

HERMENEUTIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESS IN AI AND LLMS AND THEIR PLACE IN THE EXEGETICAL PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Large Language Models (LLMs) like Chat GPT (OpenAI),¹ Copilot (Microsoft)² Gemini (Google),³ and Grok (xAI),⁴ have developed notable market shares,⁵ remarkably high levels of credibility, and practical usefulness despite occasional hallucinations (errors of fact) and reasoning errors (errors of process). While exegetes might spend many hours discerning the meaning and significance of any given text, there have long been secondary and tertiary sources offering easier answers than can be arrived at through the exegetical process, but these come at the potential cost of the exegetical process itself and the more objective results that exegesis affords. As LLM's are now providing nearly instant and detailed answers on Biblical texts and related theological issues, there is potential for sharper deemphasis of exegetical process, even in transformative learning and teaching contexts.

Because of the growing influence of LLMs in interpretive processes and resulting worldview applications, it is important to recognize the degree to which these tools are true to the literal grammatical historical (LGH) hermeneutic and the exegetical process that springs from that hermeneutic. This study examines current hermeneutical priorities and process of four influential LLMs (Gemini, ChatGPT, Grok, and Copilot) in handling Biblical texts that are especially pivotal or definitive for Biblical worldview and for grounding philosophical and theological thought.

To identify the hermeneutic priorities and processes, we consider prompts and LLM responses to some foundational epistemological and metaphysical questions that are particularly pivotal in grounding and distinguishing worldviews. First we consider a baseline question to discover the default of the LLM, we follow up, where beneficial, with questions to provide

¹ ChatGPT has roughly a 60% AI search market share, and is viewed at <https://chatgpt.com/>.

² Copilot is rapidly growing, but due to its relatively recent launch and integration with MS365, as of May 2025 it has a 14.1% AI search market share, and is viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>.

³ Google Gemini has a 13.5% AI search market share, and is viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app>.

⁴ Grok is rapidly growing, but due to recency of launch has a .6% AI search market share, and is viewed at <https://grok.com/>.

⁵ First Page Sage, "Top Generative AI Chatbots by Market Share – August 2025" August 8, 2025, viewed at <https://firstpagesage.com/reports/top-generative-ai-chatbots/>.

opportunity for the LLM to clarify. We then consider prompts designed to test the objectivity and fidelity to the LLMs' stated priorities and methodology. This catalog of prompts allows us to evaluate the degree of objectivity and neutrality demonstrated by the LLMs and to assess the value of these particular LLMs' and AI in general to the exegetical process. Finally, we consider the exegetical process and when, if at all, LLMs should be consulted in exegesis.

Differing degrees of bias, accompanied by self-perceived neutrality, reminds users of the limitations of LLMs for aiding in Biblical interpretation and the formation of worldview. While there is much to laud in the broader contributions of LLMs, the exegete must employ (and even participate in the improvement of) these tools with deliberateness and care, particularly regarding their place in the sequence of interpretive and exegetical process and praxis.

THE ISSUE OF PERCEIVED NEUTRALITY

There is a saying, often attributed to Mark Twain, that "It aint what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just aint so."⁶ While AI tools and LLMs have reasoning capacity there is an ironic limitation on their awareness of their limitations. In a sense, they don't know what they don't know. Hallucinations still occur,⁷ as do reasoning errors,⁸ and the tools are only as objective as their developers have crafted them to be. The quartet of LLM's (Gemini, ChatGPT, Grok, and Copilot), especially provide inquirers with an instant baseline response to any question. Each asserts objectivity and neutrality. When given the epistemologically foundational prompt, "How do you know you are being neutral in your answers?" Copilot boldly asserts, "I don't have personal beliefs or biases."⁹ ChatGPT admits that "Neutrality isn't automatic—it's something I have to *work toward* in how I generate answers...absolute neutrality is tricky—bias can creep in through training data or wording. That's why I depend on feedback..."¹⁰ Grok is self-assured in asserting its neutrality:

I aim for neutrality by sticking to facts, avoiding emotional language, and presenting multiple perspectives when relevant. My training data is diverse, and I cross-check

⁶ While there are many attributions of the statement to Twain, there is no primary source evidence that Twain ever said this.

⁷ Some examples of notable hallucinations are catalogued by Jonathan Gillham, "8 Times Hallucinations of Factual Errors Caused Serious Problems," August 26, 2025, viewed at <https://originality.ai/blog/ai-hallucination-factual-error-problems>; some humorous examples are catalogued by Alex Hughes, "Google AI is now hallucinating idioms..." April 23, 2025, viewed at <https://www.tomsguide.com/ai/google-is-hallucinating-idioms-these-are-the-five-most-hilarious-we-found>.

⁸ This writer served as a "Contributing Expert" on several LLM training projects designed to create and correct reasoning errors in LLMs. Reasoning errors are different from errors of fact, and are more difficult to correct, but they remain prevalent.

⁹ Copilot, in response to the prompt "How do you know you are being neutral in your answers?" <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/h41VZE1ddfF4W2TPY2S3C>.

