the canonical approach "provides a large window to theological relevance," enabling biblical texts to speak to both their original audience and the contemporary Church through their embedded theological continuity. This synchronic reading of Scripture in its final, canonized form ensures that exegesis remains faithful to textual structure and redemptive intent, making it an ideal method for addressing the doctrinal misinterpretations that this thesis investigates.

Loader (2005), while critical of the idealistic claims of canonical unity, nonetheless affirms the canon's theological role, asserting that "canon is a necessary hermeneutical category for understanding the Bible in terms of

normative theology.” He acknowledges the tension between canonical coherence and historical-critical plurality but insists that canonization remains the church's attempt to preserve theological integrity amid textual diversity. This tension makes canonical criticism powerful: it respects literary and historical complexity while affirming that God has spoken authoritatively through the canonical structure. The methodological implications align with this study's grammatical-historical and exegetical approaches. Canonical criticism does not negate historical awareness but synthesizes it with theological intentionality. Thus, the interpreter does not merely trace textual development but engages with the canon as the theological voice of the ancient and contemporary faith community.

The principle of authorial intent is closely linked to canonical criticism, the idea that a biblical text must be interpreted in light of what its human author, under divine inspiration, meant to communicate. This interpretive model resists the reduction of meaning to reader response or modern theological agendas. Wendland (2020) notes that literary approaches that sideline the author in favour of indeterminacy risk collapsing the theological weight of the text into subjective ambiguity. He critiques post-structuralist tendencies for erasing the author, calling instead for a balanced literary-theological engagement that honours authorial design as part of the interpretive equation. Scroggins (2019) deepens this perspective by arguing that theological unity between the Old and New Testaments cannot be based merely on abstract conceptual links (e.g., Jesus as the

“unifying concept”) but must arise from the shared revelatory intentionality of the Triune God. He contends that a “conceptual hierarchy” exists between Old and New Testament presentations of God, but both derive their coherence from a divine intent that runs through history and Scripture. This theological coherence is grasped only when authorial intent is within the canonical narrative, not detached from it. Moreover, Loader (2005) emphasizes that the canon is “the only context in which theological meaning can be normatively derived.” This underscores theologically that authorial intent is not merely historical but canonical. The inspired authors of Scripture did not write in isolation but within a redemptive arc orchestrated by God. Reading them apart from that context, i.e., isolating Paul from the Law or isolating Jesus’ sayings from the prophets, results in doctrinal disintegration.

In the fragmented interpretive climate of contemporary theology—particularly within digital Christianity, motivational preaching, and prosperity hermeneutics the loss of authorial intent and canonical context leads to the rise of contradictory doctrines and theological confusion. Astapov (2019) warns that when theology fails to maintain a dialectical unity between faith and reason (the mystical and rational elements of revelation), it disintegrates into incoherent discourse. By preserving divine transcendence and historical concreteness, the canonical approach helps prevent such fragmentation by rooting theology in faith and rational textual engagement.

Thus, canonical criticism and authorial intent function synergistically within the broader framework of this thesis to expose, critique, and correct the doctrinal errors that arise from interpretive negligence. Their combined emphasis on the theological integrity, historical situatedness, and canonical finality of Scripture aligns seamlessly with the study's use of the grammatical-historical method and its exegetical methodology.

Reader-Response Theory: Advantages and Theological Limitations

Reader-response theory marks a paradigm shift in literary interpretation by emphasizing the reader's role in constructing textual meaning. Originating from the work of theorists such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Louise Rosenblatt, this theory reorients interpretive authority from the author and text to the individual reader and their contextual experience (Browne, Chen, Baroudi, & Sevinc, 2021). While this shift offers numerous pedagogical and rhetorical advantages, it also introduces significant theological limitations—particularly when applied to sacred texts like the Bible.

Advantages of Reader-Response Theory

One of the foremost strengths of the reader-response theory is its capacity to foster active engagement and personal identification with the text. According to Mart (2019), the transactional model championed by Rosenblatt (1978) asserts that meaning arises from a dynamic interplay between text and reader, where both are mutually influential. In this view, Scripture becomes “alive” not in isolation

but in the reader's response, enhancing emotional and intellectual involvement. This is particularly useful in educational and homiletical contexts, where engaging learners or congregants in a dialogue with the text fosters deeper comprehension and critical thinking (Mart, 2019). This theory also democratizes interpretation by acknowledging the legitimacy of diverse readings shaped by gender, ethnicity, culture, and social position. As Nolte (2012) explains, the reader-response theory empowers marginalized voices by encouraging readers to confront and deconstruct dominant interpretations. Through this lens, readers become co-creators of meaning, participating in a communal hermeneutical process that reflects their lived realities and theological concerns.

Moreover, the reader-response theory cultivates interpretive plurality and empathy in literature discussions and pedagogical settings. Wendland (2020) acknowledges that by integrating the reader's context into the interpretive act, this model opens space for moral reasoning, emotional processing, and intercultural dialogue. When responsibly facilitated, such discourse fosters humility and theological curiosity, prompting readers to explore their assumptions and biases.

Despite its advantages, the reader-response theory raises considerable concerns within biblical interpretation. Chief among these is the relativization of textual meaning. As Iser (1978) and Fish (1980) note, meaning is no longer situated in the text or the author's intent but in the reader's subjective experience. While this

may enrich literary analysis, it poses a theological threat when applied to divinely inspired Scripture, as it risks detaching the text from its authoritative, revelatory function.

Nolte (2012) warns that such an approach opens the door to “theological impressionism,” where individual or cultural preferences undermine biblical authority. Instead of being an encounter with divine revelation, the interpretive act becomes an exercise in self-expression, leading to doctrinal incoherence and the potential abuse of Scripture to justify incompatible or heretical positions. Another critical limitation is the neglect of authorial intent. As Wendland (2020) cautions, reader-centered approaches often marginalize or even reject the importance of understanding what the biblical authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, intended to convey. This contradicts the foundations of grammatical-historical exegesis, which anchors theology in historical context, linguistic precision, and canonical coherence. Without grounding in authorial intent, theological interpretation becomes unmoored and susceptible to manipulation.

Furthermore, the theory’s assumption of the “indeterminacy of meaning” (Wendland, 2020) is fundamentally at odds with Christian doctrines of biblical clarity (perspicuity) and sufficiency. While it is true that some passages are complex and admit multiple layers of meaning, to claim that all meanings are reader-generated denies the objectivity and trustworthiness of Scripture. Browne et al. (2021) underscore that while social and cultural contexts shape reading, they

must not eclipse the theological integrity of the text. Finally, as noted in the Oxford Bibliographies (Browne et al., 2021), reader-response theorists often sideline interpretive constraints such as genre, syntax, and theological continuity. In theological interpretation, however, such constraints are not optional—they are the very tools by which fidelity to the divine message is preserved. The theological community must, therefore, be cautious in adopting reader-response principles without appropriate hermeneutical safeguards.

The reader-response theory offers valuable pedagogical and rhetorical tools for engaging Scripture at a personal and communal level. It affirms the reader's context and experiences, fosters interpretive dialogue, and enhances educational outcomes. However, its theological application is limited by its relativistic tendencies, neglect of authorial intent, and potential to distort doctrinal truths. This part of the research aligns with the grammatical-historical and canonical approaches and critically engages the reader-response theory as a diagnostic tool rather than a prescriptive model. It explains the rise of experiential and motivational misreading in the 21st-century Church. It underscores the need to return to interpretive discipline that prioritizes the text's original meaning and theological coherence.

Application of Each Framework to Selected Literature

This study applies four major hermeneutical frameworks to adequately assess the doctrinal misinterpretations prevalent in the 21st-century Church: the

grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, authorial intent, and a critical engagement with reader-response theory. These interpretive models are employed not as abstract theories but as practical tools for evaluating how Scripture has been interpreted or misinterpreted across various theological and ecclesial contexts. Applying these frameworks to selected literature reveals interpretive strengths, prevailing errors, and the need to return to theological and methodological discipline.

Grammatical-Historical Method: Textual Re-anchoring: Selected texts such as *Jeremiah 29:11*, *Philippians 4:13*, and *Romans 8:28* have been widely used in prosperity, motivational, and therapeutic preaching. However, as Adjei (2024) demonstrates in his historical-grammatical study of Genesis 3:15, this method enables interpreters to recover a passage's original lexical, syntactic, and contextual meaning. This study applies the grammatical-historical framework to re-anchor these misused verses in their immediate literary context and historical backdrop. For instance, rather than reading Jeremiah 29:11 as a universal promise of personal success, the grammatical-historical approach reveals its context within Israel's Babylonian exile and covenant theology. This method, therefore, exposes how eisegetical misreadings have uprooted the passage from its original audience and redemptive trajectory.

Canonical Criticism: Restoring Theological Coherence: The application of canonical criticism, as developed by Childs and refined in recent literature

(Pereira, 2015), brings theological continuity to texts that have been fragmented through topical or individualistic readings. For example, texts like *3 John 1:2* and *Isaiah 54:17* are frequently isolated from the broader biblical narrative and used to promote health-and-wealth doctrines. This study evaluates these passages within the broader scope of Scripture, aligning them with the biblical theology of suffering, divine providence, and communal ethics. Canonical criticism restores their function within the redemptive metanarrative, thus correcting doctrinal distortions. Loader (2005) supports this approach, affirming that true theological meaning is revealed when a text is interpreted in its canonical placement, not in isolation.

Authorial Intent: Guarding Interpretive Fidelity: Authorial intent is employed with the grammatical-historical method, but with a theological focus on the message the divinely inspired human author intended for their audience. This is particularly applied to *Revelation 3:20*, which is often used in evangelistic appeals as if Christ is knocking on the heart of an unbeliever. However, a careful authorial-intent-based reading, supported by the structure and tone of Revelation 2–3, indicates the passage is addressed to a lukewarm church in Laodicea, calling for repentance, not individual conversion. The application of this framework, therefore, guards against interpretive abuse and doctrinal reductionism. As Wendland (2020) notes, recovering authorial purpose is crucial for any hermeneutic that seeks to remain accountable to Scripture and ecclesial tradition.

Reader-Response Theory: A Diagnostic Contrast: While not normative in this study, the reader-response theory is employed critically to diagnose the interpretive environment that fosters doctrinal misreadings. Texts like *Matthew 7:1* (“Judge not...”) and *John 10:10* (“...life more abundantly”) are often interpreted through the lens of personal experience and emotional appeal, detached from the text's context and theological intent. The literature reviewed (Mart, 2019; Browne et al., 2021) demonstrates how modern audiences often reshape biblical messages according to subjective frameworks, leading to misapplications ranging from relativistic ethics to consumerist spirituality. This study engages the reader-response theory not to affirm such readings but to expose how the neglect of textual, theological, and historical boundaries enables theological drift. It is thus a critical lens for understanding the cultural dynamics behind eisegesis.

Together, these frameworks serve complementary roles in the study. The grammatical-historical method and authorial intent ensure textual fidelity and theological precision. Canonical criticism ensures coherence within Scripture's redemptive narrative, while the reader-response theory provides insight into how misinterpretations are socially and psychologically constructed. These frameworks applied to selected literature and texts allow for a multidimensional critique of doctrinal distortion and offer pathways toward interpretive restoration.

2.5 Existing Literature on Misinterpretation

The scholarly literature addressing biblical misinterpretation, particularly the prevalence of eisegetical practices within the 21st-century church, reflects a growing concern over the erosion of doctrinal integrity. A significant theme in this literature is the tension between historical-grammatical fidelity and modern subjective appropriation of biblical texts. This section evaluates such literature, focusing on prosperity theology, selective verse usage, and the influence of reader-centered interpretive models. One of the most commonly misused hermeneutical tendencies in contemporary preaching is selective verse usage, or "cherry-picking," where preachers isolate verses to serve topical, motivational, or ideological agendas. Tolentino (2023) highlights this problem by referencing the misapplication of texts such as *Philippians 4:13*, *Jeremiah 29:11*, and *3 John 1:2*, which are frequently interpreted outside their literary and historical contexts to promote materialism and self-empowerment. He notes that such misuse leads to theological distortions that conflate spiritual maturity with material prosperity, thereby obscuring the biblical emphasis on humility, perseverance, and contentment.

These practices are especially prevalent in prosperity theology, a movement critiqued for consistently misusing Scripture to support its claims. The prosperity gospel draws on selected verses like *Malachi 3:10*, *Luke 6:38*, and *John 10:10*, often decontextualizing them to promise divine wealth and physical health.

Swoboda (2015) and Mumford (2012) argue that prosperity theology promotes an over-realised eschatology, substituting the redemptive narrative of Scripture with a gospel of economic emancipation and personal success. This results in a distorted theological worldview where suffering and sacrifice are viewed as signs of spiritual failure, in contrast to New Testament teachings. Theological and ethical critiques of misinterpretation have also been prominently featured in recent works. For instance, Plantak (2017) raises concerns about the ethical consequences of misusing Scripture for manipulative purposes, especially in giving and tithing. He observes that many prosperity-oriented preachers use texts like *2 Corinthians 9:7* and *Luke 6:38* to coerce financial contributions, exploiting the faithful under the guise of divine reward. This has broader ecclesial implications, as misinterpretation erodes trust in church leadership and creates disillusionment among believers who do not experience the promised blessings.

From a doctrinal standpoint, these misinterpretations foster fragmented theology, where themes such as grace, judgment, and sanctification are unevenly addressed or altogether omitted. Barton et al. (2014) and Rouse (2018) point out that sermons overly focused on affirmation and success neglect the whole counsel of God, including hard truths about repentance, suffering, and divine discipline. This imbalance leads to spiritual immaturity and confusion about the nature of discipleship. Additionally, the literature reveals that the reader-response theory, while applicable in literary and pedagogical contexts, contributes to theological

instability when uncritically adopted in biblical interpretation. The subjective emphasis of the reader-response theory, as advanced by Bleich (1978) and Rosenblatt (1978), displaces authorial intent and canonical coherence in favour of reader-imposed meaning. This has led to an interpretive culture where personal experience dictates doctrine, a phenomenon Tolentino (2023) and Reese (1983) argue undermines biblical authority and theological clarity.

Moreover, Niebuhr's (2023) examination of interpretive trends within Word of Faith movements shows that theological innovation often masquerades as contextual relevance yet results in the misapplication of Scripture. His analysis of passages such as 1 Timothy 6:9-10 and Matthew 6:19-21 shows how prosperity preachers frequently sideline such texts to maintain an ideology of divine entitlement, thus presenting a truncated gospel devoid of eschatological depth. The literature reviewed affirms the central claim of this study: that doctrinal misinterpretations in the contemporary Church are frequently rooted in methodological negligence and hermeneutical subjectivism. These works collectively advocate for a return to historically grounded, theologically coherent interpretation, primarily through the grammatical-historical method and canonical reading, thereby ensuring Scripture is not only read but rightly divided.

2.6 Research Gap

Despite the increasing volume of scholarly work examining hermeneutical models and their influence on theology, a significant gap persists in studies that

critically integrate exegetical discipline, theological coherence, and contemporary ecclesial practice in diagnosing and correcting doctrinal misinterpretations. Existing research often treats biblical misinterpretation either from a literary-theoretical lens, a historical-critical standpoint, or a pastoral-theological critique, but rarely through an integrative framework that evaluates eisegetical tendencies across diverse denominational settings using a combined grammatical-historical, canonical, and theological hermeneutic.

One significant gap in the reviewed literature is the lack of exegetically grounded, doctrinally focused, and methodologically unified evaluations of biblical texts most prone to eisegesis in the 21st-century church. While several works, such as those by Swoboda (2015), Mumford (2012), and Tolentino (2023), have rightly critiqued the prosperity gospel and other experiential theologies, their analyses often stop short of conducting verse-by-verse exegetical reassessments rooted in grammatical-historical methodology. This study seeks to fill that gap by performing close exegetical readings of key misinterpreted verses, revealing how their misuse originates from a departure from both linguistic precision and contextual integrity.

Furthermore, many contemporary studies on misinterpretation do not adequately apply canonical criticism or authorial intent as diagnostic tools. Pereira (2015) and Loader (2005) suggest that proper theological understanding arises from individual verses and their placement and meaning within the broader canonical

narrative. However, in practice, these insights are often underdeveloped or neglected altogether when critiquing church hermeneutics. This thesis addresses this deficiency by ensuring that each selected biblical passage is read within its redemptive-historical and canonical framework, thereby recovering theological unity.

A third dimension of the research gap involves the lack of methodological clarity and interdisciplinary synthesis. While the reader-response theory frequently influences contemporary preaching and interpretation (Mart, 2019; Wendland, 2020), few studies directly contrast it with grammatical-historical and canonical models to show how its assumptions lead to doctrinal relativism. This study's deliberate juxtaposition of these frameworks, using reader-response as a critical contrast, offers a fresh and necessary contribution to both theological method and ecclesial praxis.

Moreover, most existing studies focus on isolated traditions (e.g., Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism) or cultural contexts without offering comparative theological evaluation across different ecclesial settings. This limits their utility in proposing broader solutions to interpretive malpractice. In contrast, this study employs a cross-contextual lens, analyzing how doctrinal misinterpretations span multiple church traditions, driven by shared methodological neglect rather than denominational distinctives.

Lastly, limited work synthesizes exegetical findings with actionable pastoral recommendations. This thesis identifies where and how doctrinal misinterpretations occur and proposes hermeneutical corrections and pedagogical strategies for preachers, teachers, and theological educators. In doing so, it bridges the academic-practical divide that often characterizes hermeneutical scholarship.

2.7 Integration of Theoretical Framework and Research Approach

Integrating this study's theoretical framework and research approach is deliberate and essential. The aim is to offer a coherent, multi-layered strategy for analyzing and addressing doctrinal misinterpretations in the 21st-century Church. The research is guided by a historical and analytical approach while employing a qualitative and exegetical methodology, anchored in four key theoretical frameworks: the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, authorial intent, and a critical application of reader-response theory. These components work in concert to produce a rigorous and theologically accountable interpretive process.

Alignment with the Historical and Analytical Research Approach: The historical approach in this study provides the backdrop for understanding the evolution of interpretive models and how shifts in theological methodology have led to current trends of eisegesis. The integration of canonical criticism is significant here. As advanced by Childs and further examined by Pereira (2015),

Canonical criticism insists that theological meaning emerges within the narrative arc and canonical unity of Scripture. This aligns with the historical approach's focus on the developmental trajectory of theological interpretation and ecclesial practice. Through this lens, the study traces how the dislocation of verses from their canonical context has led to doctrinal error and ecclesial misalignment.

Simultaneously, the analytical approach empowers this research to evaluate doctrinal consequences of misinterpretation within contemporary settings. Here, the grammatical-historical method is employed as the interpretive lens through which texts are examined exegetically. This method, rooted in historical-linguistic analysis, allows the study to assess how specific verses, such as Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 4:13, and Matthew 18:20, have been decontextualized to support prosperity, therapeutic, or motivational doctrines. The analytical nature of the research supports a detailed and disciplined examination of theological claims against the original meaning of Scripture.

Critical Use of Reader-Response Theory as Contextual Diagnosis

While the reader-response theory is not upheld as a primary framework in this study, its integration as a critical contrast allows for a sociocultural diagnosis of interpretive trends. It explains the popularity of experiential, emotionally driven Scripture readings in digital and media-saturated church environments. The historical approach identifies the reader-response theory as a relatively recent hermeneutical development. In contrast, the analytical approach evaluates its

theological weaknesses, especially its tendency to decant the text in favour of subjective meaning. This framework helps explain how sermons and theological reflections have become increasingly shaped by audience expectation and personal application, often at the expense of doctrinal coherence and authorial faithfulness. Rather than merely condemning these tendencies, the research uses reader-response insights to illuminate how the current interpretive environment has been formed, offering a deeper understanding of today's Church's pastoral and educational challenges.

Synergistic Role of the Frameworks in Guiding the Research: These frameworks are not applied independently but synergistically. The grammatical-historical method provides exegetical precision, canonical criticism offers theological and narrative unity, authorial intent ensures doctrinal fidelity, and reader-response theory contextualizes misinterpretation within modern ecclesiology and communication dynamics.

The research approach ensures that the findings are not merely descriptive but diagnostic and prescriptive when applied to the selected texts and literature. The integrated model enables a balanced critique rooted in Scripture's authority, sensitive to ecclesial realities, and committed to theological renewal.

Chapter Two: Literature Review - Resume

Section	Summary
2.1 Historical Overview of Biblical Interpretation	Traces the evolution of biblical interpretation from the Patristic era to modernity, emphasizing how shifts in hermeneutics influenced doctrinal formation and misinterpretation.
2.2 Contemporary Trends in Interpretation	Analyzes modern interpretive trends, such as reader-centered approaches, digital spirituality, and therapeutic preaching, and their impact on theological drift.
2.3 Theological Impact of Eisegesis	Explores how eisegesis leads to doctrinal fragmentation, ethical distortions, and the erosion of Christocentric theology, especially in prosperity and motivational teachings.
2.4 Assessment of Theoretical Frameworks	Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each theoretical framework—grammatical-historical, canonical criticism, authorial intent, and reader-response theory.
2.5 Existing Literature on Misinterpretation	Reviews scholarly critiques of misinterpretation in prosperity theology, doctrinal manipulation, and reader-centered preaching, emphasizing methodological negligence.
2.6 Research Gap	Identifies the lack of integrated, doctrinally focused, exegetical studies on misused texts as a key gap in current hermeneutical scholarship.
2.7 Integration of Theoretical Framework and Research Approach	Explains how the study's theoretical models and research methods interrelate, offering a unified approach to analyzing and correcting doctrinal misinterpretations.

