

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 6

Discovering Meaning

Forum



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Contents

Question 1: Why is it important to understand a biblical book's historical setting?	1
Question 2: Why should we consider the author and original audience when interpreting a biblical text?	2
Question 3: What are some drawbacks to over-emphasizing the original audience in biblical interpretation?	5
Question 4: How can becoming familiar with Greek help us to interpret the New Testament?	6
Question 5: How important to our interpretive efforts is knowledge of a passage's grammatical and historical contexts?	7
Question 6: What kinds of copying errors did scribes typically make when copying biblical texts?	8
Question 7: Were New Testament authors sometimes unfaithful to the Old Testament?	10
Question 8: How can learning from other interpreters help us interpret the Bible better?	13
Question 9: How can pastors and teachers learn to adapt their teaching to the needs of different audiences?	14

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Lesson Six: Discovering Meaning

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Bruce Baugus

Dr. Darrell L. Bock

Dr. Stephen J. Bramer

Dr. Gary Cockerill

Dr. Brandon Crowe

Dr. Dan Doriani

Dr. Howard Eyrich

Dr. Michael J. Glodo

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Dr. Miguel Nunez

Dr. Luis Orteza

Dr. Greg Perry

Dr. Robert L. Plummer

Dr. David Redelings

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

Dr. Simon Vibert

Dr. Peter Walker

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace

Question 1:

Why is it important to understand a biblical book's historical setting?

There are many factors to consider when we come to interpret a passage of Scripture. One of the first is the historical setting, or time and place, in which a biblical book or passage was written. But if Scripture is still relevant to our lives today, do we really need to learn what was happening thousands of years ago? Why is it important to understand a biblical book's historical setting?

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

It's important to understand the historical setting in which each book of the Bible was written, as far as we can determine that setting, for several reasons. One is that it helps us really see the Bible as a real document written to real people in real circumstances. Not simply written and tucked away and sealed for another day, but actually written to living, breathing people who struggled with the same kinds of issues we do. And when we can understand their circumstances, we can see a more direct line of application sometimes to our own lives. That's part of it. Another reason is we're able to discern the applications for those original readers. For example, the book of Revelation was written to people struggling under sometimes what was perceived as a chaotic world where maybe God wasn't in control or a world in which the authorities or people in general were hostile to their faith. And so, they had real questions about, could they persevere in this kind of world? Was God in charge? And if he was, was he working for their good? And so, as an example, the book of Revelation, we see what those early Christians received from it if we look at the historical situation instead of simply looking past it to our time. And finally, an important reason why we want to look at the historical setting is because the human authors of Scripture, as they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they used the language, they used the literary forms. And they also, at times, used historical reference so that, if we understand those things, we tend to read them in their original

context rather than try to force them into our context. So we can understand how biblical writers used poetry or used imagery on their terms rather than forcing them to do it on our terms.

Dr. Brandon Crowe

Why is it important to understand the historical setting of biblical books? Well, for one, these books are written a long time ago to a people that shared a certain language, and culture, and situation... And these are the types of things that are simply assumed by the biblical writers whenever they write their books. And so, for example, to understand the point of what a biblical author is trying to make is — to understand that point, it helps us to get as close back to that era as we can, because we are separated by more than 2,000 years ... A second reason why it's important to understand the historical context of biblical books is so we don't exploit the book and use it for our own purposes. As the old saying goes, "Any text without a context can become a pretext for whatever we want to do with the book." And so to make sure that we are understanding the book as God intended it to be understood through the original human author, then we should understand that human author's historical context so we can appropriately make the transition from their day to our day. It's been noted that even the Devil can cite Scripture for his own purposes. And simply citing a Bible verse does not ensure that we are understanding or appropriating the biblical text in the right way. And so, part of the safeguard against exploiting those texts in that way is understanding, in a robust fashion, the historical context in which the books were originally written. A third reason might be illustrated with the New Testament letters. And here is where we see in a very clear way the importance of historical context. If someone were to approach 1 Corinthians, for example — the letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth — and not understand that that church was dealing with some very specific troubles, then someone might run the danger of applying that book, without any adjustments, wholesale to the church today. But we should be careful about simply doing that because Paul was writing as a pastor to a church with some very specific issues, and part of the way he addressed those issues is unique to that church in that time. Now, does that mean 1 Corinthians is not a book for us today? Of course it is. It is true always, in all places, in all times. But part of understanding it rightly in our own day is understanding how Paul tailored his response to that church in their particular historical circumstances.

Question 2:

Why should we consider the author and original audience when interpreting a biblical text?