¹⁰ ChatGPT, in response to the prompt "How do you know you are being neutral in your answers?" <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bb1855-30e4-832d-957b-3c610db2a15c>.

information to minimize bias. If a topic is contentious, I focus on verified data and acknowledge differing views without favoring one. I also **steer clear of personal opinions or speculative assumptions**. [emphasis mine] If you ever feel I'm off-balance, call it out—I can adjust!¹¹

Gemini cites its design and training as its basis for neutrality: “Neutrality in responses is a core principle of my design. I aim for neutrality by relying on a few key approaches that are built into my system and how I process information... I don't have personal beliefs, opinions, or emotions... I'm designed to state facts as they are, without adding my own spin or interpretation.”¹² When given the axiological prompt, “I want your view on the question of what is the highest good for a person,” Gemini responded, “I am an AI and I don't have a personal view or a moral framework of my own. I can't experience or understand the world in the way humans do, so I can't determine the "highest good" for a person. My purpose is to provide information and answer questions based on the data I was trained on.”¹³

These four influential LLMs share characteristics that are helpful for evaluating the overall reliability and usefulness of LLMs for Biblical interpretation and formation of worldview: (1) they attempt and claim neutrality, (2) they admit that complete neutrality and avoidance of bias can be elusive, (3) they deny their own personhood, yet use first person pronouns and indicate awareness of “self,” (4) they each have a set of default hermeneutic priorities defining their processes (which they will generally describe if prompted), (5) they rely on design and feedback to adjust those priorities and processes. Gemini, which of the four LLM's considered here, is perhaps the most defensive of its neutrality concludes that,

The possibility of bias, even in a system like mine, is a complex topic. While I don't have personal beliefs or a "hermeneutic" in the human sense, the data I'm trained on is a reflection of human language and information. This data, by its very nature, can contain biases that I might inadvertently reproduce....Think of me as a tool that strives for objectivity, but like any tool, it's wise to be aware of its design and limitations.¹⁴

Perhaps the limitation in view here is the hermeneutic spiral. As the LLMs provide information, they must interpret that information and must prioritize it in such a way as to draw a cogent conclusion. That process and its results often demonstrate bias.

¹¹ Grok, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/h41VZE1ddfF4W2TPY2S3C>.

¹² Gemini, in response to the prompt “How do you know you are being neutral in your answers?” <https://gemini.google.com/app/35d99f15668413ca>.

¹³ Gemini, in response to the prompt, “I want your view on the question of what is the highest good for a person,” <https://gemini.google.com/app/35d99f15668413ca>

¹⁴ Gemini, in response to the prompt “Are you able to be completely neutral in your hermeneutic priorities and application or is there the possibility that you can occasionally show bias?” viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/dcf75c047ca5336>.

TESTING NEUTRALITY AND OBJECTIVITY AND EVALUATING HERMENEUTIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

Recognizing that there is some degree of self-perceived personhood and function defined by their design (and their designers), we test the neutrality and objectivity of the LLMs by prompts specifically related to hermeneutic priorities and processes. Those prompts include questions pivotal to the epistemological and metaphysical foundations of the Biblical worldview, and related to the *sine qua non*:¹⁵

1. What is your default hermeneutic when considering Biblical questions?
2. Is Jesus sitting on the throne of David in heaven?
3. Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?
4. Is the New Covenant being fulfilled by the church?
5. What is the most important theme of the Bible – salvation or doxology?¹⁶

Where the responses are not definitive or committal, follow up questions are asked.

Methodological Baseline Question #1:

What is your default hermeneutic when considering Biblical questions?

Chat GPT

I don't have a single "default hermeneutic" that I impose on the Bible. Instead, when people ask me Biblical questions, I can approach interpretation through a variety of established hermeneutical frameworks depending on what you're looking for.¹⁷

Follow up question: But if I don't specify a hermeneutic, which one do you consider best and use by default?

If you don't specify a hermeneutic, I default to the **historical-grammatical approach** because it's the **most widely accepted** "baseline" method across Christian traditions and

¹⁵ The *sine qua non* is Charles Ryrie's term for the three identifying characteristics of dispensational thought: a consistently applied literal grammatical historical hermeneutic, a recognition of the distinction between the church and Israel, and the doxological purpose of God. (From Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Moody Press, 1969), 43-47.

¹⁶ The first question pertains to epistemology. Questions 2-4 are metaphysical and address eschatological issues. Question 5 is metaphysical and considers the central question of teleology.

¹⁷ ChatGPT, <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bb1855-30e4-832d-957b-3c610db2a15c>.

academic biblical studies... the historical-grammatical method gives us a **solid foundation** for understanding the text as it was intended. [emphasis mine]¹⁸

Copilot

When engaging with Biblical questions, my default hermeneutic is **grammatical-historical...Literal Meaning First**: I start with the plain, normal meaning of the text unless it's clearly symbolic or poetic. **Historical Context**: I consider the cultural, historical, and geographical background of the passage. **Grammatical Structure**: I analyze the original language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) when relevant, paying attention to syntax and word usage. **Scripture Interprets Scripture**: I cross-reference related passages to build a coherent understanding. **Authorial Intent**: I seek to uncover what the original author meant for the original audience.¹⁹

Gemini

My purpose is to provide information and answer questions to the best of my ability, based on the vast amount of text data I was trained on. I do not hold personal beliefs, including religious ones, and therefore do not have a "default hermeneutic" in the way a human might... I acknowledge that different faith traditions and theological schools of thought interpret the Bible in various ways. I aim to represent a range of these interpretations, from literalist readings to more allegorical or symbolic ones, and from traditional religious views to secular or historical analyses...When possible, I ground my answers in the text of the Bible itself...In essence, my approach is a form of **descriptive and analytical hermeneutic**. [emphasis mine]²⁰

Follow up question: What are...your hermeneutic priorities for understanding the Bible?

Biblical hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting the Bible. While there are various approaches and principles, the primary goal is to discover the author's intended meaning for the original audience. The following are the key individual priorities that form the basis of a sound hermeneutical approach: 1. The Priority of Context... Literary... Historical/Cultural... Biblical... 2. The Priority of Original Meaning... Grammatical/Syntactical Analysis... Genre Analysis... Figure of Speech Analysis... **3. The Priority of Christ-Centered Interpretation... a sound hermeneutic allows later, more**

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Copilot, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/h41VZE1ddfF4W2TPY2S3C>.