CHAPTER THREE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS I

WEALTH AND SUCCESS THEOLOGIES

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The 21st-century Christian landscape has witnessed a dramatic shift in the interpretation of Scripture, particularly in areas related to wealth, success, and divine favour. These developments are not merely exegetical variations but constitute profound theological reorientations that reflect a significant turn toward eisegesis, wherein preachers and believers project their socio-cultural aspirations onto biblical texts. This chapter seeks to analyze such misinterpretations through the lens of prosperity theology and motivational Christianity, using the grammatical-historical method and canonical frameworks to recover the original meaning and theological coherence of selected texts.

Prosperity theology, which promotes the view that faithfulness to God is directly correlated with material wealth and physical well-being, has gained significant traction in contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Lephoko (2024) notes that this theology frequently draws from texts such as Philippians 4:13, 3 John 1:2, and Jeremiah 29:11 to propagate a gospel centered on accumulation, comfort, and financial success, often disregarding the literary and historical contexts of these Scriptures. Such interpretations frequently ignore

Paul's context of suffering, exilic despair in Jeremiah, and the epistolary conventions of personal greetings in Johannine literature.

Therefore, the historical approach employed in this study serves a corrective function by tracing the interpretive lineage of these texts from their canonical origins to their present-day distortions. According to Boaheng, Boateng, and Boahen (2024), biblical texts on wealth were historically situated in cultural settings that emphasized responsible stewardship, covenantal ethics, and social justice, not individualistic gain. When Abraham, Job, or Boaz are referenced in the biblical corpus as wealthy, their wealth is not portrayed as prescriptive for believers but descriptive of divine providence within specific redemptive narratives. Thus, any interpretation that detaches these examples from their narrative and theological contexts risks turning biblical testimony into anthropocentric ideology.

Aligned with the grammatical-historical method, this study undertakes close readings of texts to reveal their syntactical, literary, and socio-theological features. This approach is crucial in texts like Philippians 4:13, which, according to Kearley et al. (1986), is not a *carte blanche* declaration of limitless potential, but a testimony to the sufficiency of Christ amid affliction and contentment. Similarly, Friedman and Birnbaum (2013) highlight that the portrayal of wealth in Proverbs, especially in Proverbs 31, embeds success within ethical labour, generosity, and humility. However, in modern preaching, such qualities are often

overlooked in favour of a mechanistic doctrine of “seed-faith” giving and material reward.

The research's analytical component further exposes the thematic evolution of success theologies. As Boaheng et al. (2024) argue, the current materialistic ethos within Christianity often conflates spiritual blessing with economic advancement, interpreting wealth as an unequivocal sign of divine favor. Such frameworks are hermeneutically flawed and theologically dangerous, as they lead believers to assess spiritual maturity through material benchmarks. The analytical lens reveals an apparent drift from Christocentric and kingdom-oriented theology toward anthropocentric consumerism.

Canonical criticism and authorial intent also play pivotal roles in deconstructing prosperity-based readings. As applied here, Canonical criticism insists that verses like Jeremiah 29:11 be read within the prophetic corpus, including warnings of judgment, calls for repentance, and visions of communal restoration, not individualized promises of success. As Lephoko (2024) further notes, prosperity gospel preachers often strip these texts of their covenantal implications, fostering a theology devoid of divine sovereignty and ecclesial responsibility. Similarly, Boaheng et al. (2024) argue that wealth in Scripture is always tethered to moral accountability and social compassion, rather than personal entitlement.

This chapter, therefore, aligns with the broader aim of the thesis: to re-establish exegetical and doctrinal integrity by exposing interpretive negligence. Through

qualitative examination of select texts, this section demonstrates how prosperity and success theologies often arise from eisegetical manipulations that ignore grammar, history, genre, and theology. When left unchallenged, these distortions promote a vision of Christianity that is at odds with the gospel's call to discipleship, suffering, and stewardship.

This introduction underscores the necessity of returning to historically grounded, canonically aware, and exegetically responsible readings of Scripture. It prepares the ground for detailed analysis in subsequent sections, wherein specific texts are revisited through grammatical-historical interpretation, with sustained attention to authorial intent and theological coherence. This process, grounded in the research's historical-analytical approach and qualitative-exegetical method, affirms the role of Scripture as divine revelation rather than a mirror for human ambition.

3.2 Text One: Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah 29:11 is arguably one of the most frequently quoted verses in contemporary Christian discourse: *"For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Often cited in motivational preaching, prosperity theology, and personal affirmations, this verse has come to represent divine promises of individual success, material comfort, and unqualified favour. However, such popular

interpretations largely overlook the textual, historical, and theological context in which this promise was given initially.

Within the framework of the **grammatical-historical method**, it is essential to explore both the linguistic structure and the historical setting of Jeremiah 29 to arrive at a faithful interpretation. Jeremiah's statement was addressed not to individuals in generic hardship, but to the exilic community of Judah, deported to Babylon following Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in 597 BCE. According to Wessels (2016), the prophetic message in this chapter is best understood through the lens of "prophetic realism"—a pastoral and theological exhortation grounded in the harsh realities of displacement, aimed at fostering patient endurance and active engagement with foreign societies.

Historically, the community receiving this promise was grappling with despair, having been uprooted from their homeland and temple. False prophets among the exiles, such as Shemaiah, falsely predicted a quick end to the exile, inflaming the people with expectations of swift deliverance (cf. Jeremiah 29:8-9). Jeremiah, on the contrary, conveyed a message of long-term settlement and patience, calling the people to build houses, plant gardens, and seek the welfare of Babylon (Jeremiah 29:5-7), thus reframing their suffering as part of God's long-term providence (Davidson, 2011). This realistic, long-range vision forms the backdrop to verse 11.

As such, interpreting Jeremiah 29:11 through a **canonical and authorial intent** framework corrects the tendency to isolate the verse from its broader theological narrative. According to Fretheim (2002), the passage reveals God's covenantal faithfulness not through immediate relief but through a disciplined hope rooted in historical continuity and divine purpose. The "plans" God speaks of are not personal ambitions or career goals, but refer to the ultimate restoration of Israel after seventy years of exile (Jeremiah 29:10), thus integrating judgment, patience, and renewal into a single theological arc.

From a **theological standpoint**, the misuse of this verse exemplifies the danger of eisegesis. Dr Reddy and Nicolaides (2022) noted that Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was grounded in covenantal accountability, and his declarations were often subversive to nationalistic and triumphalistic readings of the Law. The misinterpretation of Jeremiah 29:11 today often echoes the same misjudgments of Jeremiah's contemporaries, who believed God's covenant would unconditionally guarantee their prosperity despite their disobedience.

A **qualitative and exegetical methodology** helps identify how this text has been recontextualised in modern preaching. The verse is often employed in prosperity sermons detached from the context of exile and prophetic rebuke. However, as argued by scholars such as Fischer (2005), the structure and literary design of the text, as a letter, show intentionality in bridging the geographic and emotional

distance between the prophet and the people; thus, it deserves a reading that honours its literary form and theological message.

Moreover, **analytical reflection** on this passage reveals a broader critique of how modern churches use Scripture to endorse individualistic and materialistic values. The repeated use of Jeremiah 29:11 in affirming guaranteed personal success mirrors the same presumptions condemned by Jeremiah's message—namely, that divine favour equates to uninterrupted comfort. The grammatical-historical approach contrasts Yahweh's accurate prophetic word and false prophets' manipulative promises, situating the verse within a polemic against misguided optimism (Leuchter, 2008; Carroll, 1986).

From a **canonical perspective**, Jeremiah 29:11 is part of a larger theological tradition in the Hebrew Bible that portrays exile as both judgment and opportunity for renewal. The themes of divine fidelity and future restoration that emerge in this passage are echoed in later prophetic literature, reinforcing the coherence and redemptive purpose of the biblical narrative (cf. Jeremiah 30–33).

In conclusion, Jeremiah 29:11, when approached through the integrated lenses of the grammatical-historical method, authorial intent, and canonical theology, reflects not a generic promise of prosperity but a specific assurance of restoration following divine discipline. Misinterpreting the verse strips it of its theological depth and ethical demands. A contextual and disciplined reading restores its pastoral function: to call God's people to patient trust, communal responsibility,

and eschatological hope amid suffering. Such exegetical fidelity is critical to combating doctrinal misuses of Scripture in the modern church and aligns with this study's broader objective of restoring interpretive integrity.

3.3 Text Two: Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” This verse from Philippians 4:13 has become one of the most widely quoted—and misquoted—texts in modern Christianity. Commonly invoked to inspire confidence in personal achievement, athletic success, financial breakthrough, and emotional resilience, it is often detached from its literary and theological context. Contemporary Christian rhetoric is frequently a motivational slogan, reduced to spiritualised self-empowerment. However, such usage veers into the realm of **eisegesis**, reading personal ambition into the text, rather than drawing meaning out of it through **grammatical-historical** and **canonical interpretive lenses**.

A responsible **historical-exegetical reading** of Philippians 4:13 begins with situating the verse within its immediate context, namely, Paul’s discussion on contentment in verses 10–12. Paul was writing from prison, enduring hardship and uncertainty, and he spoke of having learned the secret of being content in all circumstances, whether in abundance or need. As Aletti (2024) affirms, the apostle’s use of rhetorical structures, such as periautology (measured self-reference and commendation), throughout Philippians provides a lens through

which to interpret verse 13 not as a claim to limitless capability but as a theological declaration of Christ-centered sufficiency amid adversity.

Aletti's (2024) analysis of Pauline rhetoric notes that Paul's self-praise was often employed not to elevate himself but to contrast fleshly confidence with Christocentric reliance. This periautological framework explains the apostle's emphasis on inner fortitude derived from Christ rather than personal strength or social status. Paul is not promoting self-empowerment, but highlighting a life marked by *kenosis*, the voluntary humility reflected earlier in Philippians 2:6-11.

In terms of **authorial intent**, it is evident that Paul aimed to encourage the Philippians to emulate his Christ-dependent perseverance. This aligns with his overarching purpose in the epistle: to exhort believers toward joy, unity, and steadfastness, particularly in the face of suffering. The verse is framed as part of a thanksgiving for the Philippians' financial support (Phil. 4:10-20), within which Paul reaffirms that his sufficiency lies not in circumstances but in divine enablement. To remove this verse from its epistolary and situational context, as often occurs in prosperity or motivational preaching, is to misrepresent both Paul's theology and pastoral tone.

The **grammatical features** of the text further support this reading. The Greek phrase “πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με Χριστῷ” (*panta ischyō en tō endynamounti me Christō*) does not imply boundless potential in a generalised sense. Instead, “panta” (“all things”) refers specifically to the trials and conditions

listed in the preceding verses—hunger and fullness, need and abundance—indicating a range of life experiences through which Paul has maintained spiritual equilibrium. As such, the **canonical coherence** of the text is preserved only when this verse is interpreted within its pericope, and not lifted as an isolated maxim.

The **analytical component** of the research methodology further reveals that the misapplication of Philippians 4:13 correlates with a broader trend in contemporary theology favouring experiential and therapeutic expressions of faith. Such interpretations often appeal to modern sensibilities shaped by consumerism and self-actualisation, which are then projected onto biblical texts. This is a textbook case of reader-response hermeneutics run amok, where, as Aletti (2024) and Smit (2014) argue, ancient rhetorical frameworks are supplanted by culturally driven appropriations.

This interpretive malpractice carries **theological implications**. It shifts the locus of faith from the sufficiency of Christ in weakness to the perceived power of the believer in ambition. As Aletti (2024) explains, the power Paul describes is not a general empowerment for achievement but a participatory strength that enables endurance and spiritual contentment in Christ. The apostle's journey, as detailed in Philippians 3, reflects a radical reorientation from self-merit to Christ-dependence. Thus, when Paul asserts "I can do all things," the implied condition is "through the one who empowers me", not through self-will or positive thinking.

From a **pastoral-theological perspective**, the verse's misinterpretation has fuelled unhealthy expectations among believers. It erroneously suggests that faith guarantees personal success in every venture, thus creating disillusionment when struggles persist. Conversely, its proper interpretation provides a theological foundation for resilience, humility, and trust in divine providence—qualities more reflective of Paul's intent and the gospel's message.

Moreover, when interpreted through canonical criticism, this text resonates with other Pauline affirmations of divine strength in weakness, such as 2 Corinthians 12:9-10: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* Such verses reinforce the central biblical theme of God's power manifesting not in human triumph but in surrender and dependence.

Philippians 4:13 is not a motivational catchphrase for unbounded potential; it is a Christological confession of sufficiency amid suffering. Its misuse in modern church discourse exemplifies how theological distortion can arise when texts are stripped of context and reinterpreted through personal or cultural filters. The verse is restored to its rightful place within Pauline theology through the grammatical-historical method, as an affirmation of enduring grace, not performative strength. When reinserted into its **canonical, theological, and rhetorical framework**, Philippians 4:13 becomes a beacon of hope not for unrestrained ambition but for faithful perseverance through the sustaining presence of Christ.

3.4 Text Three: 3 John 1:2

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” This verse from 3 John 1:2 has been frequently cited within prosperity gospel teachings as a scriptural endorsement of material wealth and physical well-being. However, such interpretations often overlook the epistolary conventions and theological nuances inherent in the text.

Grammatical-Historical Context

Understanding 3 John 1:2 through a grammatical-historical lens reveals the significant role of literary convention and historical setting in biblical interpretation. Often lifted as a standalone doctrinal declaration, this verse is situated within a conventional epistolary structure standard in Greco-Roman correspondence. The phrase *“I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, even as your soul prospers”* reflects the standard form of well-wishing at the beginning of letters in the ancient world—a courtesy more than a theological premise (Stott, 2003).

The Greek word *εὐδοῦσθαι* (*euodousthai*), often translated as “to prosper,” derives from a term meaning “to have a good journey” or “to succeed in reaching one’s goal” (Friberg, 2000). In biblical usage, the word can sometimes imply successful outcomes, but its scope is determined by context. In this instance, its use in an opening greeting corresponds more to a general hope for the recipient’s well-being than a prophetic promise of financial or physical prosperity. Similarly, *ὑγιαίνειν* (*hygiainō*), “to be in health,” while capable of implying physical

wellness, is likewise used here in a formulaic, conventional way—not as an indication of a guaranteed divine health plan.

The historical context of 3 John further reinforces this. The epistle was written to Gaius, a Christian disciple known for hospitality toward travelling missionaries. The letter's content, dealing with truth, hospitality, and rejection of domineering leaders like Diotrephes (3 John 9–10), does not concern itself with prosperity theology or health doctrines. Instead, it addresses church leadership, communal ethics, and the embodiment of Christian love. Thus, the opening verse aligns with Greco-Roman rhetorical customs, where the initial prayer or blessing was part of epistolary etiquette, establishing goodwill between the sender and the recipient (Thompson, 2022).

In light of this, interpreting 3 John 1:2 as a binding theological claim for all believers, across all times and contexts, constitutes a misapplication of its literary form. As argued by Michael and Baidoo (2020), the grammar and syntax of the verse reveal its non-prescriptive function. The subjunctive mood of *εὐοδοῦσθαι* indicates a wish or desire, not a definitive assertion. It is part of the Elder's personal affection and pastoral care toward Gaius, not a universal decree of health and wealth. Therefore, to apply this verse doctrinally without attending to its grammatical form and epistolary context is to practise eisegesis rather than exegesis.

Additionally, the clause “*even as your soul prospers*” (καθὼς εὐοδοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχή) shows a deliberate grammatical parallelism that aligns the prayer for material well-being with the existing evidence of Gaius’s spiritual vitality. This reveals a conditional and comparative relationship—the material blessings are desired to reflect, not exceed or validate, the spiritual state. This syntax thus undermines any interpretation that treats material prosperity as an automatic indicator of spiritual success, a concept frequently forwarded in modern prosperity theology but incongruent with the text’s structure.

Therefore, by paying close attention to verb forms, historical usage of epistolary conventions, and syntactical relationships within the verse, the grammatical-historical approach offers a much more restrained and faithful interpretation. It affirms that 3 John 1:2 is a personalised expression of goodwill, not a universal promise of health and wealth. When contrasted with reader-centred interpretations that treat this verse as a spiritual blank cheque, this method reaffirms the need for contextual literacy in doctrinal application.

Canonical Criticism and Authorial Intent

The interpretive recovery of 3 John 1:2 requires more than grammatical-linguistic analysis; it demands theological coherence across the canon and fidelity to the author's original intent. The integration of canonical criticism and authorial intent within this study's framework allows the verse to be examined not merely as an

isolated phrase but as a theologically located expression, functioning within the broader Johannine vision of truth, community, and spiritual integrity.

Canonical Criticism, pioneered by Brevard Childs and supported in subsequent scholarship, views the canon of Scripture as a unified theological witness shaped not only by its compositional history but also by its final form and ecclesial reception. In this sense, the phrase *“I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”* must be interpreted within the narrative arc and theological continuity of the New Testament—especially within the Johannine corpus, where the prosperity of the soul is consistently elevated above material concerns.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays for the sanctification of his followers in truth (John 17:17) and warns against storing up treasures on earth (cf. John 6:27). Likewise, 1 John centres its vision of Christian identity on fellowship, righteousness, and love, not on material abundance. Thus, when the Elder writes in 3 John 1:2, his intent is best understood not as departing from Johannine priorities but as affirming them in practical, pastoral form. Gaius, the recipient of the letter, is praised for walking “in the truth” (v. 3) and for hospitality towards Christian workers. His spiritual vitality becomes the benchmark against which the Elder offers a prayer for his physical and circumstantial welfare. In this light, the desire for material prosperity is contingent and secondary; it follows the flourishing of the soul, not precedes or conditions it.

Through canonical criticism, the verse is also contrasted with texts that directly challenge the foundational assumptions of prosperity theology. For instance, in 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul affirms that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution,” and in James 1:9-11, the transient nature of riches is underscored. These texts complicate any reading of 3 John 1:2 that assumes a normative theology of material blessing. Canonically, the believer's prosperity is not defined by wealth or physical health, but by spiritual steadfastness, doctrinal integrity, and loving service.

From the vantage point of authorial intent, the structure and tone of the letter suggest a highly personal and situational message. The Elder writes with pastoral concern to Gaius, a faithful disciple who has demonstrated his commitment to the truth by extending support to itinerant ministers. The phrase in question, therefore, is not an impersonal proclamation or theological abstraction but a personalised prayer shaped by the Elder's gratitude and relational intimacy. As Thompson (2022) argued, authorial intent in epistolary literature must be derived from both the internal logic of the letter and the contextual function of its language within ancient conventions.

Moreover, the sentence's grammatical structure reinforces the author's concern for congruence between inner and outer life. The phrase “*just as your soul prospers*” (καθὼς εὐοδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχή) reveals a comparative clause that binds the desire for external prosperity to an already evident spiritual condition. This

syntax implies that the Elder is not wishing for riches irrespective of Gaius's faithfulness but is expressing a hope that the blessing already experienced in the inner life might be mirrored, where possible, in the outward one. This indicates theological restraint and authorial clarity, far removed from the sweeping doctrinal promises often extracted from this verse in prosperity circles.

Further, as Dube (2020) argues, when the authorial intent of epistolary New Testament writings is ignored in favour of performative reinterpretations, Scripture becomes a pliable text that serves modern ideologies rather than divine revelation. This observation underscores the need to ground interpretation in the actual communicative act between the biblical author and recipient, acknowledging the human author's situational context, theological priorities, and rhetorical style.

By applying canonical criticism and authorial intent, this study resists atomistic readings and re-establishes interpretive coherence and theological integrity. It safeguards the text from being treated as a prescriptive promise and reorients it toward its original pastoral function. The verse thus emerges not as a blueprint for prosperity but as a model of holistic Christian care, a spiritual leader's wish that a disciple's temporal life might reflect the flourishing already present in his faith.

In this way, the integrated theoretical frameworks not only recover the authentic voice of Scripture but also confront the theological errors born from its neglect.

They serve as a necessary corrective to the doctrinal distortions that arise when experience, culture, or desire are given interpretive authority over text, theology, and tradition.

Analytical Perspective and Theological Implications

From an analytical standpoint, the misinterpretation of 3 John 1:2 as a doctrinal endorsement of guaranteed health and wealth reveals broader trends within contemporary Christian hermeneutics that prioritise subjective needs over contextual exegesis. The prosperity gospel, in particular, exemplifies this trajectory by extracting isolated verses to construct theological frameworks alien to the immediate literary environment and the redemptive narrative of Scripture. In this case, the epistolary well-wishing of the Elder to Gaius has been reconfigured into a spiritual law: God's desire is for all believers to experience financial abundance and uninterrupted physical vitality.

This form of interpretation is underpinned by what this study identifies as a reader-response hermeneutic, in which meaning is determined not by the author's intent or the canonical location of a text, but by the reader's personal, cultural, or ideological context. Such an approach is prevalent in environments influenced by motivational preaching and therapeutic spirituality, where Scripture is treated as a source of psychological reinforcement rather than theological instruction. As Baidoo (2020) argues, prosperity-oriented theology often manipulates texts like 3 John 1:2 to legitimise teachings that promise financial breakthrough and divine

healing in exchange for offerings, faith declarations, or positive thinking. This pattern typifies an anthropocentric reading strategy that centres the reader's desires and reframes divine revelation around them.

The theological implications of such distortion are significant. Firstly, it promotes an over-realised eschatology, in which the blessings associated with the new creation are demanded and expected in the present age, thereby ignoring the biblical theology of suffering, waiting, and the already/not-yet tension in Christian hope. By suggesting that health and wealth are direct indicators of divine favour, it distorts Christian discipleship and alienates those enduring hardship, sickness, or poverty, who may feel spiritually inadequate.

Secondly, it fosters a merit-based soteriology, wherein blessings are interpreted as rewards for faithfulness, giving, or obedience. This undermines the gospel's foundational emphasis on grace and introduces a transactional model of divine-human interaction. As reflected in the broader Johannine corpus, true prosperity in the Christian life is defined by intimacy with God, conformity to truth, and communal love, not material success. The Elder's affirmation of Gaius's spiritual prosperity as the primary benchmark in 3 John 1:2 contrasts prosperity theology's inversion of values.

