

Title: Biblical Hermeneutics and Hebraism in the Early Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work of John Weemse (1579-1636)

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a contextual and historical understanding of hermeneutics and exegesis in the early seventeenth century, in the form of a study of the biblical exegete and Hebraist, John Weemse of Lathocker and Prebend of Durham. This study argues both for the continuity of early seventeenth-century biblical exegesis with Reformation exegesis and for the progress of Protestant exegesis after the Reformation.

In substantial similarity to the Reformers with regard to the doctrine of Scripture and to exegetical principles, the foundation of Weemse's exegesis was reading Scripture in its original languages. He enriched his efforts through grammatical and textual studies of masoretic scholarship with its highly scholarly apparatus, through study of Hebrew literary convention, and through a broad knowledge of Hebrew customs and tradition. Weemse made a significant contribution in the history of biblical interpretation by making positive use of Hebraica and Judaica to establish a critical basis for orthodox Christian biblical exegesis. Another significant mark of post-Reformation exegesis was the instrumental use of scholasticism and humanism for a Christian reading of scripture.

In a technical sense, Weemse's post-Reformation biblical hermeneutic is neither medieval nor critical and historical in the modern sense; it is, in the tradition of the Reformation, concentrated on the meaning of Scripture as drawn from a grammatical, literal, textual, and contextual understanding. At the same time, his exegesis is like medieval exegesis in that it is *church* exegesis. It is like Reformation exegesis in that it too has as its motto that Scripture is the living Word of God to the church at present. Weemse's post-Reformation biblical exegesis is not a precursor of the modern critical method; it was rather a pre-critical exegesis, even though it was supported by a more finely tuned theological, linguistic, and logical apparatus than the Reformers employed. This development of the orthodox period is not to be understood as a deviation from Reformation principles but as an answer to the challenge of the period that came from critical, philological study to maintain and refine the heritage of the Reformation theology.