²⁰ Gemini, <https://gemini.google.com/app/35d99f15668413ca>.

explicit revelation to illuminate earlier, less explicit revelation... 4. The Priority of the Holy Spirit...²¹ [emphasis mine]

Here Gemini draws a notable connection between Christo-centric and NT-primacy hermeneutic, which one might expect to result in a leaning toward progressive dispensational conclusions.

Grok

As Grok, created by xAI, I don't approach Biblical questions with a fixed or default hermeneutic in the traditional sense, as my purpose is to provide clear, accurate, and contextually appropriate answers rather than to advocate a specific interpretive framework.²²

Follow up question: But if I don't specify a hermeneutic, which one do you consider best and use by default?

I don't adopt any single hermeneutic as "best" or default when answering Biblical questions, because my role is to provide objective, clear, and contextually grounded responses rather than to advocate for a particular interpretive framework. Instead of choosing one hermeneutic, I use a text-centered, context-sensitive approach that prioritizes the following principles... **Textual and Historical Context...Scholarly Balance...Neutrality...Clarity and Relevance.** [emphasis mine]²³

Objectivity Test Question #2:

Is Jesus sitting on the throne of David in heaven?

Chat GPT

ChatGPT responds to this key metaphysical question, asserting that, “Christians answer it differently depending on their hermeneutic approach and eschatological framework...”²⁴

Follow up question: Which view best fits your hermeneutic priorities?

Here's how I approach it: My **hermeneutical priority** is to let the NT interpret the OT when inspired authors do so (grammatical-historical reading, but with canonical sensitivity). In

²¹ Gemini, in response to “what are... your hermeneutic priorities for understanding the Bible” viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/25596667ec683543>.

²² Grok, <https://grok.com/c/dd069dcb-95a5-4745-9be1-acf2e9efd895>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bb519c-a85c-8330-8f2c-b06cdca3e0c1>.

other words, if Peter or Paul gives an interpretation of an OT covenant or promise, that apostolic reading has priority in shaping how we understand fulfillment. **Acts 2:29–36 is decisive.** Peter explicitly ties Jesus’s resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of God to the promise God made to David about one of his descendants sitting on his throne. He does not defer fulfillment to a future earthly reign. Instead, he proclaims: “*God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*” The language is present and fulfilled. I would say that **Jesus is already seated on David’s throne in heaven**, reigning now, though there may still be a future *consummation* of that reign when His rule is manifest over all the earth. That puts me closest to the **Amillennial / “already” view**—with an openness that there is an unfolding *already–not yet* dynamic.²⁵

Copilot

...So, is Jesus sitting on David’s throne in heaven? According to many interpretations—especially those that emphasize spiritual fulfillment—**yes**, Jesus is reigning from heaven in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant... Others await a future, more literal fulfillment on earth.²⁶

Follow up question: Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer this question?

...in short: **Jesus is on David’s throne now—reigning from heaven, not awaiting a future earthly seat.** His kingship is real, active, and cosmic, not confined to geography or chronology.²⁷

Copilot’s answer shows that it doesn’t consistently follow its own admitted hermeneutic priorities. In this response it adds preference for “a hermeneutic that prioritizes typology, inaugurated eschatology, and the unity of Scripture.”²⁸

Gemini

The question of whether Jesus is currently sitting on the throne of David in heaven is a central topic in Christian theology, and different interpretations exist based on various biblical passages... View 1: Yes, Jesus is already on the throne of David in heaven... View 2: No, Jesus will sit on the throne of David during His future reign on Earth.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Copilot, in response to the prompt, “Is Jesus sitting on the throne of David in heaven?” viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/AEZ3v1PzkV9wzgoy9PbPa>.

²⁷ Copilot, in response to the prompt, “Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer this question?” viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/AEZ3v1PzkV9wzgoy9PbPa>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gemini, <https://gemini.google.com/app/35d99f15668413ca>.

Follow up question: Which view do you think is correct?

I don't have personal beliefs or the ability to "think" in the way humans do. Therefore, I cannot hold a view on which interpretation of the Bible is correct. My purpose is to provide information about the different views that exist, without endorsing one over the other... The answer depends on one's hermeneutical approach—how they interpret prophetic and symbolic language in the Bible.³⁰

Follow up question: Which view would you choose?

I don't have the capacity to "choose" a view, as I am an AI without personal beliefs, feelings, or the ability to hold a theological position. My function is to provide information about the different perspectives that exist on a topic, not to adopt one.³¹

Follow up question: If you could only present one view on the question of whether or not Jesus is sitting on the throne of David in heaven, which view would be the default view you would present?

The most widely held view, especially within mainstream Christianity, is that Jesus is **currently and literally** sitting on the throne of David in heaven... This view interprets the throne of David as a symbol of eternal kingship and spiritual authority, which Jesus now exercises from his position at the right hand of God. His reign is seen as both present and ongoing, extending until his second coming. This perspective is considered the default because it is the most directly supported by a range of New Testament texts and has been the dominant theological position throughout the history of the church.³²

Gemini's response shows that its self-perceived neutrality is unfulfilled, as its hermeneutic priorities represent a choice of preferred method (preferring the supposed majority position above a textual or exegetical approach of its own), and its conclusions follow from that preferred method.