Thirdly, doctrinal misapplications of this text contribute to spiritual disillusionment when believers, having been taught that Scripture guarantees financial and physical flourishing, encounter suffering or lack. Such

misinterpretation has pastoral consequences, as it can erode faith, fuel guilt, and fragment ecclesial unity. Amoah (2020) notes in his assessment of prosperity hermeneutics in African Pentecostal contexts that these theologies often commodify faith, leading to disempowerment and exploitation when the promised material results fail to manifest.

Furthermore, a responsible analytical reading of the text highlights the theological coherence between the spiritual and material aspects of well-being as understood by the Elder. The verse does not separate the physical from the spiritual, but rather subordinates the desire for physical wellness to the recognised vitality of the soul. When viewed canonically, this literary structure mirrors other New Testament texts where spiritual integrity, not physical condition, accurately measures Christian well-being (e.g., 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Thus, a theologically sound reading of 3 John 1:2 recognises that Scripture does not condemn material blessing or bodily health, nor does it elevate them as normative indicators of God's favour. The text instead reflects a prayerful aspiration that external circumstances would align with spiritual growth, not a decree that they must. As such, the analytical approach in this study exposes how interpretive errors are shaped not merely by ignorance of biblical languages or historical context, but by the pervasive influence of cultural ideologies, ecclesial models, and preaching trends that distort the text's theological intent.

The misuse of 3 John 1:2 within prosperity theology illustrates a more profound epistemological shift in contemporary Christian interpretation—from revelation to experience, theology to therapy, and Christocentrism to self-fulfillment. The integration of analytical, grammatical-historical, and canonical approaches in this study reasserts the necessity of methodical interpretation that honours authorial purpose, respects literary form, and preserves doctrinal integrity within the full witness of Scripture.

A comprehensive exegesis of 3 John 1:2, grounded in grammatical-historical analysis and canonical criticism, reveals that the verse functions as a customary greeting reflecting the Elder's holistic concern for Gaius's well-being. It is not a doctrinal foundation for the prosperity gospel's guaranteed wealth and health claims. Recognizing the author's intent and the verse's placement within the broader Johannine corpus allows for a more nuanced understanding that prioritizes spiritual prosperity and communal support over material gain.

3.5 Comparative Thematic Analysis

In this section, we undertake a comparative thematic analysis of the three key biblical texts examined thus far, Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 4:13, and 3 John 1:2, to discern shared patterns in their misinterpretation, theological distortion, and hermeneutical misalignment. This analysis synthesizes findings through the lens of the research's overarching historical and analytical approach, employing the

grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and authorial intent as the principal theoretical frameworks.

A clear thematic consistency across all three passages is the displacement of historical context in favour of subjective or culturally desirable meanings. As Marbaniang (2014) argues, interpretation divorced from original context leads to doctrinal errors and pastoral misguidance. In the case of *Jeremiah 29:11*, the original prophetic intent, a message of endurance and future hope for exiled Judah, is truncated into a generic promise of personal success and comfort. Similarly, *Philippians 4:13* is extracted from a discourse on contentment in suffering, becoming instead a rallying cry for limitless human achievement. ³ *John 1:2* suffers from a comparable hermeneutical shift, often used as proof for material prosperity, ignoring John's greeting's personal and epistolary nature.

Theologically, the implications are significant. These misinterpretations support anthropocentric theologies, where human desires and ambitions shape divine revelation rather than theocentric frameworks where God's redemptive narrative governs interpretation. As Korr (2019) explains, a failure to reconcile phenomenological experience with rigorous hermeneutical analysis results in theological reductionism, whereby Scripture is domesticated into utilitarian affirmations.

Additionally, each text has been reinterpreted within the reader-response paradigm, a theoretical stance critiqued earlier in this work. Oliver Davies (2009)

underscores that while modern hermeneutics recognises the inevitability of plural interpretations, a failure to affirm authorial intent and canonical unity allows Scripture to be refashioned around individual or communal agendas rather than divine revelation. This critical shift in hermeneutical locus, where meaning is no longer discovered but constructed, undermines biblical authority and doctrinal coherence.

Within the grammatical-historical framework, all three texts demonstrate the same methodological lapse: the neglect of immediate literary context, genre, and syntactical cues that would otherwise anchor interpretation in the original authors' intent. According to Davies (2009), pre-modern hermeneutics recognised multiple levels of meaning but never at the expense of textual fidelity. The recovery of such discipline is vital in resisting the flattening of Scripture into devotional slogans.

Moreover, the canonical perspective adds an essential corrective. When considered within the broader theological arc of Scripture, these texts emphasize God's sovereignty, redemptive patience, and communal ethics, rather than private success or individual empowerment. Ricoeur's theory of the "world of the text," as cited in Korr (2019), reinforces this view, suggesting that the imaginative world created by Scripture invites participation in a divinely orchestrated reality, not a human-authored narrative.

Lastly, a phenomenological dimension is evident in how contemporary readers experience these texts. While personal application is vital for spiritual formation, it must never eclipse textual integrity. Ricoeur's (1976) hermeneutics, as discussed by Korr (2019), proposes a dialectical tension between the world behind the text (historical context), the world of the text (literary construction), and the world in front of the text (reader's context). When properly mediated, this dynamic fosters interpretive responsibility and guards against theological anachronism.

The comparative analysis reveals a triad of misinterpretive tendencies: contextual neglect, theological distortion, and subjective appropriation, repeated across all three texts. Addressing these requires a robust commitment to historical-exegetical discipline, theological coherence, and communal accountability. The frameworks employed in this study serve as correctives to these patterns, highlighting the necessity of returning to sound interpretive traditions in scholarly and ecclesial spaces.

3.6 Theological and Pastoral Implications

The theological and pastoral implications of the widespread misinterpretation of biblical texts such as *Jeremiah 29:11*, *Philippians 4:13*, and *3 John 1:2* are extensive and urgent. These texts, often recontextualised through eisegetical and reader-response methods, have shaped a theological imagination in many congregations that prioritises personal ambition, material security, and emotional

affirmation over biblical fidelity, ecclesial formation, and spiritual maturity. This distortion, while subtle at times, has produced what might be described as a theological shift from **Christocentric discipleship** to **consumer-driven spirituality**.

At the core of this shift lies a failure to interpret Scripture with theological coherence and pastoral responsibility. As Korr (2019) contends, when hermeneutics becomes disengaged from divine revelation and rooted primarily in the existential needs of the reader, the authority of Scripture is inevitably compromised. Texts like *Philippians 4:13* and *Jeremiah 29:11*, when divorced from their grammatical and historical contexts, cease to function as instruments of divine instruction and instead become affirmations of human potential. This misdirection reinforces an ecclesial culture in which Scripture is treated as a tool for self-actualization rather than transformation through the gospel.

Theologically, such misuse perpetuates an **over-realised eschatology**, wherein promises of future redemption are prematurely demanded in the present. This is particularly evident in prosperity theology, which reads texts like *3 John 1:2* as divine mandates for wealth and health in the here and now. Davies (2009) warns against this tendency, noting that Scripture's eschatological vision anticipates suffering, perseverance, and communal solidarity, not necessarily personal success or circumstantial ease. Consequently, doctrines born out of these distorted

readings can foster disillusionment when believers encounter suffering that seems incongruent with the promises they were led to believe were unconditional.

Pastorally, the implications are equally troubling. Congregants nurtured on misinterpreted Scripture are often ill-equipped to handle trials, persecution, or long-term waiting. This misalignment with biblical theology results in fragile faith, emotional instability, and even spiritual burnout. As Marbaniang (2014) explains, pastoral care rooted in shallow theology often fails to offer adequate support during crisis, leading believers to question God's character or their faithfulness. Moreover, it fosters a transactional relationship with God, where faith is treated as a means to an end, rather than a life of surrender, obedience, and sacrificial love.

In ecclesial practice, these misinterpretations also alter the focus of ministry and preaching. Instead of promoting the **formation of Christlike character**, much of contemporary preaching centres on pragmatic relevance, psychological encouragement, and motivational rhetoric. While not inherently harmful, this emphasis becomes theologically deficient when it supersedes the proclamation of repentance, sanctification, and kingdom-oriented living. Korr (2019) rightly notes that theology, when disconnected from Scripture's revelatory function, becomes anthropocentric and susceptible to secular ideologies cloaked in religious language.

Furthermore, doctrinal integrity within the Church is compromised when key biblical texts are misused to justify theological systems not grounded in Scripture's full witness. When *Philippians 4:13* is used to support a theology of limitless potential, and *Jeremiah 29:11* is preached as a universal guarantee of success, the Church risks cultivating a spirituality that is emotionally satisfying but biblically deficient. The result is a kind of theological schizophrenia, where Scripture is both revered and routinely reconfigured to meet personal needs.

Theologically responsible interpretation, guided by **canonical coherence and authorial intention**, challenges this trajectory by restoring each text to its rightful place within the redemptive narrative. As Thompson (2022) emphasises, when interpretation is rooted in the unity of Scripture and the integrity of its human-divine authorship, it cultivates doctrines that are not only true but also pastorally sustainable. This includes teaching on suffering, perseverance, delayed fulfilment, and communal dependence, critical themes often neglected in prosperity-oriented preaching.

Therefore, the **pastoral implications** of this study point toward the necessity of returning to **exegetical discipleship** within the Church. Preachers and teachers must be equipped not only with theological knowledge but with interpretive discipline. Hermeneutics must become a pastoral tool, not merely for sermon preparation but for shaping the life and faith of the Church. This aligns with the call from scholars like Marbaniang (2014) and Baidoo (2020), who urge

contemporary churches to integrate hermeneutics into their discipleship structures, ensuring that sound doctrine rather than cultural trends form believers.

The theological and pastoral consequences of misinterpreting these verses extend far beyond academic error; they impact the soul of the Church, shaping how God is perceived, how the Christian life is lived, and how the Church bears witness in the world. Correcting these errors through historically grounded, canonically informed, and theologically coherent exegesis is thus not only a scholarly task but a pastoral imperative. The Church must recover a hermeneutic of fidelity, one that aligns with the gospel's call to cruciform living, kingdom expectation, and resilient hope in the God who speaks not for our comfort, but for our transformation.

3.7 Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter has critically examined three of the most widely misinterpreted biblical texts in contemporary Christian discourse: Jeremiah 29:11, Philippians 4:13, and 3 John 1:2, within the framework of the study's grammatical-historical, canonical, and authorial-intent approaches, undergirded by a historical and analytical research orientation. The analyses revealed that while each passage carries theological depth and pastoral relevance, their misuse often arises from a neglect of exegetical discipline and a preference for reader-centric interpretations.

Jeremiah 29:11, initially delivered to a displaced and exiled community under divine judgment, has been lifted from its historical and covenantal context to

function as a universal promise of individual success and personal fulfilment. The prophetic message of patient hope through divine sovereignty has thus been reimagined in therapeutic and self-affirming terms. Likewise, Philippians 4:13, embedded within Paul's reflections on contentment in suffering, has been misappropriated as a motivational slogan, promising limitless potential instead of highlighting Christ's sufficiency in all circumstances. Finally, 3 John 1:2, a customary epistolary greeting, has been transformed into a doctrinal cornerstone for health and wealth theology, despite its personal and pastoral nature.

Throughout this chapter, the grammatical-historical method has proven essential for restoring these verses to their original linguistic, syntactical, and situational frameworks. When examined closely in its grammatical form and immediate literary setting, each text reveals an intention far removed from the interpretations advanced by prosperity and motivational theologies. The canonical approach further situated these texts within the overarching redemptive narrative of Scripture, enabling their theological meanings to be measured against the full scope of biblical teaching. Additionally, attention to authorial intent safeguards the texts from arbitrary reinterpretation, affirming that the Bible is not a repository of disjointed aphorisms but a coherent theological witness.

The comparative thematic analysis revealed consistent patterns across all three texts: a recurring tendency to extract biblical phrases from their theological contexts, a misalignment of application with biblical theology, and the pervasive

influence of anthropocentric hermeneutics. These tendencies were shown to be theologically detrimental, promoting a distorted vision of God, the Christian life, and the Church's mission.

The theological and pastoral implications of these misinterpretations are significant. They contribute to spiritual disillusionment, promote an over-realised eschatology, and encourage a transactional view of divine-human relations. When believers are taught to equate faith with success or suffering with failure, the integrity of biblical discipleship is undermined. This calls for a renewed commitment to exegetical discipleship within ecclesial contexts, where Scripture is engaged for inspiration and transformation.

Chapter Three demonstrates the necessity of hermeneutical reformation in the 21st-century Church. The misinterpretation of these texts is not merely an academic oversight but a theological and pastoral crisis. By returning to interpretive models grounded in Scripture's historical context, canonical unity, and theological intent, the Church can resist doctrinal error and reclaim the richness of God's revealed Word for faithful living and gospel witness.

Chapter Three: Textual Analysis I- Wealth and Success Theologies (Resume)

Section	Summary
3.1 Introduction to the Chapter	Explores the rise of prosperity and motivational interpretations in modern Christianity, introducing the methodological approach of exegetical and canonical analysis.

3.2 Text One: Jeremiah 29:11	Demonstrates that Jeremiah 29:11, when read in its prophetic and exilic context, conveys a promise of future hope grounded in covenantal faithfulness, not individual prosperity.
3.3 Text Two: Philippians 4:13	Reveals how Philippians 4:13 is often decontextualised and misused as a motivational slogan, whereas its true intent is Paul's Christ-centred contentment in all circumstances.
3.4 Text Three: 3 John 1:2	This clarifies that 3 John 1:2 is a conventional epistolary greeting and not a doctrinal affirmation of material wealth or guaranteed health, which aligns more with spiritual encouragement.
3.5 Comparative Thematic Analysis	Identifies thematic patterns of misinterpretation across the three texts, including context-stripping, anthropocentrism, and the rise of reader-response hermeneutics.
3.6 Theological and Pastoral Implications	Examines these misinterpretations' theological and pastoral consequences, such as spiritual disillusionment, doctrinal instability, and misguided discipleship models.
3.7 Summary of Chapter Three	This part summarizes the chapter's findings and reaffirms the necessity of returning to historical, grammatical, and theological frameworks for sound biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS II

ECCLESIOLOGY AND PNEUMATOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

The interpretation of scripture related to ecclesiology and pneumatology has significantly transformed the 21st-century church. While the early church maintained a theologically grounded, historically aware understanding of communal life and the holy spirit's work, many modern interpretations shift towards subjectivism, experience-driven theology, and isolationist readings of key texts. This chapter explores four commonly misinterpreted passages: Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:4, Isaiah 54:17, and Romans 8:28, within the framework of the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and authorial intent, to restore theological coherence and doctrinal integrity.

Theological discourse on ecclesiology and pneumatology forms the bedrock of Christian doctrine and practice. Ecclesiology examines the church's nature, structure, and mission, while pneumatology clarifies the Holy Spirit's role. Accurately interpreting biblical texts on these topics is crucial, as misinterpretations can impact church governance, believers' growth, and the broader Christian community. This chapter uses rigorous qualitative and exegetical methods to interpret biblical texts in their original contexts. This approach fits the study's historical-analytical framework, highlighting a shift from

faithful exegesis to problematic eisegesis. The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, rooted in a genuine spiritual renewal inspired by the Book of Acts, face interpretive challenges that require careful scholarly focus. As noted in *the 21st-century reformation, many early Pentecostal groups embraced experiential theology while resisting institutional oversight, leading to highly individualistic expressions of church and spirit that often lacked doctrinal anchors* (Chukwuemeka, 2022). The Azusa Street revival, for instance, gave rise to an informal theology of spiritual empowerment that was later dogmatised into non-negotiable doctrines such as glossolalia as the sole evidence of spirit baptism. While initially driven by a desire for revival, these theological shifts opened the door to interpretive misalignments that persist today.

The typical contemporary application of Matthew 18:20 within ecclesial discourse, which asserts that the mere gathering of two or three believers guarantees the presence of Christ and full spiritual authority, represents a problematic decontextualization of the verse. Such interpretations frequently overlook the immediate literary context, especially its clear emphasis on outlining suitable procedures for conflict resolution and disciplinary measures within a specified covenant community. As articulated in *Jesus Christ's theology, Jesus' teachings on church authority (Matt. 18:15-20) were tied to ethical accountability and ecclesiastical discipline, not to generic Christian fellowship*.

Similarly, Acts 2:4 has been subject to doctrinal misapplication, particularly in denominations that equate glossolalia with spiritual legitimacy. While the occurrence at Pentecost undoubtedly signalled the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, its historical and theological context suggests a unique fulfillment of one of the Old Testament prophecies and a transitional moment in redemptive biblical history (cf. Joel 2; Acts 1:8). The problem arises when the descriptive narrative is misconstrued as a prescriptive norm, a mistake that undermines the broader Pneumatological witness of scripture.

This chapter applies the grammatical-historical method to correct these misinterpretations by situating each text within its original audience's historical experience and literary context. As Oliver Davies (2009) noted, hermeneutical responsibility involves decoding textual meaning and discerning the theological intention embedded in its canonical function. This methodological commitment opposes the prevailing trend in reader-response theology, which prioritises emotional and subjective reader impressions over exegetical integrity (Davies, 2009).

Canonical criticism enhances the interpretative richness of this chapter. Unlike methods that focus on individual verses alone, it places the specific text within the larger framework of the entire scriptural canon. This broader context reveals a cohesive theological view that enriches and clarifies its meaning. By adopting this holistic perspective, we gain a fuller understanding of the text, which helps

to transcend fragmented interpretations and exposes its importance within the overarching narrative of scripture. For instance, Isaiah 54:17 should be understood in the context of Israel's post-exilic restoration and God's covenantal promises, rather than as an unconditional guarantee of divine protection applicable in every situation. Similarly, Romans 8:28, often misused to promote deterministic optimism, is canonically linked to Pauline soteriology and eschatology, drawing on those who love God, who are aligned with his plan for redemption.

Finally, the notion of authorial intent anchors this chapter's analysis by reaffirming that theological meaning is not an open field for spiritual speculation, but rather a careful retrieval of what the biblical author, influenced by the Holy Spirit, intended to convey. According to *Jesus Christ's theology, the early church was founded not on mystical experiences alone, but on the apostolic witness rooted in Christ's teachings and clarified by the Spirit's guidance (cf. John 14:26; Acts 2:42).*

This chapter employs the tools of rigorous hermeneutics to reclaim ecclesial and Pneumatological texts from misuse and misappropriation. It situates each verse within its grammatical-historical context, interprets it in light of the canonical whole, and respects the authorial intent to produce a theologically sound, pastorally sensitive reading that counters doctrinal drift and affirms biblical truth.

4.2 TEXT FOUR: MATTHEW 18:20

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.
(Matthew 18:20, NIV)

Grammatical-historical context

The misinterpretation of Matthew 18:20 is one of the most persistent in contemporary ecclesial settings. Often quoted to validate small prayer gatherings or informal church meetings, the verse is popularly construed to mean that Christ's presence is automatically guaranteed wherever two or three Christians assemble. While this may seem pastorally comforting, such an application divorces the verse from its original literary and grammatical context.

Grammatically, the verse forms the conclusion of a pericope on church discipline, beginning from verse 15. The Greek structure of the clause “ὅπου γάρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἑμὸν ὄνομα” links back to the judicial process outlined in verse 16, where “two or three witnesses” are to be gathered to confront a sinning brother (cf. Deut. 19:15). The historical setting reflects a Jewish legal framework in which communal adjudication was pivotal. The language does not describe general fellowship but judicial gathering under divine authority (Blomberg, 2012).

Historically, Jesus instructed his disciples on the communal mechanism for resolving internal conflicts within the ecclesial body. As noted by Silitonga

(2018), the emphasis is not on informal gatherings for worship but on structured, spiritually responsible conflict resolution within the covenant community.

Analytical perspective and theological implications

From an analytical viewpoint, the misuse of this verse highlights a tendency within prosperity and charismatic frameworks to abstract texts for convenience and encouragement. While such biblical interpretations objectively affirm divine omnipresence and accessibility, they may flatten the rich theological exegesis of accountability, community discipline, and ecclesial authorisation embedded within the passage (Keener, 2012; Hendriksen, 1973).

Likening the verse to a motivational mantra reduces its ecclesiological profundity. The church's identity has shifted from being a covenantal and ethical entity to a more casual congregation, thereby reducing the significance of discipleship and doctrinal accountability. Nicolaides (2021) accurately emphasizes that ecclesial communion is not merely spatial but also theological, entailing shared responsibility under divine authority. This misunderstanding indicates broader theological dilemmas. It encourages a privatized spirituality that neglects the communal discipline Christ sought to maintain within the church. When this communal framework is weakened, ecclesiology becomes subjective, and doctrinal integrity is compromised.

Canonical Criticism and Authorial Intent

The modern church confronts a significant challenge: transitioning its identity from a covenantal and ethically guided body to a more laid-back congregation, ultimately undermining the relevance of discipleship and doctrinal responsibility. Nicolaides (2021) correctly posits that ecclesial communion transcends mere spatial proximity, encompassing a theological dimension predicated on shared responsibility under divine authority. This misinterpretation of ecclesiology leads to significant theological issues, particularly promoting a privatized spirituality that overlooks the communal discipline Christ aimed to uphold in the church. Disregarding this communal structure ultimately leads to a subjectivization of ecclesiology and threatens doctrinal integrity. To achieve a more profound comprehension of Matthew 18:20 and its role in the redemptive-historical narrative, applying canonical criticism with a focus on authorial intent is crucial. Adhering to Brevard Childs' principles, it is vital to interpret texts in their final form within the canon.