When we study a biblical passage, we need to look at its historical setting, but we also need to understand something about the author and original audience of the book or passage. We should always ask, who wrote this book? And who first heard it? But, why should we consider the author and original audience when interpreting a biblical text?

Dr. Gary Cockerill

The question about understanding something about the original author and the audience of a biblical text is one that's been important to me, since Hebrews has been a focus of my study and we don't know who wrote it, and we don't really know to whom it was written. Our only clues really are within the text itself. And of course in understanding a biblical book, it is important to understand what we can about the era from which it came — the culture of the first century, the language of the first century, how expressions were used, and so forth, and the their meaning — to put it in that much context. And to understand it then with the more specific information we are given ... I don't think we can know the actual name of the writer of Hebrews. I think we can know a lot about the person. I mean, he was a deep theologian with a profound understanding of the Old Testament and how it was fulfilled in Christ, with a real pastoral heart for the people to whom he was writing. He was a consummate rhetorician. I mean, his structure of the book, the way he has put things together is beautifully done to impact his hearers. So he was very cultured in that way in ancient Greek rhetoric. And so we need to understand him within that context. He certainly bases what he said — there's many ways to see how he bases what he says — on common Christian tradition that was believed by all the writers of the New Testament. And yet he has his own unique way of expressing that and bringing that home. Now, his hearers obviously were people who could benefit from this kind of thing. They had to be cultured themselves enough to appreciate, to receive this kind of rhetoric. We can understand from his concerns something of the things they faced. They were becoming perhaps lax in their Christian faith. They were facing persecution, exclusion from the world. They were perhaps tempted by the rewards the world could give if they gave up... or soft-pedaled their Christian commitment.

Dr. Darrell L. Bock

To understand the original audience of a writing is actually very crucial to understanding what's being said and why it's being said the way that it's being said. We could take, for example, books like Galatians and Colossians which are dealing with issues in the church — specific issues. In Galatia we're dealing with, "Should someone follow the Law?" And in Colossae we're dealing with a particular heresy that's never actually named for us but is only described. The more we know what the background of those that Paul is writing in opposition to, what they hold, the better grasp we have of what's going on in the book. And so we see in the book of Galatians an emphasis on people who want to go back to the Law, and Paul says, no, you left that in Christ. And all you need to do to understand that is have an understanding of what Second Temple Judaism was about, what the Judaism of the time was about. Colossae is a little more difficult. You're trying to figure out what this teaching is that says that there is this kind of super-spirituality *above* simply believing in Christ. And it's debated whether it comes out of a Jewish background, or Greco-Roman background, or perhaps a mix. And that makes a little bit of difference as to how you interpret some of the passages about special calendars, and moons, and special days, and special diet, all those kinds of things... So, understanding what that background is does impact the way you read the book and the way you understand it. And

depending on which version of that heresy you pick will impact how you're reading those passages. Being able to decide that at one level is very important to know what the details are about. At another level, fortunately, we can step back one level and say, well, whatever it is we know Paul wasn't for it... Whether it's Jewish or Greco-Roman, doesn't really help us very much to get closer to God through what Jesus Christ has already provided. You have everything that you need in what he's already given you. That's where your attention should be. That really is the stress of the book, and that helps us to appreciate what Colossians is about.

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

It's important to understand and know who the audience is, because that's going to have a direct effect on how we interpret Scripture... Is it the disciples? Is it the Pharisees? Am I speaking to the Samaritan woman? To the Syrophenician woman? Because all of these are going to have a direct effect on how I interpret. What are the circumstances of the people? What are they going through to prompt this particular writing? And also, it's going to prevent me from, again, giving a faulty interpretation. I can easily place myself in there and say that God is speaking this directly to me when, if I don't understand what's happening with the original people, then again I can come up with a severely faulty interpretation ... And so, understanding the recipients again will give me a clearer, fuller understanding of what this particular passage, what this particular verse, and even what the particular chapter or book is about.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Information about a biblical book's original audience helps us in understanding a book's meaning because it helps us to understand the purpose for which God spoke a particular portion of Scripture. God is an infinitely wise pastor, and he always speaks his word right into the hearts and the needs of his congregation. So Paul speaks the letter to the Galatians under the inspiration of the Spirit specifically to Gentile Christians who are under pressure to, perhaps, think that they will become full-fledged children of Abraham if they observe all of the laws given to Israel through Moses. And Paul speaks into that situation and demonstrates the reality of the gospel from the Old Testament Scriptures. So he will quote Scriptures even as his opponents are quoting Scriptures, but also from the experience of the Galatians — "You received the Spirit as the Spirit drew you to faith in Christ crucified, not through your keeping the Law but in believing this message of what has been accomplished for you." God is always speaking into the hearts and lives of his people. So, for example, the letter to the Hebrews is speaking to people who are under the pressure of some sort of exclusion from the Jewish community, uncertain about whether Jesus' high priesthood, which they cannot see, is as effective as the priestly sanctuary and the priestly sacrifices that are still going on in Jerusalem. So the writer to the Hebrews speaks to their situation. The more we can understand their spiritual struggles, the better we'll be able to see how those struggles manifest themselves in our experience today. Maybe on the surface looking somewhat different in the way we would experience spiritual temptation or trial today, but there is a continuity as well. And the more we grasp what God said to them and why in the light of their situation, the

occasion for the text, the better we'll be able to see how he speaks his word to us in our setting today.