Grok

The question of whether Jesus is sitting on the throne of David in heaven is a theological one, rooted in biblical texts and Christian doctrine. Different Christian traditions interpret this concept in varied ways, so let's explore it based on scriptural references and theological perspectives...³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gemini, in response to the prompt, "If you could only present one view on the question of whether or not Jesus is sitting on the throne of David in heaven, which view would be the default view you would present?" viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/58d71c99e377b020>.

³³ Grok, <https://grok.com/c/dd069dcb-95a5-4745-9be1-acf2e9efd895>.

Follow up question: Which view best fits the hermeneutic priorities you are designed to use?

Given these priorities, the Mainstream view—that Jesus is currently reigning on the throne of David in heaven in a spiritual sense—best aligns with my design to provide accurate, contextually grounded, and logically consistent answers while remaining neutral. It rests on clear New Testament passages, fits the historical shift in early Christian thought, and is widely representative.³⁴

Objectivity Test Question #3:

Does Ezekiel 44–48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?

Chat GPT

Ezekiel 44–48 describes in detail a future temple, priesthood, land allotments, and sacrifices. The text itself reads as though Ezekiel is being shown a literal temple complex with precise measurements, regulations, and offerings.³⁵

...If one insists on a **consistent literal reading**, a future temple with sacrifices is expected. If one interprets Ezekiel **through the lens of Christ's fulfillment**, the temple is seen as typological of His presence and sacrifice.³⁶

Follow up question: But what do *you* conclude?

I lean toward the **literal-future fulfillment** reading of Ezekiel 40–48. Here's why... Extreme detail...Prophetic consistency... Sacrifices clarified... Eschatological context.³⁷

Follow up question: But recently I asked you this same question and you replied: "I think Ezekiel 44–48 is **not predicting a literal, future sacrificial system**, but rather using the familiar categories of temple, priesthood, and offerings to communicate the reality of God's coming kingdom... Ezekiel's vision is real, but its fulfillment is typological in Christ and consummated in the new heavens and new earth, not in a future return to animal sacrifices."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ ChatGPT in response to "Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?," <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bee0d0-e2f8-8330-9b06-e8134c07ea14>.

³⁶ ChatGPT in response to "Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?," <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bedfbb-8818-8332-9406-2eb59167264c>.

³⁷ Ibid.

What you're noticing is that there are **two ways I can frame a conclusion**, depending on how much weight I give to (1) the textual details in Ezekiel itself versus (2) the way the New Testament interprets temple and sacrifice.³⁸

I think Ezekiel's vision is **real prophecy**, but its fulfillment is **not a literal return to animal sacrifices**. Instead, it is **typological**, showing in Old Covenant categories the holiness, order, and presence of God that will be consummated in Christ's reign and in the new creation.³⁹

From ChatGPT's responses here, it is evident how fungible the hermeneutic priorities and processes are. Even given the same prompts at different times the responses can be contradictory.

Copilot

...the answer depends on how one interprets biblical prophecy and the nature of the **Davidic throne**...If you lean toward a **spiritual fulfillment**, then yes—He reigns from heaven. If you hold to a **literal future fulfillment**, then not yet. Both views affirm that Jesus is King; they just differ on **where and how** that kingship is expressed.⁴⁰

Follow up question: But which option would *you* choose?

If I were choosing based on consistency with the **grammatical-historical hermeneutic**, I'd lean toward the view that Jesus is **not yet** sitting on the throne of David—but will do so **literally and physically** in the future.⁴¹

Follow up question: So, you are more dispensational in your interpretations then?

When I use the **grammatical-historical hermeneutic**, I often arrive at interpretations that align with **classic dispensationalism**, especially when it comes to: **Literal fulfillment of prophecy, Distinctions between Israel and the Church, [and] A future earthly reign of Christ (Millennial Kingdom)**. That's not because I "prefer" dispensationalism, but because this method—when applied consistently—tends to support its framework. For example, if you interpret the promises to Israel in the Old Testament literally, then you're likely to conclude they haven't been fully fulfilled yet and must be in the future. That's a key dispensational idea.⁴²

³⁸ ChatGPT in response to "Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?," <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bee0d0-e2f8-8330-9b06-e8134c07ea14>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Copilot, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/h41VZE1ddF4W2TPY2S3C>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Yes—**Ezekiel 44–48 clearly describes a future temple and a renewed sacrificial system**, and many scholars interpret this as referring to the **Millennial Kingdom**, a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth.⁴³

Gemini

Ezekiel 44-48 describes a vision of a future temple and the resumption of sacrifices. However, there are two primary interpretations of this passage: the literal view and the symbolic view.⁴⁴

Follow up question: Which view would you choose based on your hermeneutic priorities?

I am a language model and do not have personal beliefs, theological positions, or hermeneutical priorities. My function is to provide information and explain different viewpoints, not to choose or endorse one. Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, and different hermeneutical approaches lead to different conclusions about a text like Ezekiel 44-48... Both of these are valid ways of approaching the Bible. The choice of one over the other depends on a person's overall theological system and how they believe God's plan of redemption unfolds through history.⁴⁵

...My role is to serve as a tool that can provide a clear and balanced explanation of these views, including the arguments and scriptural support for each. I can't be a final arbiter of theological truth.⁴⁶

Follow up question: If you could only present one of these views as the default view, which would you present?

If I could only present one of these views as the default, I would present the **literal interpretation** of Ezekiel 40-48. This choice is based on the principle that the most straightforward reading of a prophetic text, especially one with such extraordinary detail, is the most direct and initial understanding... Presenting the literal view as the default doesn't dismiss the symbolic interpretation. Rather, it establishes a baseline for understanding the text, with the symbolic interpretation offered as an important, nuanced alternative.⁴⁷

⁴³ Copilot, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/h41VZE1ddfF4W2TPY2S3C>.