When viewed as an integral component of the Matthean ecclesial discourse (Matt 16–20), the verse harmonizes with the thematic trajectory of Jesus establishing the ethical and structural identity of His church. Childs (1992) emphasizes that canonical reading avoids isolating verses from their broader theological and narrative framework. Thus, Matthew 18:20 should be viewed not as a solitary promise of God's divine presence but as a final affirmation after Jesus's outlined

method for upholding moral integrity within the community of believers. Consequently, reading the verse canonically situates it within the larger narrative encompassing communal discipline, divinely appointed authority, and the crucial reconciliation process.

Authorial intent, tied closely to the grammatical-historical method, compels interpreters to resist contemporary projections onto the text. Matthew's Jesus was forming a community with legal and spiritual accountability (cf. Matt 18:15-18), not merely suggesting a mystical presence in all Christian gatherings. The verse thus serves as divine affirmation of the authority delegated to the ecclesia when it obeys divine commands.

Furthermore, as highlighted in the study by Rev. Kimberly Orr (2019), the Matthean ecclesiology envisions a "commonwealth" rooted in torah-principled obedience and community responsibility, underscoring that interpretive reductionism robs the text of its formative role within church life. Matthew 18:20 is not a blanket promise of divine presence in any small Christian gathering. Instead, it is a climactic declaration of Christ's ultimate presence in the ecclesial restorative justice process and movement. Misinterpreting it suggests the broader trend of eisegesis in the contemporary church, where isolated texts are accentuated and popularised outside their canonical and theological background. Therefore, returning to grammatical-historical and canonical

approaches can ensure proper doctrinal clarity and ecclesial faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ.

4.3 TEXT FIVE: ACTS 2:4

And they were all filled with the holy spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (NKJV)

The passage of Acts 2:4 is often cited within Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as a foundational text for the doctrine of "speaking in tongues" or glossolalia. However, its frequent narrative as a normative or prescriptive command or order for all spirit-filled believers in Christ, primarily as a universal sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit, has generated theological and pastoral tensions. When properly applied, the grammatical-historical method offers a critical correction to some of the more experiential and eisegetical approaches that have dominated contemporary discourse.

Grammatical-historical and canonical context

From a grammatical-historical perspective, Acts 2:4 must be understood in light of its linguistic, historical, and cultural milieu. The Greek word for "tongues" in this verse, *glōssais*, specifically denotes "languages", intelligible human dialects, not ecstatic utterances devoid of semantic content (Boaheng, 2022; Oyetade, 2020). This is affirmed in the subsequent verses (Acts 2:6-11), where various listeners around the Mediterranean recognised their native languages being

spoken. This situates the Biblical text within a specific historical narrative: the Jewish journey to Jerusalem during Pentecost, involving many diasporic Jews (Boaheng, 2022).

The narrative is profoundly rooted in God's redemptive plan, bringing to fulfillment Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28) and Jesus' instruction in Acts 1:8 regarding spirit-empowered witness to every nation on earth. Hence, the grammatical-historical method resists anachronistic applications of the text that impose modern charismatic practices on a first-century missiological event (Abashiya, 2012).

Furthermore, the canonical reading reinforces this redemptive trajectory. The passage stands as a theological pivot in the Lukan narrative, linking the Old Testament expectation of the Spirit (cf. Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:27) with the formation of the church. As Horton (2007) noted, fire and wind imagery echoes Sinai theophanies and signals the eschatological inauguration of the spirit's global mission through the church. Thus, glossolalia in Acts 2 is not merely a spiritual experience but a theological sign of God's unifying and missionary intent (Boaheng, 2022).

Theological analysis and misinterpretation

Quietness does not simply mean lack of experience. A frequent misinterpretation of this passage is its extrapolation as a prescriptive norm requiring all spirit-filled Christians to speak in tongues as proof of salvation or baptism in the holy spirit.

This doctrinal posture has been prevalent in specific Pentecostal movements, where glossolalia is the primary or exclusive evidence of the Spirit's indwelling (Zimmerman, 1963; Farrell, 1963). Pauline theology, particularly in 1 Corinthians 12:30, clearly rejects the universality of any spiritual gift, including tongues. Misinterpreting Acts 2:4 has serious theological consequences, mainly seen in the tendency to prioritize personal spiritual experiences over the authoritative direction provided by scripture and sound exegesis. This shift in focus can lead to a spiritually elitist environment, creating a hierarchy among believers that separates those considered to have the "true" experience of the Spirit from those viewed as deficient. Oyetade (2020) wisely warns against such rigid doctrinal stances, as they distort the church's essential character as a Spirit-formed, inclusive, and mission-oriented community. This highlights the importance of employing canonical criticism and recognizing authorial intent. As Boaheng (2022) and Horton (2007) assert, Luke's narrative purpose in Acts 2 is to highlight the universally accessible and empowering work of the Holy Spirit, rather than to establish tongues-speaking as a compulsory rite of passage.

Missiological and Ecclesiological Implications

The Pentecost event, particularly as depicted in Acts 2:4, carries substantial ramifications for both ecclesiology and the overarching mission of Christianity. The multilingual marvel observed that day directly contrasts with the divisive Babel narrative (Genesis 11), symbolizing God's redemptive plan to unify

humanity through the Gospel's unifying power. Scholars such as Bediako (1995) and Miller (2011) affirm this theological motif, underscored by the necessity of cultural and linguistic contextualization in missions.

The tongues in Acts were a medium of proclamation and kerygma, not private spiritual edification. As Abashiya (2012) notes, the content of the tongues was declarative: “the wonders of God.” This confirms that glossolalia served an evangelistic and doxological function rather than being an interior, unintelligible experience. Misappropriating this text to validate private prayer languages or ecstatic utterances, therefore, divorces it from its original missional and theological purpose.

A methodologically sound, theologically robust reading of Acts 2:4 reorients its interpretation away from individualistic and experiential excesses toward its intended function as a marker of the spirit’s universal empowerment for global witness. The grammatical-historical approach highlights the miracle's linguistic importance, canonical criticism places it within the redemptive story, and authorial intent underscores its ecclesiastical role. Misinterpretation distorts doctrine and misguides praxis, making this verse a crucial issue in today's church's struggle for hermeneutical integrity.

4.4 TEXT SIX: ISAIAH 54:17

No weapon formed against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; their righteousness is from me, declares the Lord. (NKJV)

Grammatical-historical and canonical context

Isaiah 54:17 is frequently referenced in various Christian circles as a broad assurance of physical safety, personal vindication, and spiritual shielding from harm. However, this interpretation, often detached from its historical, literary, and theological context, results in misunderstandings that emphasize individual security more than covenantal theology.

Grammatically, the promise is embedded in a larger prophetic poem (Isaiah 54:1-17) addressed to post-exilic Israel. The passage forms part of a redemptive declaration following the “suffering servant” discourse in Isaiah 53. According to van der Walt (2021), this literary shift marks a movement from judgment to restoration. Israel, formerly desolate, is portrayed as a reconciled and vindicated people within a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Therefore, the reference to “no weapon” prospering should be interpreted in the context of divine covenant fidelity, not as an abstract universal shield against all adversity, but as reassurance to a restored nation re-entering right relationship with God. Historically, the chapter addresses the trauma and theological crisis of exile, where God’s judgment had seemingly forsaken Israel. Isaiah consistently portrays the return to peace (שָׁלוֹם) not as a condition created by human efforts or spiritual confessions but as a relational restoration granted by God (van der Walt, 2021). In this context,

peace flows from righteousness and is intimately tied to covenant obedience and divine initiative (cf. Isaiah 54:10; 60:17).

Misinterpretation and theological concerns

The widespread misuse of Isaiah 54:17 is often evident in “spiritual warfare” rhetoric or prosperity teachings, where it is invoked as a legal claim against opposition, illness, or failure. Such interpretations veer into doctrinal distortions prioritizing individual triumphalism over covenantal identity and communal faithfulness. As Pechansky (2006–2009) explains, the Hebrew concept of peace (שָׁלוֹם) is not merely about circumstantial stability, but about the balance sustained by relational fidelity between God and His people. When this verse is isolated from the context of Israel’s covenantal theology, it loses its grounding in divine justice and communal redemption and instead becomes a mantra of self-empowerment. Moreover, Brueggemann (2001) warns that Isaiah’s promises, including 54:17, are deeply eschatological and rooted in the servant’s atoning work. Detaching these promises from the prior suffering, repentance, and reconciliation emphasized in Isaiah 53 is hermeneutically flawed and theologically irresponsible.

Canonical criticism and authorial intent

Canonical criticism affirms that Isaiah 54 must be read continuously with the broader Isaianic vision of judgment and restoration. As van der Walt (2021) illustrates, peace and security in Isaiah are consistently conditional on a right

relationship with God. The “heritage of the servants of the lord” (v. 17b) refers not to arbitrary believers but to a specific, obedient remnant shaped by righteousness (Isaiah 51:1; 56:6-7). These themes echo the prophetic literature and must inform the canonical meaning of Isaiah 54:17.

The authorial intent, likely representing a post-exilic theological school that compiled prophetic oracles, was to reassure a traumatized community of God’s faithfulness, not to offer a *carte blanche* spiritual insurance policy. The “weapons” in question are symbolic of imperial oppression, exile trauma, and slander that Israel had endured. In this context, God’s assurance pertains to collective vindication rather than individual invulnerability, underpinned by divine justice.

Analytical Implications and Pastoral Reflection

From an analytical standpoint, Isaiah 54:17 demonstrates how a misunderstanding of scripture can shift theology from focusing on covenantal reliance to emphasizing individual entitlement. The theological journey of this verse leads away from prosperity theology and toward covenant theology, where God’s righteousness serves as both the cause and assurance of Israel’s peace. From a pastoral perspective, this verse is a call to engage in God’s redemptive story, rather than a promise of a trouble-free existence. A proper interpretation of the verse affirms that true security comes from residing in the righteousness bestowed by God, not from defensive assertions. This aligns closely with the grammatical-historical method, which aims to derive theological significance

rooted in historical context and the author's intent. Isaiah 54:17 should not be interpreted as a formula for personal safety; instead, it is a significant theological affirmation of God's covenantal protection over His redeemed community. Its misapplication in contemporary preaching reveals deeper issues in modern hermeneutics, where context is frequently compromised for personal interpretation. This verse is recovered through grammatical-historical and canonical criticism as a rich theological promise of restoration, righteousness, and divine fidelity, a message desperately needed in today's church.

4.5 TEXT SEVEN: ROMANS 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28, NIV)

Grammatical-historical context

Romans 8:28 is often referenced to support a general promise of divine goodness. This can suggest that every negative experience will ultimately lead to personal benefit or improvements in circumstances. However, these interpretations frequently detach the verse from its grammatical framework and the historical-theological context found in Pauline literature.

Grammatically, the Greek phrase *panta sunergei eis agathon* (“all things work together for good”) can be misunderstood when readers presuppose that *panta* (“all things”) are automatically subject to divine orchestration in a deterministic

sense. However, scholars note that *panta* is likely the subject of the verb, not God himself, and the verb *sunergei* (work together) reflects a relationship rather than unilateral causation (Joubert, 2018).

Historically, Romans was written to a diverse audience of Jewish and gentile believers navigating suffering and persecution under Roman imperial rule. Paul's emphasis on suffering, hope, and glorification in the surrounding verses (Romans 8:18-39) makes it clear that "good" (agathon) refers not to superficial outcomes, but to eschatological glory and moral transformation (Joubert, 2018).

Analytical and theological perspective

From an analytical viewpoint, misinterpreting this verse frequently aligns with a theology focused on prosperity, neglecting Paul's teachings on suffering. Rather than suggesting that believers escape hardship, Romans 8 asserts that suffering is a vital part of the believer's journey towards glorification. Joubert (2018) cautions against equating agathon with earthly success or individual comfort. Instead, Paul perceives "good" as the ultimate alignment with the image of Christ (v.29), positioning moral and spiritual good at the core of his theological perspective.

In the doctrinal framework, Romans 8:28 also plays an essential role in discussions regarding divine foreknowledge, predestination, and human autonomy. Paul's use of *prothesis* (purpose), *proorizō* (predestine), and *proginōskō* (foreknow) in verses 29–30 reveals a broader framework of salvific assurance rather than a mechanical blueprint of divine micromanagement

(Inyaregh, 2024). The passage highlights God's sovereign role in initiating and completing salvation, but not in a fatalistic manner; instead, it ensures the believer's hope for the future.

Canonical Criticism and Authorial Intent.

From a canonical perspective, Romans 8:28 aligns with Paul's overarching theological narrative, spanning Romans 5 to 8, which focuses on justification, sanctification, and glorification. Here, Paul is not addressing random hardships but the profound realities of a redeemed life amidst a fallen world. His argument reaches a climax with the assurance that nothing can separate believers from Christ's love (Rom. 8:38-39), anchoring Romans 8:28 not in circumstantial optimism but in theological certainty (Gorman, 2004).

Authoritatively, Paul intends to comfort believers enduring persecution by affirming that their sufferings serve a redemptive purpose when understood in light of God's plan. This aligns with the Pauline emphasis on inaugurated eschatology, the belief that the age to come has already begun in Christ and is manifesting in the church (Inyaregh, 2024).

Corrective hermeneutical insight

Through the grammatical-historical method, it becomes clear that Paul's audience is not promised circumstantial ease, but spiritual maturity and eternal glorification. Misinterpretations that promote triumphalist or overly optimistic

readings strip the passage of its theological weight. Moo (1996) and Joubert (2018) argue convincingly that Paul is combating fatalistic determinism, replacing it with relational theology rooted in God's love and faithfulness.

Theological and pastoral implications

Romans 8:28 demands that preachers and teachers reject eisegetical insertions of prosperity and deterministic outcomes. Instead, they must point congregants toward enduring faith, sanctification through suffering, and confident hope in God's redemptive purpose. Pastoral counselling must also resist trivialising pain with promises of immediate reversal and instead affirm God's presence amid trials.

4.6 COMPARATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The comparative thematic analysis within this chapter seeks to critically examine recurring patterns, doctrinal motifs, and interpretive inconsistencies among the texts analysed Matthew 18:20, acts 2:4, Isaiah 54:17, and romans 8:28. This analysis integrates the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and authorial intent to underscore how textual misinterpretations affect theological coherence and pastoral praxis in the 21st-century church.

A unifying trend across the misinterpretations of these texts is the displacement of their historical and theological contexts in favour of individualised or community-centric applications. In Matthew 18:20, the promise of Christ's

presence “where two or three are gathered” has been detached from its judicial and ecclesial context to promote a generalised sense of spiritual solidarity. Loader (2005) argues that prophecy in the Hebrew canon was rooted in history and focused on interpreting God’s will as it relates to the lived experiences of His people, rather than engaging in abstract universalism or emotional validation. These changes illustrate a larger trend in reader-centered hermeneutics, where personal interpretation frequently takes precedence over the coherence of the canon.

Similarly, the analysis of Acts 2:4 reveals a trend toward Pneumatological excesses. This verse, foundational to Pentecostal-Charismatic theology, is often isolated to validate glossolalia as a normative and prescriptive experience for all believers. However, Boaheng (2021) insists that Acts 2 should be understood as a unique salvific-historical event rather than an ecclesial template for normative charismatic practice. When interpreted through the lens of the historical-grammatical method, the emphasis shifts from ecstatic experience to the empowering of witness and unity in mission, a central theme of Luke-Acts as a two-volume theological narrative.

In Isaiah 54:17, the expression “no weapon formed against you shall prosper” has often been taken out of its prophetic and covenantal context to endorse triumphalist theology. However, as contextualised by Pennington (2020), this prophetic assurance is directed toward post-exilic Israel as part of God’s

redemptive commitment to restore Zion, not as a blanket promise for personal invincibility. The misapplication of such texts illustrates what Loader (2005) describes as a hermeneutical inversion where prophetic texts, once grounded in socio-political history, are reappropriated to affirm individual security devoid of covenantal responsibility.

Romans 8:28, another frequently cited text, encapsulates the dangers of interpretive simplification. While the passage affirms divine sovereignty over all circumstances, it has been misused to downplay human suffering or justify prosperity outcomes. As Lillback (2023) and Reese (1983) argue, theological misreadings of this kind can trivialise the complexity of suffering and divine providence by transforming theological assurance into motivational slogans. When viewed canonically, Romans 8 is part of a broader Pauline discourse on suffering, groaning, and the eschatological hope of redemption—a theme too often obscured by atomistic interpretations.

Across these texts, a pattern of decontextualization and doctrinal flattening emerges. Virkler and Ayayo (2023) contend that these methods overlook the unity and consistency of scripture, leading to a disjointed biblical witness composed of isolated affirmations instead of recognizing it as a unified redemptive story. This disconnection is exacerbated by the rise of experiential and prosperity theologies, which reshape doctrinal truths into instruments for affirmation rather than genuine transformation.

It is crucial to revert to strong hermeneutical practices to combat this issue. When employed with exegetical rigor, the grammatical-historical approach uncovers the layers of authorial intention and the theological coherence in scripture. For example, analyzing the syntax and semantics of terms in Acts 2:4 highlights the linguistic accuracy and the theological purpose woven into the narrative structure (Boaheng, 2021). As described by Pereira (2013), Canonical criticism supports the interpretation of each text within the larger scriptural narrative, ensuring that no verse exists in a vacuum but contributes to the theological narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Moreover, the outcomes of this comparative thematic analysis reinforce the importance of incorporating systematic theology into biblical interpretation. Dehart (2024) notes that a fragmented interpretive strategy frequently results in inadequate theological frameworks. Conversely, by approaching texts through scripture's Christocentric and covenantal themes, pastors and theologians can guide congregations toward a more coherent and biblically faithful spirituality.

In summary, the comparative analysis of Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:4, Isaiah 54:17, and Romans 8:28 shows a consistent shift away from historical, grammatical, and theological accuracy toward interpretive relativism and doctrinal reductionism. This trend necessitates a purposeful return to hermeneutical discipline grounded in historical awareness, theological coherence, and canonical integrity. Only in

this way can scripture serve as its authors intended: a revelatory witness to God's redemptive purpose in Christ, through the church, and for the world.

4.7 THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

The theological and pastoral implications of misinterpreted texts explored in this chapter are far-reaching and deeply consequential for the life and mission of the 21st-century church. Doctrinal distortion, ecclesial disunity, and the erosion of ministerial credibility are only some of the outcomes that arise when biblical texts are stripped from their historical, grammatical, and theological contexts. This section examines the impact of such misapplications on theological development and ministry practice, incorporating relevant scholarly insights from uploaded documents. A significant theological consequence is doctrinal inconsistency, which often stems from fragmented and proof-textual interpretations of scripture. As Tolentino (2024) states, selectively quoting scripture to support personal or institutional beliefs disrupts the coherence of biblical theology and obstructs the congregation's grasp of fundamental doctrines. The frequent citation of passages like Romans 8:28 or Isaiah 54:17 in prosperity and protection-focused theologies, without considering their canonical and redemptive contexts, conveys a diminished gospel that challenges God's sovereignty and the understanding of suffering.

This fragmentation is intensified by prosperity theology, which aligns divine favor with material wealth and physical health. According to Mpigi (2017) and

Owojaiye (2019), such teaching distorts biblical doctrine by interpreting texts like 3 John 1:2 as universal promises of wealth and health, rather than conditional greetings within an epistolary genre. The pastoral danger here is that when life circumstances contradict these teachings, believers may experience crises of faith, doubting either God's faithfulness or their spirituality.

The erosion of community cohesion within congregational life is closely linked to doctrinal disintegration. Tolentino (2024) explains that sermons shaped by selective hermeneutics often alienate segments of the church body, primarily when they disproportionately address one sociocultural group at the expense of others. For example, an overemphasis on divine vengeance or prosperity can silence voices calling for justice, repentance, and ethical transformation. When disconnected from a holistic theological framework, pastoral care struggles to address the varied contexts and needs effectively. Additionally, misinterpretation can drastically weaken pastoral authority and the pulpit's credibility. Frequent inaccuracies in exegesis undermine congregants' trust in church leadership, leading to spiritual stagnation. Barton et al. (2014) highlight that when congregants are exposed only to affirming yet theologically superficial messages, they find themselves spiritually malnourished and unable to engage in discipleship, resilience, or in-depth theological dialogues regarding broader cultural issues. The enduring outcome is an emotionally vibrant faith community, yet theologically deficient.

These patterns underscore the pressing need for a hermeneutical reformation to realign with the core tenets of the grammatical-historical method. This strategy ensures that passages such as Matthew 18:20 and Acts 2:4 are interpreted within their covenantal, ecclesiological, and missional contexts, rather than being used to validate personal spiritual experiences. Tolentino (2024) rightly emphasises that fidelity to the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) is indispensable to the health of both doctrine and community.

On a pastoral level, this calls for a renewed emphasis on **theological education and congregational literacy**. As noted by am3egoby (2017), the failure of theological institutions and ministers to contextualise robust doctrine has enabled the rise of simplistic and emotionally manipulative preaching that resonates but misguides. Churches must therefore invest in equipping leaders and members with tools for biblical discernment, canonical reasoning, and communal interpretation.

Additionally, pastoral ministry should reflect both theological courage and humility. This entails the readiness to confront widely accepted yet flawed teachings, guide congregants through uncomfortable truths, and exemplify a faith that balances divine mystery with biblical clarity. As Reese (1983) observed, selective preaching not only skews theology but carries ethical risks, including manipulation and spiritual exploitation. The misinterpretation of scripture explored through texts such as Romans 8:28, Isaiah 54:17, Acts 2:4, and Matthew

18:20, when viewed through the lens of the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and theological reflection, reveals a profound pastoral and theological emergency. The church must reclaim its interpretive heritage and renew its commitment to sound doctrine to fulfil its mission of spiritual formation, gospel witness, and community transformation in the 21st century.

