EDITOR’S NOTES: PLAIN-SENSE HERMENEUTICS 
AND COVENANT PREMILLENNIALISM 

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Someone once asked me, “How can one hold to covenant theology and premillennialism at the same time?” My answer was, “Plain-sense hermeneutics demand it.”

Plain-sense or “normal” hermeneutics is very simply that method of interpretation that deals with the Scriptures as God presented them to us. A normal hermeneutic recognizes that God used human means of communication to communicate to humans. Therefore, we must not allegorize the text or leave its plain sense unless there are clear indications that such was the author’s intent to communicate his message.

Contrary to the typical allegorist’s disparaging depiction of the “literalist,” those who practice a plain-sense hermeneutic do recognize the depth of theology presented by the text. The plain-sense theologian, however, does not feel compelled to go beyond the text in flights of fancy to discover that depth. God gave us the Holy Spirit in order that, among other things, He might be our ultimate Teacher. Since He inspired the text as it is, in normal human communication forms, the plain-sense interpreter resists the temptation to embellish the text with arbitrary, so-called “deeper” meanings obtained by the imaginations of men.

The plain-sense interpreter relies on the tools provided by historical-grammatical interpretation. Historical-grammatical interpretation is not letterism. Letterism is a hyper-literalism practiced by some throughout church history, most recently by extremists in the dispensational camp. Letterism insists on a surface reading of the text and nothing more, and is an error that produces the same kind of arbitrary theology as rampant allegorism.

Historical-grammatical, plain-sense interpretation is the method of letting the text speak to us as it will. It takes into account historical context and the grammatical choices made by the author, much as one would approach the interpretation of any other piece of literature written by men, to men. For the Christian interpreter, however, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit plays a key role as well. The Spirit’s ministry leads us to the full impact of the text and applies it to our hearts.

In this issue of the *WRS Journal*, the approach outlined above is abundantly evident. We welcome your comments, and trust this discussion will enrich your ministry and understanding.