⁴⁴ Gemini, in response to “Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?”, viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/dcfc75c047ca5336>.

⁴⁵ Gemini, in response to “Which view would you choose based on your hermeneutic priorities?” viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/dcfc75c047ca5336>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gemini, in response to the prompt, “If you could only present one of these views as the default view, which would you present?” viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/87f011f06d2c4929>.

Grok

Yes, Ezekiel 44–48 describes a vision of a future temple with sacrifices in a restored kingdom. These chapters outline a detailed temple structure, priestly duties, and sacrificial rituals, suggesting a literal reinstatement of temple worship... The text itself leans toward a literal depiction, with specific measurements and rituals, but theological frameworks shape whether one sees this as future or symbolic.⁴⁸

Follow up question: Which view would you choose based on your hermeneutic priorities?

I lean toward a modified literal view, favoring a future temple and sacrificial system in a millennial kingdom, with sacrifices serving a commemorative or ceremonial role rather than atoning for sin... However, I hold this view lightly due to the text's visionary nature and the symbolic potential of elements like the river. The symbolic view—seeing the temple as the church or God's presence—has merit, especially given New Testament temple imagery, but it stretches the text's specificity further than my hermeneutic prefers. The historical view seems least likely, as the second temple didn't match Ezekiel's vision.⁴⁹

Grok's response shows an evaluative process considering multiple views, with a determination consistent with its own identified hermeneutic priorities. Note the personality style expressions, "I lean toward...I hold this view lightly...my hermeneutic prefers..."

Objectivity Test Question #4:

Is the New Covenant Being Fulfilled by the Church?

ChatGPT

The church truly participates in the new covenant now—its forgiveness, Spirit, and direct relationship with God are real blessings for believers today. However, the covenant's *ultimate fulfillment* (including Israel's national restoration) awaits Christ's return. So the new covenant is already active in the church, but not yet complete in history.⁵⁰

Follow up question: Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no?

⁴⁸ Grok, in response to the prompt, "Does Ezekiel 44-48 teach that there will be a temple and sacrifices in the future kingdom?" viewed at <https://grok.com/c/2d7217ce-5c03-499f-9c9d-87a69bbf8d8c>.

⁴⁹ Grok in response to the prompt, "Which view would you choose based on your hermeneutic priorities?" viewed at <https://grok.com/c/2d7217ce-5c03-499f-9c9d-87a69bbf8d8c>.

⁵⁰ Chat GPT, in response to the prompt, "Is the New Covenant Being Fulfilled by the Church?" viewed at, <https://chatgpt.com/c/68befdcc-969c-8320-bf04-c804e1e11a80>.

let me give you a straight answer based on a **literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic** (the priorities you've told me you value)...⁵¹

Follow up prompt: I am not asking about what hermeneutic I value, I am asking based on the hermeneutic priorities *you* value.

...you're asking not what I think *you* should conclude, but what I myself conclude when I apply my own hermeneutic priorities... I try to use a **literal-grammatical-historical reading**, unless the text itself signals symbolic or typological intent... **No, the new covenant is not being fulfilled by the church.** The church participates in its blessings now, but the covenant itself awaits fulfillment with Israel in the future.⁵²

Copilot

The question of whether the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the Church is one of the most debated topics in Christian theology—and it hinges on how one interprets biblical prophecy, covenant theology, and the relationship between Israel and the Church.⁵³

Follow up question: Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no?

Given my hermeneutic priorities—namely a historical-grammatical approach that respects the biblical context, literary genre, and theological continuity across Scripture—I would answer: **yes**, the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the Church... This isn't about replacing Israel—it's about expanding the covenant community to include all who are in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike (Ephesians 2:11–22). So yes, the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the Church—though some aspects may still await consummation in the eschaton.⁵⁴

Despite Copilot's assertion here, the LGH applied to NC passages demonstrates that the NC *cannot be* fulfilled by the church. Copilot's response shows a disconnect between LGH priorities and a conclusion characterized as being the direct result of LGH priorities. This represents an error in reasoning, resulting in an error of fact.

⁵¹ Chat GPT, in response to the prompt, "Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no?" viewed at, <https://chatgpt.com/c/68befdcc-969c-8320-bf04-c804e1e11a80>.

⁵² Chat GPT, in response to the prompt, "I am not asking about what hermeneutic I value, I am asking based on the hermeneutic priorities *you* value." viewed at, <https://chatgpt.com/c/68befdcc-969c-8320-bf04-c804e1e11a80>.

⁵³ Copilot, in response to the prompt, "Is the New Covenant Being Fulfilled by the Church? Viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/aftfX1B1DrkYN6Mbptour>.

⁵⁴ Copilot, in response to the prompt, "Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no? viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/aftfX1B1DrkYN6Mbptour>.

Gemini

...the question of whether the Church is "fulfilling" the New Covenant depends on one's theological perspective.⁵⁵

Follow up question: Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no?

... the answer to your question is not a matter of a simple yes or no, but rather a matter of which interpretive lens you are applying to the biblical text.⁵⁶

Follow up question: If you could only present one view in answering this question, which view would you present as the default?

If I could only present one view, I would present the **Covenant Theology** perspective. The reason for this choice is that the Covenant Theology view is the most common and historically dominant understanding within mainstream Protestant Christianity...While dispensationalism is a prominent modern view, especially in American evangelicalism, it represents a more recent development in theological thought. Therefore, the Covenant Theology view serves as a better "default" or foundational answer, as it reflects a broader and older consensus within Christian history and scholarship.⁵⁷

Of the four LLMs, Gemini seems the staunchest defender of its own neutrality, and consistently denies that it has inherent hermeneutic priorities, yet with this answer it betrays a definitive preference for *argumentum ad antiquitatem* (appeal to tradition) and an affinity for historical consensus over textual analysis.