4.8 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter has critically examined the misinterpretation of four theologically significant biblical texts: Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:4, Isaiah 54:17, and Romans 8:28, focusing on how their misuse has impacted ecclesiology and pneumatology in the contemporary church. The analysis employed a qualitative and exegetical methodology, grounded in a historical and analytical research approach, and framed by the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and the principle of authorial intent.

Each text revealed a consistent pattern of interpretive negligence resulting in doctrinal distortion and pastoral disorientation. *Matthew 18:20*, often used to affirm Christ's presence in informal gatherings, was shown to be a passage on church discipline and communal accountability, not merely a statement about divine omnipresence. *Acts 2:4* was frequently misappropriated to promote glossolalia as a normative spiritual benchmark, despite its original function as a theological and missionary event within redemptive history. *Isaiah 54:17* has become a cornerstone of triumphalist theology, detached from its post-exilic,

covenantal context and reinterpreted as a universal promise of personal invincibility. Likewise, *Romans 8:28* is frequently quoted to suggest a prosperity-affirming outlook, when it is a profound eschatological reassurance meant for believers enduring suffering within God's redemptive plan.

The **comparative thematic analysis** uncovered several interrelated patterns: decontextualization, theological flattening, and the rise of anthropocentric hermeneutics. These patterns are closely tied to reader-response tendencies and prosperity-driven interpretations, which prioritize experiential validation over theological fidelity. Across all four texts, the neglect of grammatical, historical, and canonical dimensions led to interpretations that misrepresent the intended message and promote dangerous theological assumptions about divine favour, suffering, and ecclesial authority.

The **theological and pastoral implications** of these misinterpretations are substantial. They include doctrinal confusion, spiritual disillusionment, diminished pastoral credibility, and the propagation of shallow theology that fails to sustain believers through trials or nurture mature discipleship. As demonstrated, this interpretive crisis calls for a hermeneutical reformation that re-centres the church on rigorous exegesis, canonical coherence, and theological integrity.

Chapter four has shown that ecclesiology and pneumatology, when built upon misapplied texts, risk becoming caricatures of their biblical foundations. This

chapter emphasizes the importance of sound hermeneutics for maintaining doctrinal clarity and pastoral faithfulness in today's church by re-examining these passages within their historical context, theological continuity, and redemptive purpose.

Chapter four: textual analysis II- Ecclesiology and Pneumatology (Resume)

Section	Summary
4.1 Introduction to the chapter	Introduces the focus on ecclesiology and pneumatology, emphasising key texts' historical and theological misreadings and reiterating the study's methodological and theoretical framework.
4.2 Text Four: Matthew 18:20	This clarifies that Matthew 18:20 addresses church discipline and communal authority, not informal gatherings, and urges a contextual and canonical understanding.
4.3 Text five: Acts 2:4	Examines acts 2:4 in its Pentecostal setting, refuting its use as a universal prescription for tongues and reasserting its missiological and redemptive-historical context.
4.4 Text six: Isaiah 54:17	Demonstrates that Isaiah 54:17 is a post-exilic promise tied to covenantal restoration, not a general guarantee of personal victory against adversity.
4.5 Text seven: Romans 8:28	Explores how Romans 8:28 has been misconstrued as a promise of worldly good rather than spiritual formation and eschatological hope in the face of suffering.
4.6 Comparative Thematic Analysis	It highlights thematic patterns across texts, including

	decontextualization, prosperity bias, and anthropocentrism, reinforcing the need for hermeneutical discipline.
4.7 theological and pastoral implications	Discusses the impact of these misinterpretations on doctrine and pastoral care, including theological confusion, disillusionment, and weakened church leadership.
4.8 Summary of Chapter Four	Summarizes exegetical findings, reaffirming the need for grammatical-historical, canonical, and theologically coherent approaches in biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS III

SOTERIOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The misuse of eschatological and soteriological texts in contemporary Christian preaching reveals interpretive negligence and theological dislocation. This chapter continues the pattern of close exegetical analysis established in the preceding sections, with particular attention to doctrinal formulations surrounding salvation and final judgment. These categories are easily misappropriated when biblical texts are taken out of their literary and theological contexts. Central to this exploration are three highly familiar and frequently distorted passages: Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10. Each of these verses has suffered from forms of eisegesis that distort the message of Christ, elevate human subjectivity, and substitute theological substance for emotive convenience.

This chapter builds on the grammatical-historical method, as previously articulated, while placing heavier emphasis on canonical criticism and authorial intent. These frameworks are essential when handling texts with strong metaphorical structures or eschatological overtones, such as the Book of

Revelation. Furthermore, the qualitative and exegetical methodology is particularly suited for such analysis, as it allows for interpretive depth that is both textually and theologically grounded. The historical-analytical research approach ensures that biblical passages are not treated as abstract propositions but as dynamic responses to concrete ecclesial and theological crises in the early Christian communities.

A crucial insight from Theunissen's (2005) symbolic-interactionist reading of Revelation is that the problem the Book of Revelation addresses is not persecution, as is often supposed, but the erosion of Christian identity. This distinction has profound implications for this study. Rather than interpreting Revelation 3:20 as a warm evangelistic plea, Theunissen contends that John's rhetorical purpose is to restore covenantal fidelity and ecclesial distinctiveness, an identity issue masked by metaphors and apocalyptic imagery. Such a hermeneutical reframing requires close sensitivity to the author's intention, which symbolic-interaction theory places at the forefront of interpretive analysis.

In contrast to the long-standing tradition that Revelation was penned primarily to comfort a persecuted church (Stanley, 1993), Theunissen (2005) presents an interpretive model in which John, the author of Revelation, defines the symbolic "Situation" of the churches not as one of external oppression, but of internal disintegration. Drawing from W.I. Thomas's concept of situation-definition, Theunissen identifies John's rhetorical task as one of "constructing" the

interpretive environment through powerful symbolic imagery (Theunissen, 2005, p. 441). This reading of Revelation as a problem-solving document resonates with the methodology of the present study: the biblical author presents theological diagnoses that call for specific responses, repentance, endurance, and renewal of fidelity.

Importantly, Theunissen's analysis reveals that in the seven letters to the churches (Revelation 2–3), John is not primarily offering encouragement, but exhortation. He utilises warning language, conditional rebukes, and promises of judgement to highlight the consequences of theological compromise, particularly heresy, idolatry, and moral laxity (Theunissen, 2005, pp. 446–448). This aligns with the broader aim of this research: to expose how doctrinal misinterpretations often stem from failure to engage the text within its covenantal and canonical framework. Indeed, when John employs the metaphor of Jesus standing at the door and knocking (Rev. 3:20), it is not to portray Christ as a passive petitioner for the unbeliever's heart, but as the authoritative covenant Lord demanding repentance from his complacent covenant people (Theunissen, 2005, p. 448).

The symbolic-interactionist framework offered by Theunissen is particularly useful in interpreting texts like Revelation 3:20, which have been removed from their ecclesial context and reinterpreted as personal, sentimental appeals. By analyzing “situations” (such as the Laodicean crisis in Rev. 3), Theunissen demonstrates that John's action lines, exhortations, calls to repentance, and

threats reflect a rhetorical strategy intended to address internal spiritual degradation rather than external persecution. In this light, Revelation becomes a call to identity reformation, a task that resonates deeply with the theological thrust of this thesis.

The action lines within John's narrative show a consistent concern with group boundaries, theological norms, and spiritual integrity. Theunissen argues that John's method of reinforcing Christian identity involves drawing sharp symbolic contrasts between "insiders" and "outsiders", those aligned with Christ and those aligned with Satan (Theunissen, 2005, p. 450). Such dualistic constructions are not intended to promote exclusivism but to reassert the centrality of Christ-centred identity. The misuse of eschatological verses, such as John 10:10, which is often misapplied to promote material success, is thereby exposed as an act of theological boundary erasure.

Similarly, Matthew 7:1 is routinely cited out of context to silence moral or doctrinal critique, thereby undercutting the very identity-shaping function of Scripture that Theunissen's reading emphasises. In Revelation, false teachings are not tolerated in the name of "non-judgmentalism," they are named, confronted, and corrected (Theunissen, 2005, pp. 452–453). This approach reinforces the value of authorial intent: John's objective is not merely to share visions but to demand covenantal realignment.

Furthermore, the distinction between relational problems and heresy, as made in Theunissen's symbolic-structural breakdown of Revelation, supports this study's contention that the misinterpretation of Scripture results in doctrinal and spiritual malformation (Theunissen, 2005, pp. 447–448). The relational issues John identifies (such as those affecting the churches of Ephesus and Laodicea) reflect a drift from the person of Christ. At the same time, heretical errors (as seen in Pergamum and Thyatira) stem from compromised theology. Both categories intersect in that they represent a breakdown in theological fidelity, which the grammatical-historical method aims to prevent by preserving the authorial message within its historical and theological context.

Additionally, Theunissen's symbolic reading amplifies the role of hermeneutical responsibility. The "immoral woman" in Revelation 17–18, often understood solely in political terms, is shown to represent a spiritual threat of assimilation (Theunissen, 2005, p. 451). This symbolic personification of lawlessness cautions the Church against any interpretation that displaces doctrinal fidelity in favour of cultural conformity, a warning equally applicable to modern abuses of John 10:10 and other "empowerment" verses.

The theological thread that binds these insights is identity. John's entire apocalyptic vision is a rhetorical effort to re-establish and strengthen the distinctiveness of the Christian community—a task undermined by superficial or prosperity-driven interpretations that prioritise personal comfort over covenantal

faithfulness. Revelation's symbolic intensity is not meant to entertain or mystify, but to disrupt complacency and provoke doctrinal correction. This is a hermeneutical posture urgently needed in the 21st-century church, where interpretive laxity often leads to spiritual disorientation.

Beyond Revelation 3:20, which has been contextually reclaimed in light of covenantal reproof rather than a salvific invitation, Matthew 7:1 and John 10:10 also embody the sort of interpretive flattening that Theunissen's (2005) framework cautions against. Though his primary focus is on Revelation, his symbolic-interactionist insights on rhetorical strategy, audience shaping, and thematic boundary enforcement bear significant interpretive value when extended canonically to other New Testament writings that have suffered under reader-response reductionism.

Matthew 7:1, "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged,*" has increasingly been deployed in popular discourse as a theological barrier against any ethical, doctrinal, or pastoral critique. In modern applications, this verse is often abstracted from the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount and utilised as an immunisation tactic against accountability. However, Theunissen's attention to how biblical authors "define situations" for their audiences (p. 445) reminds us that Jesus, like John in Revelation, is not promoting passivity but invoking a relational and covenantal ethics that differentiates between proper judgment and hypocritical posturing.

This distinction becomes apparent when Matthew 7:1 is read grammatically and canonically. The surrounding verses (Matt. 7:25) elaborate that Jesus is not condemning judgment per se, but rather unjust and hypocritical judgment that fails to apply the same standards to oneself. His instruction is part of a broader theological vision that calls the covenant community to mutual accountability under divine authority. Theunissen's model suggests that moral discernment is a part of identity-shaping; failure to make correct judgments allows "foreign categories", in John's imagery, spiritual impurities, to breach the covenantal identity of the people of God (Theunissen, 2005, p. 450).

This is precisely the interpretive danger observed in modern misreadings of Matthew 7:1. When judgment is wholesale condemned in the name of tolerance, the result is not a liberated community but a morally disoriented one, unable to preserve the ethical shape of the kingdom. Theunissen's (2005) emphasis on the rhetorical construction of identity via contrast and exhortation provides a lens through which Matthew 7:1 is not an invitation to moral subjectivism but a warning against arrogance that forsakes righteous standards.

The broader canonical context supports this reading. Jesus Himself encourages proper judgment in John 7:24 and instructs the Church in Matthew 18 to confront sin within the community—an action that presupposes both discernment and moral authority. Thus, the popular rendering of "Do not judge" as a prohibition on all evaluation is grammatically deficient and theologically corrosive, as with

the Laodicean church in Revelation, where a false sense of peace masked complacency, the misuse of Matthew 7:1 today similarly reflects an evasion of spiritual responsibility under the guise of tolerance.

Turning to John 10:10, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly*”—we see another text often abstracted from its pastoral and polemical context. In prosperity-driven theologies, “abundant life” is typically equated with material success, physical health, and upward mobility. However, when viewed through the lens of Theunissen’s (2005) symbolic-rhetorical framework, this misapplication becomes an example of semantic reassignment, where theological terms are redefined through external cultural values rather than internal canonical logic.

In the Fourth Gospel, the “thief” is not a generic villain nor the devil in a universalised sense, but somewhat religious authorities who exploit, manipulate, and fail to guard the spiritual well-being of the people (cf. Ezekiel 34). Jesus, in contrast, is the Good Shepherd who sacrifices Himself for the flock. The life He promises is not transactional or circumstantial; it is eternal life, a relational existence grounded in divine union and ethical transformation. Theunissen’s emphasis on the symbolic construction of moral landscapes within Revelation can equally be seen in John’s Gospel, where contrasts are not merely visual but existential and ethical (Theunissen, 2005, pp. 451–452).

Theologically, “abundant life” refers to intimacy with God, not affluence. Theunissen’s warning that symbolic distortions lead to covenantal breakdown (p. 448) is clearly illustrated here. When Jesus’ redemptive mission is reduced to a promise of circumstantial improvement, the Cross is displaced by consumerist theology. The problem is not simply lexical; it is soteriological, as salvation becomes a temporal benefit rather than a spiritual reconciliation. The symbolic scope of John’s “life” (zoē) language throughout the Gospel invariably points toward transformation into the image of Christ, a theme echoed in Paul (e.g., Romans 8:28-30) and Revelation itself (cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:17).

In this way, John 10:10 mirrors Revelation 3:20 in its theological trajectory. Both texts have been sentimentalised: one as a personal invitation to open the door to Christ, the other as a claim on abundant living. However, both are calls to obedience, identity restoration, and participation in the divine covenant in their canonical and literary settings. Theunissen’s (2005) symbolic-structural readings provide a method of analysis that safeguards against superficiality by demanding contextual immersion and theological attentiveness.

Thus, the unifying purpose of this chapter is to expose how all three texts, Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10, have been rhetorically and theologically diluted in widespread use. The consequences are doctrinal confusion, missional misdirection, and a diluted ecclesial witness. We retrieve

their integrity and recover their transformative power by placing these texts back within their redemptive, canonical, and authorially intended frameworks.

Finally, Theunissen's methodological experiment with symbolic interactionism reminds us that texts are not static but engaged in a dialogical relationship with their readers. However, this dialogical space must be governed by responsible hermeneutics. The present research, by integrating the grammatical-historical method and canonical criticism, resists the pull of reader-response theory and instead recovers the original intent and doctrinal coherence of the biblical message.

Thus, this chapter sets out not merely to analyse the misuse of three key passages, but to demonstrate how faithful exegesis restores doctrinal clarity. The misuse of Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10 reflects a broader pattern of theological drift, which this study seeks to confront. Returning to authorial intent, situational awareness, and canonical harmony, we reassert the integrity of the Christian message concerning salvation and eschatological hope.

5.2 Text Eight: Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20, KJV)

Revelation 3:20 has become one of the most frequently quoted texts in contemporary Christian culture to describe Jesus' personal invitation to

unbelievers. It is widely featured in evangelistic literature and pulpit appeals where it functions as a powerful image of Christ "waiting" outside the door of the sinner's heart, gently requesting entrance. While emotionally compelling and pastorally useful, this interpretation isolates the verse from its literary, canonical, and historical-theological contexts. The result is a deeply sentimental and individualistic message, largely incompatible with the theological intention of the Johannine Apocalypse. A careful examination of Revelation 3:20, informed by scholarly frameworks that account for its genre, rhetoric, and original audience, reveals a corrective to this misinterpretation.

Revelation 3:20 appears in the final of the seven messages addressed to churches in Asia Minor, specifically Laodicea, a congregation severely rebuked for spiritual complacency and self-deception (Rev. 3:14-22). The opening critique, "you are neither cold nor hot" (v.15), launches one of the sharpest assessments in the letters. Unlike other churches, Laodicea receives no commendation. The city, historically known for its wealth, textile industry, and medical innovations (especially its eye salve), had been economically self-sufficient. After an earthquake in 60 A.D., it refused imperial assistance for reconstruction (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.27). This socio-economic background deeply informs the metaphorical language employed in the letter.

The metaphor of Jesus "standing at the door and knocking" must be understood in light of the covenantal relationship between God and His people, as well as the

prophetic tradition in which divine presence alternates between blessing and judgment depending on covenant fidelity. As Mounce (1977) and Beasley-Murray (1978) both assert, the “door” imagery evokes an eschatological context of visitation rather than invitation. Christ’s standing at the door is best understood as a warning of imminent judgment, a last appeal to repentance before divine discipline is executed.

Within Jewish apocalyptic tradition, divine knocking often signals urgency and crisis. In *Luke 12:35-40*, *Jesus describes the master returning from a wedding banquet, knocking at the door*, where preparedness determines who is welcomed into fellowship and who is excluded. Similarly, in *Song of Songs 5:2*, the beloved knocks, but the bride’s delayed response results in loss. These intertexts reinforce the covenantal and eschatological texture of the metaphor in Revelation 3:20. They also suggest that the emphasis is not on Christ’s vulnerability, as popular interpretations suggest, but on the urgency of responding appropriately to divine initiative.

Richard Bauckham (1993), whose work on Revelation situates the entire book within a political-theological critique of empire and ecclesial compromise, notes that the Laodicean church reflects a Christian community that has grown content with societal status and spiritual indifference. The knock is not a gentle request for personal conversion, but a prophetic call to reinvigorate the covenantal relationship. The meal that follows, “I will come in and sup with him,” is a clear

allusion to the eschatological messianic banquet—a theme deeply rooted in both Old and New Testament apocalyptic visions (cf. Isaiah 25:6–9; Luke 22:30). It is a reward for those who “overcome” (Rev. 3:21), not an initial conversion event.

Moreover, R.H. Charles (1920), in his seminal commentary on Revelation, identifies the “voice” of Christ mentioned in verse 20 as consistent with prophetic utterance rather than a plea. In apocalyptic literature, voices signify commands, declarations of judgment, or divine revelation. This aligns with John’s depiction of Christ in Revelation 1:15, whose voice is likened to the sound of many waters—a majestic and awe-inspiring figure, not one passively awaiting access. The shift in tone from critique to appeal in Revelation 3:20 must therefore be read not as sentimental weakness, but as a last covenantal overture before disciplinary consequences are enacted (cf. Rev. 3:19, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”).

The historical context further illuminates the urgency of this text. Laodicea, situated along important trade routes and famous for its affluence, was also known for its tepid water supply, sourced via aqueducts from hot springs that cooled before arrival. This geographical reality contributes to the earlier metaphor: “neither hot nor cold” (v.15) is not merely about spiritual passion, but utility. The church is ineffective, useless for healing (hot) or refreshing (cold). This rebuke forms the basis for the knock in verse 20. As Beale (1999) explains,

the invitation is not primarily to salvation, but to renewed missional faithfulness and covenant fidelity.

The message to Laodicea, including verse 20, fits within the broader liturgical and covenantal structure of the seven letters. Each ends with a call to overcome, a promise to the faithful, and an exhortation to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This structure echoes covenantal renewal ceremonies in Deuteronomy, where blessings and curses are declared based on obedience (Deut. 30:15-20). In this light, the “door” is not the individual human heart but the threshold of covenant renewal, with Christ standing as both judge and redeemer.

The typical evangelical misreading of Revelation 3:20 as an evangelistic appeal also violates the literary genre of Revelation. As apocalyptic literature, the text employs symbolic language to reveal divine perspectives on historical realities. The symbolic function of Christ’s knock is a prophetic confrontation, aligning more with Old Testament prophetic acts, such as Isaiah walking naked and barefoot (Isaiah 20) or Ezekiel laying siege to a brick (Ezekiel 4), than with modern personalized appeals. The symbolism challenges the community to discern its condition and respond in covenantal repentance.

Interpretations that reduce this verse to an individual salvific plea obscure its corporate address. The original recipients were the Laodicean Christians as a body. The individualising of the text reflects modern Western tendencies toward privatised religion. However, in biblical theology, salvation is always both

personal and communal. The “one” who hears and opens is not isolated from the church but becomes the model for ecclesial repentance. The meal is not merely personal fellowship but an anticipation of communal eschatological restoration (cf. Rev. 19:9, the wedding supper of the Lamb).

Additionally, the verse should be interpreted harmoniously with Revelation’s high Christology. Christ is not depicted as a seeker but as a Sovereign. His voice, as elsewhere in the Apocalypse, commands allegiance (cf. Rev. 1:15; 2:1). His standing at the door is an act of judicial presence, reminiscent of Yahweh’s visitation in the Old Testament. The promise to dine is akin to covenant renewal feasts and aligns with prophetic motifs where Yahweh invites His people to restored fellowship following repentance (cf. Hosea 2:14-23).

Lastly, the text’s eschatological framework prohibits a purely temporal or motivational interpretation. The meal is not merely symbolic of restored intimacy in this life but of eschatological fulfilment in the age to come. This reinforces the text’s urgency and transcendence. As Ladd (1972) notes, the Kingdom of God in Revelation is both present and future, requiring present faithfulness as preparation for future participation.

Revelation 3:20 must be reclaimed from the domain of popular sentimentalism and re-integrated into the apocalyptic, covenantal, and ecclesial framework in which it belongs. The verse is not a salvific overture to unbelievers but a prophetic confrontation with a complacent church. Christ’s knock is not the knock of a guest

but of a King, arriving to assess the condition of His house. The response He demands is not mere emotional receptivity but repentance, covenant renewal, and participation in eschatological blessing. Only by restoring this text's grammatical, historical, and theological integrity can we honour its authorial intent and recover its relevance for a Church that continues to struggle with the same afflictions of self-reliance, spiritual apathy, and doctrinal compromise that characterised Laodicea.