Question 3:

What are some drawbacks to over-emphasizing the original audience in biblical interpretation?

The writer, document and original audience all play a role in the interpretation of Scripture, and each is important. Sometimes, though, we're tempted to place too much importance on one of these factors. For instance, some interpreters may concentrate only on the original audience of a passage and ignore the other factors. What are some drawbacks to over-emphasizing the original audience in biblical interpretation?

Dr. Peter Walker

Whilst there are real benefits in knowing the original audience of a particular part of Scripture, there is a real danger, I think, of it being overemphasized. In the last twenty to thirty years, a lot of energy has gone into people trying to find the original audience of, say, of John's gospel, and you have whole books being written about the Johannine community. And you get the impression at the end of reading these books that the Johannine community was a group of about ten or eleven people sitting in a tiny little church building next door to the synagogue in Ephesus, and they had all these problems. And John was writing these great truths just to help this tiny group. And suddenly you stand back and think, "Well, therefore, this text is irrelevant to me because I'm in a different context. And maybe it's just a sectarian document just designed to help a few people." And instead, you stand back and think, "No, John's gospel was written with everybody in mind. It's painting Christ's glory on a cosmic scale." And therefore, this overemphasis on finding the original audience, it almost reduces the text and makes it too particular, too contextual. And instead we want to say, this is a book which is universal in appeal. And let's read the text as it is, a book for everyone.

Dr. Bruce Baugus

When we're interpreting Scripture, it is important to pay attention, and to think through carefully, the audience. And we can think about that in terms of what is often referred to as the *original* audience, meaning, for example, the people of Corinth who were the recipients of Paul's letters ... Paying attention to the audience is very important. However, there's also some pitfalls with this. Historically speaking, I have thought many times that interpreters have a speculative reconstruction of what must have been the case with this original audience. And then their own speculation drives and determines and dictates what may or may not be possible regarding the meaning of any particular text ... If we ever think that the actual meaning of the text is dependent upon our responses and our reactions to that text, for example, then we've gone astray and we're not likely to end up with what God has said to us.

Dr. Simon Vibert

It is possible that we could over-emphasize the role of the original audience — those who first heard a letter or book of the Bible read, or read it for themselves — to such an extent that we don't think that we still have continuity in the way that we would hear that same message today. Now, it might well be that our circumstances have changed, that we live in a different geographical area. We also live in a different time. We live in a different cultural context; so therefore, we may need to make some changes to the things that are said to an original audience. But nevertheless, we still believe that the human condition is the same. We believe that God is the same, and we believe that there is a sense in which the words of Scripture still resonate even though we may live many thousand years away from when the original audience first heard them read.

Question 4:**How can becoming familiar with Greek help us to interpret the New Testament?**

To interpret the Bible responsibly, we need to set up safeguards that keep us from reading meanings into passages that the author didn't intend. One practice that can help us with these safeguards is to study the original languages of the Bible. So, how can becoming familiar with Greek help us to interpret the New Testament?

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace

I think when we're wrestling with how to interpret the New Testament, all the tools that we can possibly use to help us are important. But what I mean is that the best we can do is to try to put ourselves in the place of the original author. Now, that would include trying to understand the culture. It would be to try to understand some of his background, the religious background, where he's writing, the geography, who he is, what his own upbringing is. And it also includes knowing the language in which he wrote. And consequently, seminaries have courses in Greek and Hebrew so that we can get into the text of what these biblical authors actually wrote ... Now, does that mean that I'm going to read something in Greek that is going to radically change my view of Jesus or theology? I don't think it's going to affect the larger parts of it, but it will affect some lesser parts ... So I think one of the bridges that we need to try to cross as best we can is to cross the bridge of the biblical languages, get into the first-century world ... We're making a commitment, on one hand, to people in our culture that we're trying to reach with the gospel. But on the other hand, it's important for us to begin with the text of the Bible and try to live in that culture and that language as much as possible.