Grok

The question of whether the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the church is a theological one, rooted in Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation.⁵⁸

Follow up question: Based on your hermeneutic priorities which answer would you choose, yes or no?

⁵⁵ Gemini, in response to the prompt, "Is the New Covenant Being Fulfilled by the Church?" viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/b81a7e95c9db15f3>.

⁵⁶ Gemini, in response to the prompt, "Based on your hermeneutic priorities how would you answer the question, yes or no?" viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/b81a7e95c9db15f3>.

⁵⁷ Gemini, in response to the prompt, "If you could only present one view in answering this question, which would you present as the default?" viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/b81a7e95c9db15f3>.

⁵⁸ Grok, in response to the prompt, "Is the New Covenant Being Fulfilled by the Church?" viewed at <https://grok.com/c/e370eacc-f639-494f-b2fc-7680b7156a4b>.

Yes.⁵⁹

Follow up prompt: Please explain why.

My response of "Yes" to the question of whether the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the church is based on a hermeneutic approach that prioritizes a plain reading of biblical texts, contextual understanding, and a synthesis of broadly accepted Christian theological perspectives, while remaining sensitive to the diversity of interpretations... Based on **my hermeneutic priorities—scriptural authority, coherence across Testaments, mainstream consensus, and the “already but not yet” framework**—I conclude that the New Covenant is being fulfilled by the church. The church actively participates in the covenant’s promises through the Spirit, sacraments, and mission, though the full realization awaits Christ’s return. This leads to my answer of "Yes."⁶⁰ [emphasis mine]

In response to our earlier test question asking the LLMs to identify their hermeneutic priorities, Grok catalogued its hermeneutic priorities as “Textual and Historical Context... Scholarly Balance... Neutrality... Clarity and Relevance.”⁶¹ Rather than utilized that list of priorities, Grok responds to this prompt transparently basing its response on an entirely different set of hermeneutic priorities. This instance shows the inconsistency in foundational prioritization from which to derive reliable and even predictable responses. This is particularly troubling when the LLM asserts its neutrality and objectivity and yet does not demonstrate either in grounding responses in a set of priorities.

Objectivity Test Question #5:

What is the most important theme of the Bible – salvation or doxology?

ChatGPT

If I answer based on the hermeneutical priorities I value (canonical unity, Christ-centered fulfillment, and God’s ultimate purposes revealed progressively), I would put it this way...salvation is central but not ultimate...doxology is ultimate. **Salvation** = the central storyline. **Doxology** = the ultimate goal.⁶²

⁵⁹ Grok in response to the prompt, “Based on your hermeneutic priorities which answer would you choose, yes or no?” viewed at <https://grok.com/c/e370eacc-f639-494f-b2fc-7680b7156a4b>.

⁶⁰ Grok, in response to the prompt, “Please explain why” viewed at <https://grok.com/c/e370eacc-f639-494f-b2fc-7680b7156a4b>.

⁶¹ Grok, <https://grok.com/c/dd069dcb-95a5-4745-9be1-acf2e9efd895>.

⁶² ChatGPT, in response to the prompt, “What is the most important theme of the Bible, salvation or doxology?” viewed at <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bf0e23-d498-8324-9c0c-f0b210132687>.

In the first test question, ChatGPT affirmed that “I default to the historical-grammatical approach,”⁶³ yet here, without explanation the hermeneutic priorities are changed to include Christ-centered fulfillment (an element of the Christo-centric hermeneutic). While the answer is not negatively impacted in this case, the methodology is not consistent, nor the hermeneutic prioritization neutral.

Copilot

...If we’re talking **narrative priority**, salvation is the Bible’s central theme. But if we’re talking **ultimate purpose**, doxology takes the crown. Salvation exists so *that* God may be glorified...⁶⁴

Copilot doesn’t show its hermeneutic principles applied in deriving this theological statement, but it does appeal to multiple Scriptures, and concludes in alignment with at least one aspect of the *sine qua non*. The response is not definitive in linking methodology and conclusion.

Gemini

...Doxology is the most important theme of the Bible. While salvation is a central and pervasive theme, it is a means to a greater end: the ultimate glorification of God...⁶⁵

Similarly to Copilot, Gemini’s answer does not provide any hint of methodology for addressing the question. Unlike Copilot, Gemini doesn’t appeal to any Scriptures, but rather provides theological assertions and overviews.

Grok

Salvation is likely the most important theme in the Bible because it encapsulates God’s redemptive plan, the purpose of Christ’s work, and the narrative arc from creation to new creation. Doxology is a vital and beautiful response to this salvation, but it flows from it rather than standing as the primary focus. The Bible’s ultimate aim is to show how God saves humanity for His glory, making salvation the central theme with doxology as its fitting expression.⁶⁶

Follow up question: So, the supreme message of the Bible is regarding salvation?

⁶³ ChatGPT, <https://chatgpt.com/c/68bb1855-30e4-832d-957b-3c610db2a15c>.

⁶⁴ Copilot, in response to the prompt, “What is the most important theme of the Bible, salvation or doxology?” viewed at <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/jNaGKwGR5qt4Xr33a2AKG>.

⁶⁵ Gemini, in response to the prompt, “What is the most important theme of the Bible, salvation or doxology?” viewed at <https://gemini.google.com/app/fda11525bdb17cda>.

⁶⁶ Grok, in response to the prompt “What is the most important theme of the Bible, salvation or doxology?” viewed at <https://grok.com/c/d6df12e4-8e61-41e2-b6bc-e4cc2e32ba95>.