5.3 Text Nine: Matthew 7:1

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (NIV)

Introduction and Common Misinterpretation

Matthew 7:1 has become one of the most quoted yet misinterpreted verses in modern Christian culture. It is frequently invoked as a blanket prohibition against moral discernment or criticism, often used to suggest that Christians should avoid making evaluative claims about others' beliefs or behaviours. This popular reading aligns more with postmodern relativism than biblical theology and is symptomatic of the experiential and eisegetical approaches critiqued in this study.

Many modern readers reduce this passage to a theological shield against correction, quoting it as if Jesus intended to dismantle all forms of moral accountability. This interpretive trend is facilitated mainly by reader-response hermeneutics, where subjective experience becomes the criterion for textual

meaning. However, this use of Matthew 7:1 fails to account for its literary context, historical background, and grammatical structure, all of which are essential to a proper exegesis based on the grammatical-historical method.

Grammatical-Historical Context

The Greek imperative *Mḥ κρίνετε* (“Do not judge”) must be understood within the broader semantic range of *krinō* (to judge), which includes meanings such as “to evaluate,” “to separate,” or “to pronounce condemnation.” In this context, the verb most likely refers not to all forms of judgment but to hypocritical, self-righteous condemnation. Matthew 7:2 clarifies: “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” This introduces the principle of reciprocity and conditionality, a consistent theme in Matthean theology.

Mbabazi (2011) highlights the conditional structure embedded in the verse. The reciprocal nature of judgment in verses 1–2 forms a literary and theological link with other Matthean passages such as Matthew 5:7 (“Blessed are the merciful...”), 6:12, 14–15 (“Forgive us as we forgive”), and 18:23–35 (the parable of the unforgiving servant). These texts collectively communicate that divine judgment is conditional upon human behaviour, especially in interpersonal relationships.

The reciprocal metaphor in Matthew 7:2 (“with the measure you use it will be measured to you”) is a common Jewish idiom that reflects ethical accountability. France (2007), cited in Mbabazi’s work, explains that this “measuring” analogy

was familiar to Jewish audiences and served as a standard image for divine justice. Thus, Jesus' warning was not against discernment but against the hypocritical elevation of oneself above others while ignoring personal shortcomings.

Theological Implications

Theologically, Matthew 7:1 addresses the corrupt tendency to usurp divine prerogative. Judgment belongs solely to the divine in the ultimate sense of determining another's worth before God. Mbabazi draws attention to the fact that this passage does not forbid moral evaluation altogether but warns against assuming a divine role while neglecting one's moral accountability (Luz, 2005; Davies & Allison, 1988).

The call here aligns with Matthew's broader ethics of mercy and forgiveness. In particular, the link between Matthew 7:1-2 and 6:14-15 is crucial: if one is unmerciful or judgmental, they risk forfeiting divine mercy. As Mbabazi notes, the conditionality expressed in Matthew 7:1-2 reflects a broader Matthean ethic of reciprocity that mirrors divine justice, where the treatment we extend to others becomes the measure by which we are treated.

Davies and Allison offer further theological insight, observing that Jesus' instruction stems from the *imitatio Dei* ("imitating God") motif—disciples are to reflect God's character in mercy and restraint, rather than emulating human

injustice (Davies & Allison, 1988). Therefore, the passage calls not for moral neutrality but for moral humility and divine imitation.

Canonical and Intertextual Context

Canonical criticism helps illuminate this passage's location within the broader scriptural narrative. As part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), it forms a unit of ethical teaching aimed at kingdom living. The Sermon contrasts internal righteousness with external religiosity, and Matthew 7:1 is a key component in this discourse. Within the canonical context, this instruction complements other teachings on forgiveness, mercy, and humility, reinforcing a consistent biblical ethic rather than introducing a new doctrine.

Intertextually, Mbabazi connects Matthew 7:1-2 with Sirach 28:17, where the refusal to show mercy is directly tied to divine judgment. This parallel demonstrates that Matthew's teaching is not entirely novel but grounded in Jewish wisdom literature, emphasizing the moral responsibility to forgive and show compassion. However, the Matthean integration of these ideas is distinctly Christocentric, framing forgiveness and mercy not only as ethical imperatives but as reflections of God's kingdom order.

Additionally, Reimer (1996), as cited in the same document, supports the notion that Sirach's teachings on reciprocity and divine judgment laid the groundwork for Jesus' ethical teachings, particularly in the areas of judgment and forgiveness.

This confirms that Matthew 7:1-2 participates in a longstanding theological tradition that views mercy and judgment as inseparable.

Methodological Application

Using the historical-analytical research approach, this passage illustrates the value of reconstructing first-century interpretive contexts to correct modern distortions. The study challenges the reductionist interpretations often influenced by reader-response hermeneutics by situating Jesus' words within their social, theological, and literary environment.

The grammatical-historical method proves particularly effective in this context. A literal reading that incorporates the nuances of language (*krinō*), historical setting (Jewish ethical idioms), and literary structure (Sermon on the Mount) demonstrates that the prohibition is not universal but conditional. Thus, it preserves the theological unity of Matthew's Gospel while safeguarding against interpretive relativism.

Critique of Misinterpretation

The widespread use of Matthew 7:1 to silence ethical discourse or deflect accountability fundamentally misconstrues the verse. Mbabazi, drawing on France (2007) and Bruner (2004), contends that such interpretations reflect not a pursuit of peace but an avoidance of spiritual responsibility. Rather than teaching

moral neutrality, the text commands that judgment be administered in the same spirit with which one would wish to be judged, a call to mercy, not silence.

This study reasserts that doctrinal soundness requires discernment grounded in mercy and humility. The verse warns against judgment that is condemning or self-righteous, not discernment rooted in love and truth. The danger lies not in identifying sin, but in ignoring one's faults, a theme expanded in verses 3–5 with the metaphor of the speck and log.

Matthew 7:1 is a text rich in ethical and theological significance, often distorted by shallow readings divorced from its context. Through the lens of the grammatical-historical method, it becomes clear that Jesus calls for humility, reciprocity, and imitation of divine qualities in interpersonal relationships. The verse stands in continuity with a wider Matthean theology that upholds mercy, accountability, and the conditional nature of divine judgment.

Canonical criticism and authorial intent anchor the verse within the unified message of Matthew's Gospel, while intertextual comparisons with Sirach deepen our understanding of its theological roots. Far from being a *carte blanche* against discernment, Matthew 7:1-2 exhorts believers to judge as those who will themselves be judged, to forgive as those in need of forgiveness, and to extend mercy as recipients of God's mercy. Thus, the verse challenges theological misinterpretation and the interpreter's ethical posture, a fitting concern for a study committed to exegetical integrity and doctrinal faithfulness.

5.4 Text Ten: John 10:10

John 10:10 is a widely quoted verse in many Christian circles, frequently cited to affirm God's promise of a prosperous and abundant life. It reads: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (RSV). Modern preaching often interprets this passage to suggest that Jesus offers material wealth, physical health, and unbounded personal success. However, such interpretations risk distorting the original intent of the passage when not rooted in grammatical-historical exegesis, canonical context, and theological coherence.

Grammatical-Historical Context

Regarding grammatical structure, the verse is situated within Jesus's "Good Shepherd Discourse" (John 10:1-18), a section that uses agrarian imagery familiar to a first-century Palestinian audience. Jesus's contrast between the thief and Himself follows the earlier discussion on legitimate and illegitimate access to the sheepfold. The "thief" is anyone entering not through the gate (v.1), which symbolizes improper spiritual leadership (Tenney, 1981). Jesus identifies Himself as the Gate (v.7) and the Shepherd (v.11), indicating He is the only legitimate access to salvation and pastoral care. These dual metaphors cannot be separated from one another. Keddie (2001) argues that one must avoid forcing meaning into every detail but instead understand the main message of Jesus's figure of speech as a portrayal of divine care and salvific access.

In this context, the Greek word translated as “life” is *zoē*, which does not merely indicate biological life (*bios*), but a quality of spiritual vitality and eternal communion with God. This is reinforced by the use of “abundantly” (*perissos*), which implies a superabundance not necessarily in material possessions, but in spiritual depth, relational wholeness, and redemptive fulfilment (Keener, 2003).

Canonical and Theological Interpretation

The canonical context helps elucidate the theological trajectory of this verse. In the broader Johannine corpus, “life” is consistently associated with eternal life through a relationship with Jesus. For example, John 17:3 defines eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ. Therefore, to read John 10:10 as a promise of health and wealth is to decontextualize it from the theological narrative of John’s Gospel, which is focused on spiritual rebirth, not material gain.

This perspective is supported by Scott (2003), who traces the metaphor of the “door” to Jewish apocalyptic traditions and Wisdom literature. The gate or door in these texts represents access to divine truth, salvation, and righteous living. Therefore, when Jesus calls Himself the door, He positions Himself as the exclusive path to true life and spiritual flourishing, not worldly success.

Tenney (1981) offers a historical backdrop, noting that many pseudo-messianic figures emerged during the intertestamental period and the time of Roman oppression in Palestine. These figures, like Bar Kokhba and other nationalistic rebels, sought to liberate Israel through violent means. In contrast, Jesus’s mission

is not nationalistic but redemptive. The “thieves and robbers” (v.8) refer to these false leaders who exploit the people for personal or political gain. Jesus, by contrast, offers sacrificial care and genuine salvation—a message deeply embedded in His mission to lay down His life for His sheep (v.11).

Literary and Metaphorical Significance

The literary strategy employed in John 10 is that of a *παροιμία* (parοimία)—a proverb or figurative saying. According to Whitacre (cited in Keddie, 2001), Jesus’s listeners failed to grasp the deeper meaning of the metaphor, a reflection of their spiritual blindness. This necessitated further clarification, where Jesus explicitly declared Himself the door and the good shepherd. As Keener (2003) points out, metaphors in Johannine literature invite deeper theological reflection rather than literalistic interpretations. The metaphor of the thief does not refer to Satan, as popularly taught, but to false religious leaders who damage God’s people through manipulative doctrines. Using this metaphor in verse 10, Jesus differentiates His ministry from others: where others take, He gives; where others destroy, He restores; where others kill, He revives.

Relevance to African Context and Leadership

Boaheng (2021) applies this passage to the African church, where spiritual abuse, authoritarian leadership, and prosperity-driven theology are prevalent. In many African churches, John 10:10 is interpreted to mean that following Christ

guarantees financial prosperity and physical health. However, such a reading reflects a theological overreach that strips the verse of its redemptive essence.

Instead, as Scott (2003) clarifies, the passage speaks of Jesus's role as a protective and nurturing shepherd, committed to the holistic well-being of His flock. "Life in abundance" includes forgiveness, purpose, peace, community, and eternal hope. It is not a guarantee of material comfort but a promise of spiritual wholeness. Boaheng also notes that Jesus's leadership is sacrificial rather than exploitative. In contrast to hirelings who abandon the sheep at the sight of danger, Jesus voluntarily lays down His life (John 10:15, 17–18). This challenges contemporary African leaders, both religious and political, to emulate Jesus's servant leadership model, where the leader's priority is the welfare of their community, not personal enrichment.

Critical Misinterpretations

The prosperity gospel's distortion of John 10:10 hinges on reading Western individualistic and consumerist ideals into the text. Proponents often cherry-pick "abundant life" as a standalone promise of comfort, success, and affluence. However, when isolated from verses 1–9 and 11–18, the verse becomes a pretext for promoting a theology of entitlement, undermining the integrity of the Gospel message and setting up congregants for spiritual disillusionment when material breakthroughs do not materialize.

Köstenberger (2004) warns that John's Gospel must be read as a cohesive theological document. Interpretive segments, such as John 10, must be seen within their narrative flow, especially in light of chapters 9 and 11, which reflect on spiritual sight and resurrection, respectively. The "life" Jesus promises is a resurrected, Spirit-enabled life that aligns with God's purposes rather than personal aspirations.

Implications for Theology and Hermeneutics

From a methodological standpoint, this passage supports the grammatical-historical method, which insists on deriving meaning from the author's intent, genre, and historical setting. Jesus's language draws heavily from Old Testament imagery of God as shepherd (e.g., Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34), reinforcing the theological continuity of divine leadership, care, and covenantal faithfulness. Rhetorically, Jesus uses familiar images not to promise luxury, but to communicate the radical nature of His sacrificial love and the exclusivity of salvation through Him. Interpreters, especially preachers and theologians, must resist the temptation to over-allegorise or universalise metaphors beyond their immediate literary and theological context.

Moreover, Boaheng's study reveals the pastoral implications of this passage. In churches where spiritual leaders are expected to be demi-gods or economic deliverers, the Good Shepherd model dismantles such myths. True shepherds do not exploit but serve, do not flee but protect, and do not use the flock but die for

it. John 10:10 cannot be responsibly interpreted apart from its broader context and theological setting. When subjected to proper grammatical-historical and canonical exegesis, the verse emerges as a profound statement about the redemptive mission of Jesus, who, as the Good Shepherd, offers not transient wealth but eternal life and spiritual fulfilment. Any attempt to isolate this verse from its immediate literary context and broader theological narrative inevitably leads to interpretive errors that compromise the gospel's integrity.

Therefore, the valid message of John 10:10 is not “health and wealth,” but a call to recognize Jesus as the sole gateway to a flourishing relationship with God, marked by sacrificial love, faithful following, and ultimate security in Christ. Spiritual and civic leaders would do well to mirror this model in their service, ensuring that their authority reflects the care, courage, and selflessness of the Shepherd-King.

5.5 Comparative Thematic Analysis

The preceding sections of this chapter have dealt in detail with the interpretive mishandling of three deeply doctrinal biblical texts: Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10. Each of these verses, frequently quoted in isolation within modern Christian discourse, has been subject to distortions that carry significant theological and pastoral ramifications. Through a consistent application of the grammatical-historical method and informed by canonical criticism and authorial intent, this section seeks to draw together the common theological, hermeneutical,

and ecclesiological threads that unite the misuse of these passages. The purpose is to reveal how these misinterpretations collectively contribute to a weakened theological foundation in the Church, particularly in light of the paradoxical nature of grace, the crisis of spiritual leadership, and the erosion of moral discernment.

Hermeneutical Tendencies Across Texts

One of the most prevalent issues emerging from the misinterpretation of these texts is the trend toward reader-centred hermeneutics. Instead of seeking to understand what the biblical authors intended to communicate within their historical and theological context, many modern readers superimpose contemporary cultural, emotional, or doctrinal frameworks onto the text. This interpretive inversion is evident in the appropriation of *Revelation 3:20* as a personal evangelistic call, *Matthew 7:1* as a universal prohibition of judgment, and *John 10:10* as a prosperity affirmation. Each of these verses has been co-opted by a pragmatic theology that values subjective affirmation over canonical consistency. In Boaheng's (2021) critique of John 10:10, for instance, the misuse of "abundant life" reflects a dislocated theology of leadership that mirrors socio-political structures rather than the kenotic (self-emptying) leadership model of Christ. Boaheng, drawing on Marshall (1978), emphasises that authentic leadership in the Johannine tradition is sacrificial, relational, and redemptive—a far cry from the dominionist and individualistic leadership models standard in

some African churches today. The same critique applies to how *Revelation 3:20* is interpreted in therapeutic terms of personal fulfilment, when its canonical function is more aligned with covenantal confrontation and prophetic correction.

Thematic Pattern: Dilution of Divine Authority

A second pattern that emerges from the analysis is the dilution of divine authority and covenantal responsibility. In each case, the misinterpretation of the verse weakens the conceptual link between God's grace and human accountability. For example, in the Synoptic Gospels, particularly in *Matthew 7:1*, the command not to judge is embedded within a discourse that affirms discernment and correction (cf. Matt. 7:5; 18:15-17). As shown in Udoekpo's treatment of the passage (2021), Jesus' intention is not to nullify all forms of judgment but to expose the hypocrisy of self-exemption. The passage serves as a mirror for personal reflection and communal accountability. However, when taken out of its narrative and theological framework, the verse becomes a rhetorical shield to avoid correction and doctrinal confrontation.

Similarly, the notion of divine authority is obscured in *Revelation 3:20* when Christ is portrayed as a passive figure awaiting invitation. This image is inconsistent with the Christology of Revelation, where Jesus appears as judge, warrior, and sovereign king. As the *Grace and Condition* study notes, divine forgiveness is always balanced with conditions of repentance and transformation (cf. DeSilva, 2000). The depiction of divine mercy in Scripture is thus never

antinomian. Misreading *Revelation 3:20* as an unconditional embrace undercuts the text's demand for covenantal renewal, just as misreading *Matthew 7:1* leads to moral relativism.

Misapplied Forgiveness and the Grace Paradox

The paradox of grace and responsibility is closely related to the dilution of authority. According to O'Collins' (1995) analysis in the “Grace and Condition” paper, Scripture presents forgiveness as both a divine gift and a human calling. This dialectic is obscured when texts like *Matthew 7:1* are interpreted to mean “never confront” and *John 10:10* to imply “live without cost.” A proper balance between grace and human response is required in all three passages. For instance, in the case of *John 10:10*, “abundant life” must be interpreted through the Good Shepherd’s sacrificial love and the sheep’s reciprocal obedience, not as a blank cheque for prosperity.

Forgiveness, in the biblical sense, is neither permissiveness nor moral amnesia. The “condition” of forgiveness is often a transformed ethic, which Jesus consistently advocates (cf. Matt. 6:14-15). In this light, Udoekpo (2021) rightly observes that misunderstanding *Matthew 7:1* has led to a theological atmosphere where any correction is perceived as judgmentalism, thus weakening the Church’s witness to righteousness and justice. As these misreadings proliferate, the paradoxical nature of grace that it saves freely but transforms radically is lost.

Leadership Crisis and Ecclesial Drift

Another thematic overlap is the crisis of spiritual leadership. All three passages implicitly or explicitly critique leadership. In *John 10*, Jesus contrasts Himself with thieves and hirelings, figures representing exploitative or negligent leaders. In *Revelation 3*, the critique is directed at a complacent church whose leadership has failed to preserve covenantal zeal. *Matthew 7* addresses hypocrites who hold others to standards they do not uphold. In each case, the issue is not authority per se but misused or abdicated authority. Boaheng (2021) stresses that African Christian leadership must recover the biblical model of pastoral care, grounded in Christ's self-emptying example. Drawing from the Johannine portrayal of the shepherd, he emphasises the need for relational leadership that protects, nurtures, and guides, rather than extracts and manipulates. The misuse of *John 10:10* as a justification for extravagant leadership lifestyles is, therefore, a theological error and a pastoral scandal.

Equally, in Udoekpo's treatment of *Matthew 7:1*, the emphasis on spiritual integrity reminds leaders that judgment begins with the self. Leadership devoid of self-examination easily devolves into authoritarianism or hypocrisy. Likewise, a church that ignores Christ's corrective knock in *Revelation 3:20*, a call often addressed to leadership structures, becomes incapable of true spiritual discernment.

The Tragedy of Decontextualisation

A dominant hermeneutical flaw across all three passages is Decontextualisation. As noted in all three studies, the failure to read Scripture within its immediate literary unit and canonical structure leads to truncated theology. For example, *John 10:10* is often cited without reference to verses 11–18, which define the nature of the promised life. *Revelation 3:20* is extracted from its covenantal rebuke, and *Matthew 7:1* is read in isolation from verses 2–5, which clarify its true intent. According to Marshall (1978, cited in Boaheng), this approach is symptomatic of a devotion that favours inspirational fragments over theological coherence. The danger is that Scripture becomes a mirror of the reader rather than a window to God. When verses are atomised, they are easily assimilated into existing ideologies, whether prosperity theology, therapeutic religion, or relativistic ethics.

Canonical Synthesis and Restoration of Meaning

Despite the divergent misinterpretations, a canonical synthesis of these passages reveals a consistent call to covenant fidelity, ethical integrity, and spiritual discernment. The Good Shepherd's call in *John 10*, the Lord's rebuke in *Revelation 3*, and Jesus' ethical discourse in *Matthew 7* all assume a community that hears, obeys, and is transformed. These texts function as doctrinal statements and theological interventions meant to shape identity and mission. When interpreted within the broader canonical narrative of creation, fall, redemption,

and restoration, these verses call the Church to embody Christ's love, reflect His holiness, and proclaim His kingdom. As such, any interpretation that undermines these themes must be subjected to the corrective lens of authorial intent and redemptive context. As informed by the cited studies, the comparative thematic analysis of Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10 reveals recurring patterns of misinterpretation that undermine biblical authority, distort theological meaning, and hinder ecclesial formation. Though varied in content, the misapplications share a common root in reader-centred hermeneutics, truncated theology, and ecclesial complacency.

This reasserts the importance of grammatical-historical exegesis, canonical coherence, and theological responsibility. It offers a critique of doctrinal drift and a constructive path forward. Scripture remains the Church's surest guide to truth, transformation, and faithful witness when rightly handled.

5.6 Theological and Pastoral Implications

The careful exegetical treatment of Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and John 10:10 reveals not merely interpretive missteps but theological consequences with deep ecclesial and pastoral significance. As each of these passages has been recurrently lifted out of its immediate and canonical context, the result has been doctrinal distortion and undermining of pastoral integrity and spiritual formation. This section synthesises the broader theological and ecclesiological ramifications of these misinterpretations. It reflects their real-world impact on Christian

communities, particularly within African ecclesial contexts, as documented in the referenced works.

Dilution of Biblical Authority and Theological Identity

One of the most pressing theological implications of misinterpreting these texts is the subversion of biblical authority. As highlighted in Boaheng's (2021) study of John 10:1-18, the text presents Christ as the Good Shepherd who offers abundant life through sacrificial leadership and covenantal relationship. However, when John 10:10 is abstracted from its theological structure and weaponised in the service of prosperity doctrines, the text's authority is no longer vested in its theological depth but in its functional value to affirm pre-existing desires.