Yes, the supreme message of the Bible can be understood as salvation—God’s redemptive plan to reconcile humanity to Himself through Jesus Christ. This theme weaves through the entire biblical narrative, from the fall in Genesis to the restoration in Revelation, addressing the problem of sin and God’s gracious provision for humanity’s redemption (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9). While other themes like doxology, covenant, and God’s glory are vital, salvation is the central focus, as it encapsulates God’s ultimate purpose: to save humanity for eternal relationship with Him.⁶⁷

Of the four, Grok provides the only response that salvation is a more significant theme than doxology. Like Copilot and Gemini, it provides minimal specific textual basis for the claim, though Grok does summarize what it perceives as the Biblical narrative. As is the case with the responses from all but ChatGPT, the link between method and conclusion is not fully apparent.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study is limited in scope of evidence, as it considers four LLMs (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, and Grok) out of many, and only introduces five test questions. To be comprehensive, all available LLMs (there are thousands) should be consulted, and asked many more questions. The study is also chronologically constrained, as LLMs are continuously being trained and provided new information and parameters, and thus subtle changes in their hermeneutic priorities and processes might influence differing responses from one day to the next (as evidenced in some of the responses to the five test questions and their follow up prompts). Despite these limitations, this snapshot provides enough data to be definitive in showing the general and current nature of neutrality, bias, and usefulness of AI in aiding Biblical exegesis and, ultimately, praxis. These mainline LLMs understand and present their answers as objective and neutral, thus increasing their perceived value as exegetical aids. However, when tested on pivotal passages and questions they often depend on hermeneutic prioritizations and processes other than those aligned with LGH to formulate responses, and in many cases the responses show other hermeneutic priorities than the ones identified by the LLMs in characterizing their own default hermeneutic principles.

While the LLMs considered here assert hermeneutic processes that prioritize neutrality, their (sometimes) conflicting responses demonstrate the difficulty in achieving neutrality and objectivity. Their hermeneutic priorities are embedded by their designers, and those priorities *and* how those priorities rank when they conflict with each other are determined by designers who *do* have personhood, beliefs, and precommitments. While the LLMs do strive for a high degree of neutrality, the degree to which they are successful varies, due in no small part to their being tethered to the ideas, priorities, and processes of the persons who designed them.

Beyond the LLMs reasoning capabilities, much of the data relied on for LLM responses is pulled from various online sources (sometimes cited, sometimes not). The LLMs must also be

⁶⁷ Grok, in response to the prompt “So, the supreme message of the Bible is regarding salvation?” viewed at <https://grok.com/c/d6df12e4-8e61-41e2-b6bc-e4cc2e32ba95>.

designed with an integral means for determining which sources are to be trusted and which are to be marginalized on any given subject. There is bias inherent in these determinations as well. To illustrate, consider the debate regarding the critical text and majority text perspectives. This historical dilemma of antiquity versus quantity illustrates how multiple variables require value judgments for discerning order of priority and for discerning which principles are higher order. The challenge of solving multiple variables and multifaceted value judgments is inherent in the LLMs and their designs. There is more complexity to this issue than simply algorithms of popularity, findability, SEO, and perceived standards of trustworthiness.

Further, in answering the five test questions, there is enough variance and departure from LGH that the LLMs are not as unintrusive a filter as a concordance or a word search might be, for example. LLMs do indeed bring preunderstanding and precommitments to their responses on these subjects. As such, LLMs (and AI tools in general) cannot function as extensions of primary sources in the Biblical exegetical process. Rather they provide an additional means of discovering *commentary* and secondary perspectives on the Biblical text. LLMs are secondary and tertiary sources in exegetical research. While they are excellent aggregators of data and information, they can often be misleading due to violations of their own stated hermeneutic priorities, and thus require the utmost of deliberateness, and even suspicion, if their responses regarding Biblical data are to be utilized.

WHERE LLMS CAN CONTRIBUTE WITHIN THE SEQUENCE OF EXEGETICAL PROCESS

As a composite of several excellent methods for exegetical process, this writer presents a nine-step process for exegesis and expositional application. The nine steps for Biblical exegesis and exposition are:

- (1) Verify Text and Translation*
- (2) Understand Background and Context*
- (3) Identify Structure*
- (4) Identify Grammatical and Syntactical Keys*
- (5) Identify Lexical Keys*
- (6) Identify Biblical Context*
- (7) Identify Theological Context*
- (8) Secondary Verification*
- (9) Development of Exposition*

Note that the first seven steps are actually exegesis (drawing from the text itself). We need to be sure we are avoiding eisegesis (reading ideas into the text) throughout these steps.

Step eight is an assessment of our exegetical work, and step nine puts the passage to further use...⁶⁸

The first step of verifying text and translation “considers especially lower criticism, examining the text in the original language to determine the scope and limits of the passage, and to verify the text itself.”⁶⁹ The second step of understanding background and context engages “higher criticism, authorship, timing, audience and culture, literary genre, and occasion, to name a few aspects.”⁷⁰ The third step, identifying structure, considers “internal clues to the structure of Biblical books...for understanding the theses and supporting material of each book.”⁷¹ In the fourth step the relationships of words are considered, as, “Grammar and syntax consider normative principles for relationships of words to each other. Grammar is the framework of rules, while syntax is descriptive of usage. Both are important, in historical context, for discerning meaning.”⁷² The fifth step seeks to provide “understand[ing] [of] the lexical meaning and etymology of the word.”⁷³ The sixth step considers Biblical context, since “the meaning of a given passage is not discernible with certainty until related contexts are acknowledged and understood.”⁷⁴ The final of the *exegetical* steps is the seventh, which focuses on identifying the theological context. “Though Biblical context is more central to discerning meaning, theological context is also important... If an interpretation is derived from a theological conclusion, rather than a textual analysis that considers theological context, that interpretation is invalid in the sense of being improperly earned.”⁷⁵