Similarly, Matthew 7:1 has become a textual shield against accountability, especially in contexts where moral relativism or syncretistic ethics are prevalent. According to Udoekpo (2021), this misapplication fosters a theology of evasion, where any form of correction is framed as judgmentalism, and biblical authority becomes subordinated to personal emotion. This interpretive laziness is exacerbated when Revelation 3:20 is read as a generalised salvation invitation rather than a covenantal rebuke aimed at an ecclesial body. Such approaches gradually dismantle the constructive tension between divine grace and human responsibility, a balance essential to Christian identity (O'Collins, 1995).

Theologically, these misreadings erode Scripture's narrative as God's self-disclosure and reduce it to a collection of aphorisms for personal comfort. The result is an experientially vibrant but doctrinally hollow Church unable to discern between covenantal loyalty and cultural accommodation.

Erosion of Covenantal Theology and Discipleship

A second theological implication lies in the distortion of covenantal theology. When rightly interpreted, each analyzed passage contributes to the biblical witness that the covenant is both a divine initiative and a call to transformed living. DeSilva (2000, cited in *Grace & Condition*) notes that the structure of ancient covenants always included stipulations, blessings, and consequences. Grace was never cheap, and forgiveness was never detached from repentance. This pattern is evident in Revelation 3:20, where Christ's invitation to dine is conditional upon hearing and opening, symbolizing repentance and covenant renewal. However, the cost of discipleship is removed from the equation when the verse is read as a sentimental plea to unbelievers rather than a prophetic call to a complacent church. The verse becomes a passive assurance rather than an urgent call to spiritual fidelity.

In John 10:10, the promise of "abundant life" is intimately linked with the Shepherd's death and the ethical response of the sheep. Boaheng (2021) insists this is not an esoteric theological abstraction but a practical discipleship model rooted in sacrificial love, communal safety, and missional direction. The same is

true for Matthew 7:1. When interpreted in its fuller context, Jesus is forming a community of accountability, not indulgence, a church that knows how to judge righteously without self-righteousness (cf. vv. 2–5). The pastoral implication is that discipleship becomes malformed when texts are severed from their covenantal structure. Forgiveness, life, and spiritual access are no longer gifts received in obedience but entitlements demanded in consumeristic faith. Instead of forming disciples, the Church begins to produce spiritual consumers who shop for affirming experiences rather than submitting to transforming truth.

Misleading Leadership Models and Ecclesial Failure

Perhaps most alarming are the implications for spiritual leadership. The misinterpretations of these texts lend themselves to the rise of pseudo-shepherds, whose leadership style is performative, extractive, and often authoritarian. As Boaheng (2021) argues in his African ecclesiological critique, John 10:10 has been used by some church leaders to justify personal enrichment and ecclesial dominance. When “abundant life” becomes synonymous with material success, the pastoral role is redefined from shepherd to benefactor, and spiritual authority is traded for social prestige. This distortion is compounded by using Revelation 3:20 to mask ecclesial complacency, where leaders avoid confronting sin, fail to uphold doctrinal discipline, and substitute prophetic confrontation with therapeutic messaging. In Udoekpo’s (2021) treatment of Matthew 7:1, he identifies how the verse, when misunderstood, discourages leaders from

exercising biblical correction out of fear of being seen as judgmental. The result is a paralysed pulpit, where sin is coddled and righteousness muted.

This represents a betrayal of the Shepherd model outlined in John 10. There, the leader lays down his life for the sheep, protects against wolves, and cultivates a community that recognises truth. Misusing these verses encourages the opposite: spiritual insecurity, moral confusion, and relational dysfunction within congregations. Pastors become celebrities or dictators in such contexts rather than spiritual fathers and servants.

Impaired Forgiveness and Ethical Ambiguity

Another crucial implication is the impairment of biblical forgiveness ethics. Both Udoekpo (2021) and the *Grace and Condition* paper stress that forgiveness in Scripture is not merely emotional release but an ethical transaction tied to repentance, restitution, and transformation. When Matthew 7:1 is misread to imply blanket moral neutrality, the Church loses its prophetic voice. Forgiveness becomes a cheap grace that requires no change and imposes no boundaries. Furthermore, this has implications for justice. Leaders who weaponise “do not judge” to protect abusers or avoid accountability may silence victims of abuse, manipulation, or injustice. Likewise, unrepentant offenders are often allowed to remain in positions of influence because correction is deemed unspiritual. As the Grace and Condition document argues, the paradox of divine mercy requires a response. Grace saves, but only rightly received grace transforms.

In this regard, John 10:10 again serves as a corrective. An abundant life is not the erasure of difficulty, but the possession of divine purpose in the midst of it. True forgiveness is not the negation of justice but the restoration of dignity through confession, repentance, and reconciliation.

Discipleship, Discipline, and Eschatological Hope

At the core of each passage lies an eschatological urgency that is dulled when interpretation is compromised. In Revelation 3:20, the knock is not perpetual; it is urgent, reflecting a covenant Lord who disciplines those He loves (v. 19). In Matthew 7, the measure with which we judge will be measured back to us as a warning of eschatological reciprocity. In John 10, the abundant life is contingent upon knowing the Shepherd's voice and following Him. These are not soft invitations but prophetic summons. Theologically, the misuse of these texts blunts the Church's eschatological edge. It produces a presentist theology that seeks comfort now rather than glory later. Discipleship becomes unmoored from sacrifice, and spiritual formation loses its cross-shaped contour.

Pastorally, this demands a renewal of theological education and biblical preaching. Churches must recover interpretive responsibility as a spiritual discipline. Leaders must model exegetical fidelity, and congregations must be taught that Scripture is not a mirror of their desires but a window into God's redemptive reality.

The theological and pastoral implications of misinterpreting *Revelation 3:20*, *Matthew 7:1*, and *John 10:10* are far-reaching. These misreadings erode the authority of Scripture, distort the gospel of grace, damage the structure of Christian leadership, and diminish the Church's ethical witness. At the heart of these issues is the neglect of proper hermeneutics, the failure to hear what the Spirit says to the churches through the disciplined, contextual reading of the Word. This has demonstrated that these texts affirm covenantal grace, moral accountability, and Christ-centred discipleship when interpreted responsibly. Conversely, they produce theological confusion, pastoral malpractice, and ecclesial stagnation when mishandled. The Church's future vitality depends on its willingness to re-engage Scripture not as a tool of affirmation, but as an instrument of transformation. Doing so will recover the prophetic clarity, pastoral depth, and theological stability necessary for faithful witness in the 21st century.

5.7 Summary of Chapter Five

Chapter Five has critically examined three of the most frequently misinterpreted texts in contemporary Christian discourse: *Revelation 3:20*, *Matthew 7:1*, and *John 10:10*, within the doctrinal categories of soteriology and eschatology. While rich in theological meaning and spiritual depth, these verses have been consistently subjected to reader-centred interpretations that distort their intent and function in Scripture. Returning to the principles of the grammatical-historical method, insights from canonical criticism, and a focus on authorial intent, this

chapter has recovered the textual integrity of each passage and explored the doctrinal consequences of their misapplication.

The chapter began with an in-depth analysis of *Revelation 3:20*, a verse popularly deployed as an evangelistic invitation, particularly in revivalist and missionary contexts. However, when returned to its literary and historical context—namely, the letter to the Laodicean church the passage takes on a markedly different tone. Rather than extending a generic invitation to unbelievers, the verse is a prophetic warning to a complacent and spiritually indifferent church community. Drawing from covenantal theology, it became clear that Christ’s “knocking” represents a call to repentance, a summons to covenant renewal, and a threat of judgment for continued apathy. The door is not the unbeliever's metaphorical heart but a compromised ecclesia's collective spiritual posture.

From a theological perspective, this reading aligns with the pattern of divine discipline and covenantal fidelity articulated across Scripture, particularly in the prophetic literature and the teachings of Jesus. The insights of DeSilva (2000) and others cited within the *Grace and Condition* study affirm that grace is consistently paired with moral responsibility, a motif reinforced throughout Revelation’s epistolary prologues. The consequence of overlooking this context is that churches begin to embrace a Christ of sentimentality rather than sovereignty, a Saviour who asks but never commands, who invites but never judges.

The study then moved to *Matthew 7:1*, a text weaponised against moral accountability and doctrinal precision. Often cited as a blanket prohibition against judgment, this verse has become emblematic of theological and ethical relativism in the modern Church. However, a contextual reading within the Sermon on the Mount, specifically in conversation with verses 2–5, reveals that Jesus’ concern is not with judging per se, but with hypocritical judgment. As Udoekpo (2021) demonstrates, Jesus warns against holding others to a standard one refuses to apply to oneself, while affirming the necessity of moral discernment within the faith community.

This reframed understanding restores Matthew 7:1 to its rightful place as a call to self-examination, humility, and relational integrity. It is not a prohibition of evaluation but a redirection toward redemptive confrontation. Forgiveness, as discussed in the *Grace and Condition* document, is conditional not in merit but in receptivity and transformation. Thus, judgment and forgiveness are intertwined: one cannot authentically participate in God’s mercy while remaining morally indifferent. The misreading of this verse contributes to spiritual complacency and ethical ambiguity within churches, where sin is normalised under the guise of tolerance.

The final text analysed was *John 10:10*, perhaps the most commonly misappropriated passage in prosperity-driven theologies. Frequently used to endorse material abundance, self-empowerment, and breakthrough rhetoric, this

verse has suffered from decontextualisation and theological reduction. Boaheng's (2021) study returns the passage to its rightful setting within the Good Shepherd discourse, where Jesus distinguishes His role from exploitative leaders symbolised by thieves and hirelings. "Abundant life," in this context, refers not to economic success or physical health, but to spiritual vitality, covenantal relationship, and eschatological hope. The analysis revealed that this passage's misinterpretation has encouraged ecclesiastical leadership models that are not only unbiblical but harmful. Instead of laying down their lives for the flock, some contemporary leaders use the text to legitimise personal gain and unchecked authority. Boaheng, citing Marshall (1978), demonstrates that proper Christian leadership is sacrificial, relational, and covenantal, rooted in the example of Christ, not in cultural or political paradigms. This theological distortion extends to ecclesial identity, where "abundant life" is measured by outward success rather than inward transformation.

Taken together, the three texts illustrate a consistent pattern of theological misdirection when passages are isolated from their literary and canonical contexts. Each verse, when mishandled, results in a theological and pastoral deficiency that impacts core Christian doctrines: salvation becomes reduced to a sentimental moment rather than a transformative covenant; judgment is vilified rather than redeemed; and divine life is mistaken for material convenience.

From a comparative standpoint, several thematic threads emerge. First is the issue of reader-response hermeneutics, where the meaning of Scripture is derived not from the text itself but from the reader's expectations or emotional needs. Although popular in modern literary theory, this method proves deeply problematic for biblical interpretation, where the text claims divine origin and authority. As observed across all three texts, Scripture becomes malleable when the reader is the centre of meaning-making, and theology becomes arbitrary.

Second, there is the erosion of covenantal responsibility. Each passage, rightly understood, presents a relational dynamic between divine grace and human response. Whether it is the Laodicean church called to repentance, the believer called to righteous judgment, or the sheep called to listen to the Shepherd's voice, the theme of relational accountability runs deep. Misinterpreting these texts produces an antinomian gospel where grace is abundant but consequences are absent.

Third, the pastoral ramifications are profound. Leaders who interpret John 10:10 as a charter for prosperity theology, or who resist corrective preaching under the false banner of "do not judge," risk perpetuating a Church that is emotionally stimulated but theologically hollow. Congregants are left with fragmented understandings of salvation, authority, and community, equipped not for faithfulness but for disillusionment.

Fourth, the theological consequences ripple outward into soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Salvation is reimagined as emotional acceptance (Revelation 3:20), moral relativism is confused with mercy (Matthew 7:1), and an abundant life is equated with temporal success (John 10:10). These shifts not only misrepresent the Gospel but also dilute the Church's witness in a world desperate for truth, justice, and authentic transformation.

Fifth, there is a broader implication for biblical literacy and theological education. These texts highlight the dangers of devotional proof-texting and underscore the need for robust training in hermeneutics. As the referenced documents suggest, the Church must reintegrate theological rigour into its educational and homiletical practices. Pastors, teachers, and laity alike must be re-formed in the grammar of Scripture, learning to read the Bible and faithfully, communally, and canonically.

Lastly, the chapter reiterates the value of a multi-layered interpretive methodology, combining historical, grammatical, and canonical analysis with theological reflection. This approach does not merely defend doctrinal orthodoxy; it preserves Scripture's transformative intent. When the Bible is read rightly, Christ is seen, the Church is built faithfully, and believers are equipped for the kingdom's work.

Chapter Five has demonstrated that misinterpretation is not simply an academic issue but a theological crisis with profound implications for Christian belief, behaviour, and community. The analysis of Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:1, and

John 10:10 has shown that interpretive negligence leads to doctrinal confusion, moral compromise, and ecclesial malfunction. Nevertheless, these texts can be restored to their rightful place in the biblical canon by applying sound hermeneutics, which challenges, nourishes, and guides the Church into deeper faithfulness. This chapter thus sets the stage for the final chapter, which will draw together the study's significant findings, propose practical and theological recommendations, and outline avenues for future research. At the heart of these reflections is a single conviction: that the Word of God, rightly handled, remains the Church's surest guide in an age of theological uncertainty.

Chapter Five: Tabular Resume

Section	Title	Summary
5.1	Introduction to the Chapter	Introduces the thematic scope of soteriology and eschatology, framing the analysis of three misinterpreted texts using grammatical-historical, canonical, and theological lenses.
5.2	Text Eight: Revelation 3:20	Examines how Revelation 3:20 is misapplied as an evangelistic appeal. Proper exegesis reveals it as a covenantal rebuke to the Laodicean church, emphasizing repentance and the need for covenant renewal.

5.3	Text Nine: Matthew 7:1	Challenges the misuse of “do not judge” as a defense against accountability. The passage actually affirms ethical judgment and self-examination when read contextually.
5.4	Text Ten: John 10:10	Refutes prosperity interpretations of “abundant life” and restores its meaning to covenantal vitality and sacrificial discipleship, rooted in Christ’s pastoral leadership model.
5.5	Comparative Thematic Analysis	Synthesizes recurring theological and hermeneutical patterns across all three texts, including reader-centered hermeneutics, the erosion of biblical authority, and leadership failures.
5.6	Theological and Pastoral Implications	Explores the impact of misinterpretation on ecclesial authority, discipleship, forgiveness ethics, and Christian leadership within contemporary African contexts.
5.7	Summary of Chapter Five	Summarizes exegetical and doctrinal findings, reiterates the importance of interpretive responsibility, and sets up the transition to the final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of the Study

This study aimed to address a critical issue affecting the theological and spiritual integrity of the 21st-century Church: the neglect of exegesis and the growing dominance of eisegesis in biblical interpretation. Grounded in a historical-analytical research approach and guided by a qualitative-exegetical methodology, the work examined how widespread misinterpretation of key biblical texts has contributed to doctrinal instability, ecclesial confusion, and theological reductionism. Drawing on the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and the principle of authorial intent, the research revisited ten commonly misapplied biblical passages that have become emblematic of interpretive negligence in contemporary preaching and teaching. These included well-known texts such as Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 18:20, John 10:10, and Revelation 3:20, each analysed for how it has been removed from its immediate literary context, historical backdrop, and place within the overarching canonical narrative.

The study began by establishing a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual foundation, exploring the evolution of biblical interpretation from the Patristic

era to the postmodern age. It was found that early Christian interpreters, particularly within the Alexandrian and Antiochian traditions, pursued theological depth and spiritual formation through rigorous exegesis grounded in canonical fidelity. This was contrasted with the emergence of reader-response methods and experiential theologies, which have shifted the locus of interpretive authority from the inspired text to the interpretive subject. Through the literature review and the selection of interpretive frameworks, the research revealed how this methodological drift has facilitated theological relativism and redefined core Christian doctrines, such as salvation, divine judgment, ecclesiology, and the concept of an abundant life.

Chapters Three to Five comprised the analytical core of the thesis, with each chapter examining selected texts under specific theological themes. The analysis applied the grammatical-historical method to each verse, reconstructing its original meaning within the socio-historical and literary context of the biblical canon. In doing so, the study uncovered a consistent pattern: these texts had been appropriated to support ideologies or practices far removed from the biblical authors' intent. For instance, John 10:10 was revealed not as a license for material prosperity but as a Christological affirmation of spiritual vitality through covenantal relationship. Matthew 7:1, often quoted as a defence against moral discernment, was shown to uphold ethical accountability when read in context.

Revelation 3:20, stripped of its covenantal warnings in widespread usage, was restored as a prophetic summons to ecclesial repentance.

In addition to exposing hermeneutical errors, the study traced the theological and pastoral implications of these distortions. It demonstrated that misinterpretations are not benign but often produce profound ecclesial consequences, ranging from doctrinal illiteracy and ethical confusion to spiritual manipulation and leadership abuse. By revisiting the misused texts through the chosen theoretical frameworks, the thesis reaffirmed the indispensable role of proper hermeneutics in safeguarding theological coherence and ecclesial identity. The analysis underscored the idea that the integrity of Christian doctrine is deeply tied to the fidelity of biblical interpretation.

Ultimately, this study made a strong case for restoring exegetical integrity in the Church. It advocated for a return to historically grounded and theologically responsible interpretation, where meaning is derived not from the reader's felt needs but from the biblical authors' inspired intent. The research validated the grammatical-historical method as a rigorous and text-sensitive approach that not only retrieves authorial intent but preserves doctrinal clarity across the canon. Likewise, canonical criticism and the concept of authorial intent were shown to be invaluable tools in maintaining theological unity and resisting the atomisation of Scripture.

Therefore, this study affirms that hermeneutical care is a theological necessity. Only when Scripture is interpreted with historical accuracy, theological reverence, and canonical coherence can it serve as a proper foundation for faith, doctrine, and practice in the contemporary Church. This chapter thus marks a transition from critical analysis to constructive engagement, preparing the ground for conclusions, recommendations, and future directions that will be addressed in the subsequent sections.

6.2 Major Findings of the Research

The significant findings of this research highlight a critical theological crisis unfolding in many contemporary Christian contexts: the misinterpretation of Scripture due to the neglect of exegetical discipline and the embrace of eisegetical methods. Through an in-depth exploration of ten frequently misapplied biblical texts, the study has demonstrated how doctrinal confusion and ecclesiastical dysfunction are often rooted in abandoning historically grounded, theologically coherent, and canonically consistent interpretive practices. These findings emerged from a rigorous application of the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and a qualitative-exegetical methodology, framed by a historical-analytical research approach prioritizing contextual accuracy and theological integrity.

A central finding was the pervasive tendency to extract verses from their literary, historical, and theological contexts, resulting in doctrinally shallow and pastorally

dangerous interpretations. Verses such as Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 18:20, and John 10:10 were consistently shown to be detached from their immediate pericopes and overarching biblical narratives. For example, Jeremiah 29:11, commonly used to affirm personal success and prosperity, was revealed in its original context to be a message of hope delivered to an exiled community, grounded not in immediate gratification but in eschatological patience and covenantal restoration. Similarly, Matthew 18:20, often quoted to validate small group worship settings, was demonstrated to be part of a more extensive ecclesiastical instruction on discipline, reconciliation, and divine order within the Church.

The research also uncovered a recurring theme of doctrinal distortion driven by emotionalism, therapeutic culture, and prosperity theology. When analyzed exegetically, the popular interpretation of John 10:10 as a promise of material abundance contradicted the Johannine portrayal of Christ as the Shepherd who offers eternal life through self-giving sacrifice. This misuse, far from being benign, was shown to foster consumerist ecclesiology and legitimise exploitative leadership models. Likewise, Revelation 3:20 was found to have been grossly misrepresented as a sentimental appeal to individual unbelievers, when in fact it was a prophetic address to a spiritually apathetic church, calling for repentance and renewed covenant fidelity.

Another significant finding was the role of reader-centred hermeneutics in promoting interpretive relativism. The study demonstrated that when the authority of Scripture is subordinated to the reader's perspective or emotional disposition, theological conclusions become subjective and fragmented. This was particularly evident in the use of Matthew 7:1 to silence moral critique, where the command "Do not judge" was stripped of its contextual qualification and turned into a defence against accountability. In reality, the surrounding verses call for rigorous self-examination and redemptive confrontation, aligning with the biblical ethic of communal holiness and mutual edification.

Furthermore, the research highlighted the inadequacy of reader-response theory when applied as a primary method of biblical interpretation in ecclesial settings. While acknowledging the reader's role in meaning-making, the study affirmed that any theological hermeneutic marginalizing authorial intent and canonical coherence inevitably leads to theological error. The reader-response approach, when unregulated, allows Scripture to be moulded into the image of contemporary culture, severing it from its revelatory origin and ecclesial authority.

In contrast, the study validated the grammatical-historical method as a critical tool in retrieving the original intent of the biblical authors. This method enabled the research to penetrate the socio-historical layers of each text, uncovering the theological purposes embedded in their original contexts. Canonical criticism

further complemented this method by restoring the unity of Scripture, ensuring that each verse was interpreted within the broader biblical storyline of creation, covenant, redemption, and eschatological hope. Authorial intent served as the final anchor, preserving the inspired texts' theological purpose and communicative integrity.

Equally important was the discovery of the pastoral and ecclesial implications of misinterpretation. Churches that build doctrines on distorted texts risk promoting spiritual complacency, moral confusion, and doctrinal illiteracy. The misinterpretation of texts such as Romans 8:28 and 3 John 1:2 revealed how promises of divine favor were weaponized to affirm self-centered theology rather than covenantal responsibility. Moreover, ecclesial leadership was found to suffer when scriptural authority was compromised. In contexts where verses like John 10:10 are used to justify wealth and influence, the model of servant-leadership exemplified by Christ is replaced by clerical elitism and manipulation.

The study revealed the urgent need for a theological reformation in hermeneutical praxis. The Church must recover a disciplined approach to Scripture that honours its divine origin, human authorship, and redemptive purpose. Exegesis must be re-centred in theological education, pastoral training, and preaching ministries, not simply as a technical skill, but as a spiritual and ecclesial imperative. Only then can the Church be equipped to resist interpretive trends that dilute the gospel, misrepresent Christ, and distort the mission of the ecclesia. The findings of this

research affirm that faithful biblical interpretation is not optional but essential. Where eisegesis reigns, error multiplies; but where Scripture is read with reverence, rigour, and responsibility, theological clarity, spiritual maturity, and ecclesial vitality are restored. These findings lay the foundation for the broader implications and constructive proposals developed in the concluding sections of this chapter.

6.3 General Implications of the Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework and methodology adopted in this research have had significant implications for the investigation process and the theological and pastoral conclusions drawn from the analysis. By employing the grammatical-historical method as the primary interpretive lens and integrating canonical criticism and authorial intent as complementary frameworks, the study navigated complex biblical passages precisely, restoring their original meanings and unveiling the consequences of their widespread misapplication. Coupled with a qualitative-exegetical methodology grounded in a historical-analytical research approach, this framework enabled a multi-dimensional exploration of doctrinal misinterpretation in the contemporary Church.

At the core of the theoretical framework was the grammatical-historical method, which emphasises the importance of interpreting Scripture based on its original grammar, syntax, literary form, and historical context. Applying this method proved essential in deconstructing eisegetical readings and retrieving the

theological intentions of the biblical authors. This was particularly evident in the re-analysis of passages such as John 10:10, Matthew 7:1, and Revelation 3:20, all of which have been routinely stripped of their context in popular preaching. The grammatical-historical method facilitated the recovery of each passage's intended message, revealing the depth and coherence often obscured by reader-centred approaches.

The implications of this method were theological, pedagogical, and ecclesial. Theologically, it affirmed that doctrine cannot be abstracted from context without compromising its integrity. The textual meaning must emerge from within the cultural, covenantal, and canonical setting in which it was inspired. Pedagogically, the method modelled a hermeneutical discipline that can be taught and applied in academic and pastoral settings. It proved that faithful interpretation requires more than linguistic familiarity; it requires theological training, historical awareness, and spiritual discernment. Ecclesiastically, the method challenged the Church to abandon superficial readings of Scripture and return to a mode of interpretation that fosters maturity, accountability, and doctrinal consistency.

Integrating canonical criticism within the framework added another layer of theological coherence. Rather than treating biblical texts as isolated fragments, canonical criticism interprets each verse in light of the larger biblical canon, thereby safeguarding against proof-texting by restoring the narrative and theological continuity of Scripture. For instance, when examining Revelation

3:20, canonical criticism revealed that Christ's message to the Laodicean church is not a stand-alone evangelistic appeal but part of a broader apocalyptic and covenantal discourse consistent with the prophetic literature. Similarly, Matthew 7:1 and John 10:10 were interpreted within their respective narrative arcs and theological trajectories, ensuring that doctrinal conclusions were canonically grounded.

This canonical approach implies a return to *Gesamtbiblische Theologie*, a theology of the whole Bible. It demonstrated that Scripture must be read as a unified revelation, where individual texts derive their meaning not only from their immediate context but also from the redemptive arc to which they contribute. This reinforces theological orthodoxy and protects against the fragmentation of doctrine that often results from thematic or topical preaching devoid of canonical sensitivity.

Another theoretical pillar, authorial intent, served to anchor the interpretation in the communicative purpose of the biblical writers. In an age where the reader increasingly defines meaning, reaffirming the primacy of the author's intended message is both counter-cultural and theologically essential. Applying this principle clarified that the meaning of Scripture is not infinitely elastic. God communicated specific truths to particular communities in historical contexts through human authors. Faithful interpretation, therefore, requires humility and diligence in uncovering what was meant, rather than asking what it means.

From a methodological perspective, the qualitative-exegetical design of the research allowed for an in-depth exploration of biblical texts beyond surface-level readings. By resisting quantifiable or survey-based research, the study preserved the theological integrity of its subject matter, allowing the richness of textual analysis to emerge. The method was particularly suitable for tracing theological themes, doctrinal developments, and hermeneutical trends within the Church, providing space for layered reflection, contextual reconstruction, and theological synthesis, especially in cases where texts had been culturally co-opted or theologically diluted.

As part of the broader methodology, the historical-analytical approach proved invaluable in identifying patterns of interpretive drift across different historical epochs. It enabled the researcher to trace how the shift from patristic exegesis and reformational hermeneutics to postmodern reader-response models had influenced the contemporary misuse of Scripture. The approach revealed that interpretive malpractice is not merely a contemporary issue but part of a historical continuum, influenced by cultural, philosophical, and ecclesiastical factors. This diachronic awareness reinforced the study's call for a return to historically grounded interpretive disciplines that honour the legacy of the Church's theological tradition.

Another key implication is related to theological education and ministerial formation. The methodology and framework employed in this research

underscore the urgent need for hermeneutical training that is both methodologically sound and theologically rich. In many seminaries and church leadership training centres, hermeneutics is often reduced to technical exercises or overshadowed by pragmatic leadership modules. This study, by contrast, affirms that interpretation is at the heart of theology; how Scripture is read shapes how God is known, how doctrine is formed, and how the Church lives. Therefore, the implications of the adopted framework extend into curriculum design, pastoral training, and ecclesial policy.

Finally, the framework and methodology affirmed the interdependence between theological accuracy and spiritual vitality. The research revealed that when Scripture is rightly handled, it leads to correct doctrine and renewed discipleship, ethical clarity, and ecclesial reform. Conversely, when texts are misinterpreted, even with good intentions, the result is often doctrinal error, spiritual disillusionment, and ecclesiastical confusion. The study's approach affirmed the centrality of hermeneutics to the life and mission of the Church.

This research's theoretical and methodological commitments were not merely academic choices but theological convictions. They shaped the entire trajectory of the study, from problem identification to textual analysis and theological reflection. The implications of these choices extend beyond the pages of this thesis; they represent a call to the Church and the academy to take Scripture seriously once again. Only through a return to exegetical integrity, canonical

coherence, and theological humility can the Church faithfully proclaim the Word in a generation adrift in interpretive subjectivism.

6.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This research significantly contributes to biblical hermeneutics, systematic theology, and ecclesial praxis by recovering and reasserting the importance of historically grounded, theologically coherent, and canonically faithful interpretation of Scripture. At a time when experiential readings and cultural relativism frequently undermine the authority of biblical texts, this study offers a robust corrective grounded in the grammatical-historical method and enriched by canonical criticism and authorial intent. Its findings extend beyond textual exegesis to impact how theology is constructed, doctrine is defended, and Christian leadership is exercised, particularly in the context of the contemporary African Church and broader global evangelical communities.

One of this work's foremost contributions lies in its identification and systematisation of hermeneutical errors prevalent in the interpretation of specific biblical texts within popular Christianity. The study shows how doctrinally dangerous interpretations can be traced, examined, and corrected. It focuses on ten widely misapplied verses, each analysed in detail within its original context and theological structure. These examples serve as case studies of interpretive malpractice and as templates for sound exegesis, providing both a diagnostic and prescriptive framework for pastors, theologians, and seminary students.

The research also reaffirms the theological centrality of the grammatical-historical method, demonstrating that faithful interpretation cannot be separated from attention to literary structure, historical background, and linguistic nuance. In doing so, it challenges widespread interpretive habits that prioritise subjective relevance over objective textual meaning. This contribution is significant for theological institutions and denominations that have, in recent years, drifted toward pragmatic, topical, or motivational approaches to Scripture. By showing how texts such as Jeremiah 29:11, John 10:10, and Matthew 7:1 are routinely misread to affirm prosperity, personal affirmation, or moral relativism, the study insists that only rigorous engagement with context can preserve doctrinal integrity.

A further contribution lies in integrating canonical criticism and authorial intent within an evangelical theological framework. Rather than treating these as merely academic tools, the research applies them to pastoral and ecclesial settings, showing how they can safeguard theological unity and prevent the fragmentation of Scripture into disjointed slogans. The concept of canonical coherence, in particular, is advanced as a safeguard against theological cherry-picking, a practice in which individual verses are isolated from the redemptive arc of the Bible and used to construct doctrines that contradict the overall witness of Scripture. In this sense, the study contributes to a renewed appreciation for

Gesamtbiblische Theologie (whole-Bible theology), wherein texts are interpreted in light of the biblical canon as a unified narrative of God's redemptive work.

The study also offers practical and contextual contributions to African Christian leadership and theological formation, drawing attention to how interpretive distortions manifest in this context. It critiques the proliferation of prosperity theology, spiritual consumerism, and celebrity-driven ecclesiology, often justified by misapplied Scripture. By reinterpreting these key texts with theological depth and pastoral sensitivity, the study provides a framework for reshaping African Christian theology around the principles of covenant, discipleship, and sacrificial leadership, rather than economic aspiration or emotional appeal.

In addition to these theological and contextual insights, the research contributes to qualitative theological methodology by demonstrating how a historical-analytical approach can yield doctrinal and ecclesial clarity. Rather than relying on empirical generalisations, the study employs deep textual analysis to generate theological insights rooted in Scripture and tradition. This approach challenges the dominance of data-driven or sociologically focused theological inquiry and reasserts the primacy of biblical exegesis in constructing Christian doctrine.

Another key contribution is constructing a multi-dimensional hermeneutical model that combines exegetical, canonical, historical, and theological insights to produce a more holistic understanding of Scripture. This model accepts the importance of reader engagement or contemporary application but insists that

such engagement must be subordinate to the authority of the inspired text. The balance between methodological rigour and pastoral application ensures that this research is intellectually robust and ecclesially functional.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the discourse on theological accountability, challenging church leaders, theological educators, and Christian institutions to reflect critically on their interpretive practices. It exposes the theological and ethical dangers of using Scripture for motivational or ideological purposes without grounding in authorial intention or canonical context. The research thus becomes a tool for ecclesial reform, promoting theological humility, spiritual integrity, and scriptural fidelity.

Finally, the research contributes to the broader conversation about biblical authority and hermeneutical responsibility in the postmodern age. The study provides a firm reminder that Scripture must govern Christian belief and practice in a cultural milieu where interpretive authority is often displaced by personal experience or emotional resonance. It demonstrates that hermeneutics is not a neutral exercise but a theological task with ecclesial consequences. How the Bible is read, taught, and preached shapes individuals' spiritual formation and communities' theological identity.

This study contributes to academic knowledge by recovering and refining traditional hermeneutical methods, contextualising them for contemporary church settings, and providing a theological framework that bridges biblical

scholarship and practical ministry. It calls scholars and practitioners to re-centre the Word of God in the Church's life, interpret it with faithfulness and care, and resist the drift toward doctrinal compromise masked as spiritual innovation. The research catalyzes ongoing theological reflection, ecclesial renewal, and faithful biblical engagement through these contributions.

6.5 Recommendations

In light of the findings and implications established in this research, several recommendations are necessary for the renewal of biblical interpretation, doctrinal fidelity, and pastoral effectiveness within the Church and theological academia. These recommendations are directed toward key stakeholders: theological institutions, pastors and church leaders, Christian educators, and researchers. Each of these groups plays a critical role in either perpetuating or correcting interpretive malpractice. The recommendations are therefore both corrective and constructive, grounded in the study's methodological insights and theological convictions.

To Theological Institutions and Seminaries

It is imperative that theological education re-centres the place of hermeneutics in its curriculum. The research has exposed the doctrinal dangers that arise when pastors and ministry leaders are not trained to read Scripture responsibly. Therefore, seminaries and Bible colleges must integrate rigorous courses in **grammatical-historical exegesis, canonical interpretation, authorial intent,**

and **biblical theology**. These courses should not be taught in isolation but woven into the disciplines of systematic theology, ethics, and pastoral theology, ensuring that biblical interpretation is not divorced from its doctrinal and practical applications.

Additionally, theological institutions in Africa and other global contexts should incorporate the historical development of biblical interpretation into their pedagogy. A clear understanding of patristic, Reformation, and modern hermeneutical trajectories equips students to discern and resist modern eisegetical trends. The formation of ministers must therefore be both theological and historical, enabling them to build on the wisdom of the Church rather than reinventing interpretive norms based on contemporary ideologies or popular sentiment.

To Pastors and Church Leaders

The pastoral ministry stands at the forefront of biblical communication and spiritual formation. This study has shown that interpretive negligence at the pulpit has far-reaching consequences, often shaping the theological imagination of entire congregations. Therefore, pastors and church leaders must commit themselves to **textually responsible preaching** that arises from sound exegesis and canonical coherence. It is recommended that sermon preparation include not only prayer and reflection, but also the use of trusted commentaries, lexical tools,

and theological frameworks that help maintain fidelity to the authorial intent of Scripture.

Moreover, pastors must resist the temptation to use Scripture as a platform for motivational speaking or ideological persuasion. While the Bible does offer encouragement and relevance, its primary function is redemptive and revelatory. Leaders should model interpretive humility and theological integrity, demonstrating that Scripture must be submitted to—not manipulated for—human agendas. In this regard, regular pastoral training and peer-review of sermons may be instituted within denominational structures to promote accountability and exegetical excellence.

To Christian Educators and Discipleship Leaders

Theological misinterpretation is not limited to the pulpit—it is often perpetuated in Bible study groups, youth fellowships, and Sunday school settings. Christian educators and discipleship coordinators must therefore be equipped with **basic hermeneutical principles** that help prevent misreading and misapplication of Scripture. Churches should invest in workshops, retreats, and resource development aimed at training lay leaders in responsible Bible reading.

Furthermore, educational materials such as devotionals, small group curricula, and online content should be critically reviewed to ensure that they model accurate biblical interpretation. Popular Christian media, particularly in digital formats, has become a dominant source of theology for many believers. It is the

responsibility of Christian educators to curate these materials with theological discernment and to encourage a culture of Scriptural engagement that is both Spirit-led and exegetically sound.

To Ecclesial Bodies and Denominational Networks

Church denominations and governing bodies must take a more active role in promoting **hermeneutical standards and theological orthodoxy** within their churches. Just as confessions and creeds have historically guided the Church's understanding of doctrine, so too should denominational documents and policies reflect clear commitments to interpretive fidelity. Leadership certification processes should assess not only ministerial ethics but also the interpretive competency of candidates. Denominational conferences, synods, and pastoral councils should regularly address hermeneutical issues, especially in response to theological trends that pose risks to ecclesial unity and doctrinal clarity. The church must not be silent when Scripture is being misused to justify prosperity gospel excesses, political manipulation, or ethical laxity. A unified commitment to interpretive integrity can become a hallmark of ecclesial health and a safeguard for the next generation of church leaders.

To Academic Researchers and Theologians

This study invites further academic engagement with the intersections of biblical interpretation, theological method, and ecclesial praxis. Researchers should pursue interdisciplinary projects that explore how **hermeneutical models affect**

church culture, ethics, pastoral leadership, and spiritual formation. Comparative studies on biblical misinterpretation across denominational or cultural contexts, especially in the digital age, would also provide insights into the global dynamics of theological drift and renewal.

Moreover, theologians should continue to explore ways of synthesising **historical interpretive frameworks with contemporary challenges**, such as digital theology, narrative identity, and postmodern epistemology. The goal should not be mere criticism but constructive theological reformation rooted in Scripture and tradition. By contributing scholarly depth to hermeneutical discussions, academic theologians can serve the Church by equipping it to navigate complex doctrinal terrains with clarity and conviction.

To the Global Church and the Average Believer

Finally, this research speaks to the broader Christian community, encouraging a grassroots renewal of biblical fidelity. Every believer is a theologian in practice and must be encouraged to move beyond superficial engagement with Scripture. Bible literacy programmes, accessible hermeneutical tools, and discipleship pathways that emphasise theological reflection can empower believers to discern truth from error. Churches should normalise theological curiosity, create space for questions, and cultivate a community culture that values depth over hype. The Church must move from an entertainment-driven model to one of spiritual

formation, where the Word is not simply heard but understood, lived, and proclaimed.

6.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The results and limitations of this study provide a rich foundation for future scholarly investigation into the dynamics of biblical interpretation, theological distortion, and ecclesial renewal in the 21st century. While this research has offered a focused exegetical and doctrinal correction to ten misinterpreted biblical texts within selected theological themes, the scope of eisegesis and the broader hermeneutical crisis extend far beyond what has been covered. In light of these realities and informed by interdisciplinary insights from literary studies, theology, communication, and cultural psychology, several areas are suggested for further research.

One of the most pressing avenues for further *exploration is a comparative study of biblical misinterpretation across denominational and global contexts, particularly within Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical movements in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.* As demonstrated in Chukwuemeka and Aguid's (2020) work relating to the theological implications of psychology within African Christianity, interpretations are often shaped by communal memory, socio-economic pressures, and inherited spiritual frameworks. Future studies could thus benefit from mapping how prosperity doctrines or moral

relativism manifest in distinct cultural and ecclesial settings, while evaluating the theological tools available for response within those contexts.

A second fruitful direction is *evaluating hermeneutical frameworks within digital and media-saturated Christianity*. This research has shown that reader-centred models often dominate contemporary preaching and online theology. However, with the rise of algorithmic theology, where trending topics and personalised media streams shape spiritual formation, it is essential to interrogate how platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become digital pulpits. Drawing inspiration from the interpretive complexities addressed in intercultural literary analysis, such as in Konaté's *La Malédiction du Lamantin* (Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024), future researchers can examine the fragmentation of biblical authority in online spaces, where theological claims are frequently decontextualised and consumed without critical engagement.

A third recommended focus would be an *in-depth analysis of misinterpreted biblical themes within African literature and socio-religious narratives*. Works like *L'Orange de Noël* by Michel Peyramaure and *L'Africain* by J.M.G. Le Clézio provide literary representations of how religious worldviews, education, colonial memory, and moral consciousness intersect in shaping theological perceptions. As demonstrated in the themes, style, and aspects of secularizing the church in Peyramaure's work (Ehigie, 2019; Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024), literature can mirror religious tension and identity formation. A theological reading of African novels

through the lens of biblical hermeneutics could reveal how misinterpreted texts, often embedded in cultural myth, political theology, and social resistance, affect both personal faith and public theology.

Relatedly, *the intersection of biblical interpretation and political theology in postcolonial contexts presents* a significant area for further work. As shown in *Church and Politics* (Chukwuemeka, 2024), many churches in Africa and beyond engage with Scripture to justify political alignments or resist civic accountability. Misreadings of texts like Romans 13 or 2 Chronicles 7:14 are frequently used to validate authoritarianism or spiritual nationalism. Future research can explore the misuse of Scripture in political rhetoric while proposing hermeneutical models that uphold prophetic witness and democratic responsibility.

Another vital direction is *the integration of biblical hermeneutics and Christian psychology*. The research by Chukwuemeka and Aguid (2020) on Christian psychological formation suggests that interpretation is not only cognitive but also emotional, affective, and behavioural. This opens a space for further research on how interpretive frameworks shape believers' perceptions of God, suffering, identity, and moral responsibility. For instance, how does misinterpreting texts like Romans 8:28 or John 10:10 impact mental health, spiritual resilience, or ethical reasoning? Investigating this interplay can enrich both pastoral theology and Christian counselling.

Moreover, *longitudinal studies on hermeneutical formation within theological education* are essential. Given the ongoing concern about the decline of exegetical skills in ministerial training, future researchers could conduct empirical or ethnographic studies on how hermeneutics is taught and internalised in seminaries across the Global South. This would reveal curricular gaps and broader ecclesial assumptions that shape how Scripture is read, taught, and lived out. Such studies would be invaluable in contexts where informal theological training dominates.

Lastly, there is scope for a *multi-generational analysis of interpretive habits*, a study of how biblical understanding and misinterpretation are transmitted across generations within families, churches, and local cultures. Just as literature and cultural memory carry inherited meaning, biblical interpretation often passes through oral tradition, familial teachings, and community narratives. Researchers can examine how interpretive patterns are preserved, challenged, or transformed over time, and what factors influence theological shifts among younger Christians.

In conclusion, this study allows continued reflection on biblical interpretation's theological, cultural, psychological, and political dimensions. Future research that builds on this work must remain rooted in rigorous hermeneutics while being attentive to the lived realities and interpretive complexities of global Christianity. Whether through comparative theology, digital analysis, or literary engagement,

the call remains the same: to read Scripture faithfully, to teach it responsibly, and to live it truthfully in a world increasingly shaped by interpretive confusion.

Chapter Six: Tabular Resume

Section Title	Summary
6.1 Summary of the Study	Investigated the neglect of exegesis and rise of eisegesis in biblical interpretation; emphasized canonical and grammatical-historical methods; critiqued misused texts like John 10:10 and Jeremiah 29:11.
6.2 Major Findings	Identified doctrinal distortion from misinterpretation; emphasized the importance of authorial intent and canonical context; warned of consequences like ethical confusion and leadership abuse.
6.3 Theoretical & Methodological Implications	Affirmed the value of the grammatical-historical method, canonical criticism, and authorial intent; urged theological education to re-centre rigorous hermeneutics.
6.4 Contributions to Knowledge	Highlighted recovery of sound exegesis; provided a holistic hermeneutical model; applied findings to African Church context; critiqued prosperity theology and interpretive trends.
6.5 Recommendations	Urged theological institutions to integrate deeper hermeneutical training; called pastors to practice exegetical preaching; proposed lay education and denominational accountability; advised further scholarly engagement.

Section Title	Summary
6.6 Suggestions for Further Research	Proposed exploring biblical misinterpretation in digital spaces, African literature, Christian psychology, political theology, and intergenerational theological formation.

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