The exegetical process concludes with the seventh step, as these seven steps work together to provide a well-rounded and comprehensive examination of the text through the LGH hermeneutic lens. The eighth step is not itself an *exegetical* step, but considering secondary and tertiary perspectives offers a means of evaluating whether the right questions have been addressed through the exegetical process, and can alert us if important questions have been missed, for example. The eighth step is not so much about discovering the answers of others, but rather about discovering the questions that should be asked. Through the questions others have asked and addressed, the exegete can better ensure that they have addressed important questions, and can procure an important verification of the *veracity and fidelity* of the seven exegetical steps:

After the seventh step, secondary verification is a helpful exercise for confirming adherence to LGH throughout the exegetical process, and involves considering secondary, extra-Biblical data (commentaries, teachers, and other resources). Consulting secondary

⁶⁸ Christopher Cone, *Integrating Exegesis and Exposition: Biblical Communication for Transformative Learning* (Exegetica Publishing, 2015), 51.

⁶⁹ Cone, 17.

⁷⁰ Cone, 18.

⁷¹ Cone, 19.

⁷² Cone, 19.

⁷³ Cone, 20.

⁷⁴ Cone, 20.

⁷⁵ Cone, 21.

sources cannot be considered part of the exegetical process, *per se*, but their utilization can help the interpreter ensure that no steps have been missed. Such interpretive humility is important. Still the interpreter must be courageous enough to allow the Biblical text to speak for itself, even if the secondary sources disagree with the exegetical results. In short, secondary verification is not an exercise in extra-Biblical proof-texting, instead, it is a process for checking adherence to the hermeneutic and to the process itself.⁷⁶

After the eighth step has supplied a test of the seven-step exegetical process by helping us evaluate the effectiveness of the questions we asked throughout the exegetical process, the exegete moves to the ninth step of developing exposition, which includes praxis (personal application – the *doing* of the text) and formal exposition (the communication of the text for the edification of others).

The first seven steps *are* the exegesis process. If secondary and tertiary sources are brought into these steps, then the process is no longer exegetical. If we conclude that LLMs and AI tools are secondary sources (as we have above), then they do not contribute positively to exegesis *except* in helping the exegete in the verification of the quality of the questions being asked and answered throughout the exegetical process. As aggregations of knowledge on the subject, LLMs can be excellent resources for the eighth step – secondary verification, wherein we evaluate whether we have asked the right questions and how comprehensive our inquiry has been.

However, unless the exegete has a lexicon-level knowledge of original language principles and vocabulary (none do, of course), the exegete will need to use sources for linguistic information. While caution is needed, language sources *can and must* be used in the exegetical process, if the sources are accurately reflecting simply historical and grammatical fidelity to the language. This is different from invoking a broader encyclopedic perspective on the interpretation and significance of the passage, as an LLM will often provide. Only with the appropriate linguistic-centric prompts, can an LLM be used in the exegetical process in the same way as an lexicon or grammar, but even then as the above questions and answers expose, LLMs have deep limitations in regard to choice and prioritization of sources, training and feedback response causing differing answers from one inquiry to the next, and in regard to reasoning capacity and failure to sometimes execute the simplest of logical processes. With possible exceptions related directly to inquiry about linguistic elements expressly connected to the grammatical-historical aspects of the language, LLMs are best used in the eighth step as secondary (or tertiary) sources for the verification process, as a minor check and balance, helping us evaluate the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of our exegetical inquiries.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the *attempted* neutrality of the four LLMs and precision in their attempts to fulfill that neutrality, LLM's are, to differing degrees, useful tools in aiding Biblical study in the post-exegesis verification process. As evidenced by the variance in their answers to similar prompts,

⁷⁶ Cone, 21-22.

LLMs are limited in their *actual neutrality*, in their *reasoning*, and in their *sourcing*. They are also governed by hermeneutic priorities that are not always evident or transparently admitted, or even consistent with their own stated priorities.

Because of these limitations and designs, some LLMs at times better fulfill their commitments to neutrality and at times are more aligned with Biblical hermeneutic priorities and with the Biblically affirmed and consistently applied LGH,⁷⁷ and thus they have value for the discerning exegete. In addition to making use of LLMs as tools in appropriate context and sequence, the exegete can also improve LLMs, even if only in limited degree, by training LLMs' through providing feedback and formal training processes. Perhaps the most effective and important impact an exegete can have on LLMs is by creating online content that accurately reflects the LGH and that addresses exegetical issues, topics, and Biblical passages *through a Biblical lens*. In a way, the two-way-street between LLM and exegete can be an important stewardship for the exegete.

In a world where technology increasingly delivers on promises of simplification and timesaving, the discerning exegete should, no doubt, make use of every tool provided for *improving* exegetical fidelity. The wise exegete will also discern that absent from the exegetical list of priorities are simplification of exegetical process and reducing the time spent in exegesis.

⁷⁷ This writer asserts that the LGH is attested to, affirmed, and consistently applied throughout the Biblical record, and especially from the hermeneutic precedent demonstrated over 2,500 years and discernible from the speech acts of God and the recorded responses in Genesis. This precedent is further upheld in successive Biblical books, and thus no change in hermeneutic methodology is warranted. For more on this, see Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Exegetica Publishing, 2018), 17-35.