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

Developing skills for biblical interpretation is a tricky matter. It's not something that's easy to do on your own ... So, what you want to do is, when you're learning how to

interpret the Bible, is develop as many background skills and resources as you can. So, skill in the history of Israel, skill in the geography of Israel, skill in the languages in which the Bible came to us, early church history, first century history, Greco-Roman history ... And as you do that, I would say one of the most important things, if you have the resources, is to begin building skills in the biblical languages. There are all different levels of biblical language facility. And even a fundamental language so that you can look up words in a dictionary or a lexicon or theological dictionary or read a journal article, an electronic journal article that has Hebrew or Greek words in it. Those kinds of things will really pay off in all the work you do, not just attacking a specific topic. I would say that's one of the best ways is those background resources.

Question 5:

How important to our interpretive efforts is knowledge of a passage's grammatical and historical contexts?

When we interpret Scripture, many scholars believe it's valuable to have an awareness of both the grammatical and historical contexts of a passage. And they try to learn as much as they can about both. But why does this matter? How important to our interpretive efforts is knowledge of a passage's grammatical and historical contexts?

Dr. Miguel Nunez, translation

When we study the Word of God, we have to remember that the Word of God is a book too. It is inspired by God, but it is a book. Therefore it has grammatical rules, syntactical rules that continue to be true today in this book, the Bible. For example, an adjective is an adjective in the Bible too. A name is a name in the Bible also. They work in the same way. The verbs work in the same way in the Bible as in a Shakespearean play. But when we recognize the authority of the Word of God, this is different. The Bible has been inspired by God. Therefore, it is inerrant, infallible, and authoritative. Still, when we read the text, we cannot forget that we need grammatical rules to understand the Bible. In the same way, we have to remember that the Bible was inspired a long time ago. And many times we have to know what words meant then. Otherwise, we won't be able to come to a true meaning. God's truth doesn't change, but words can change meanings ... We have words in the past that don't mean exactly the same today. When we know what it meant in the past, we can read a text and say, "Oh, now I understand what the apostle Paul said because I can understand the grammar of that time, the syntax, the sentence construction, the paragraph." It's vital to be able to understand the grammar of the meaning of the words from those times, but secondly the historical context. These are books written at an historical time with real people. Paul writes a letter and it is a real church with real problems at that time. Therefore, I need to know the historical context and what was happening ... Understanding the historical context and also understanding the grammatical matters of that moment will help us understand the Word of God much more precisely. And that is vital for the study of the Word.

Dr. Howard Eyrich

The grammatical and the historical context becomes very important to our interpretative study. Particularly, I think, the grammatical framework does, *everywhere*. The historical is more important in some passages and some contexts than it is in others. But my favorite example of the grammatical is the passage that gets quoted at almost every missionary conference: "Go ye [therefore] into all the world." And the "go ye" is always, almost always, stated as an imperative verb. But in the text it's not an imperative verb... If you take in its grammatical structure — "while going, this is what we should be doing" — it gets very specific ... We should be making disciples, we should be baptizing, and we should be teaching those disciples to observe all that Jesus has taught. And so while the intent of the passage is imperative, it's set in the context of a process of living. Now, unfortunately, some people have gotten ahold of that and so they want to say evangelism should always just be casual, along the way. Now, I think that's a misuse of it ... And on the other side of the coin, there's no excuse for hammering people, but it's a process that should be the characteristic of our Christian life as we walk in this fallen world.

Question 6:**What kinds of copying errors did scribes typically make when copying biblical texts?**

Anyone who has attempted to hand-copy a letter or a document of any length will tell you that it's easy to make mistakes. In many respects it's very tedious work. And this is the way the Bible was copied for thousands of years. Given its difficulty, what kinds of copying errors did scribes typically make when copying biblical texts?

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace

When we think about the handwritten manuscripts over the centuries, one of the questions that comes up is, what kinds of mistakes did scribes actually do? And you can divide them a number of different ways: one is they made intentional changes — where they don't regard it as a mistake — and unintentional changes. So we could talk about intentional changes in the Gospels, and here's what's going on. If a scribe is copying Mark's gospel, and he has just finished copying Matthew's gospel, and he sees in the margin of his text that, oh, here's a parallel to Matthew that seems to fit the wording better than what he has in his text of Mark. And then he begins to think, you know, even though the scribe that copied this out regarded this as Scripture like I do, he made a bunch of mistakes. And so, that later scribe might take that marginal reading and put it into his text. And you end up with a harmonization. And that's one of the most common kinds of changes we have in our manuscripts, is harmonizations in the Gospels where it's not that they're discrepant to the point where there's errors. But there are going to be some disagreements in the sense of exactly what they're saying. That's even too strong of a word. There are really going to be some *differences* and different motifs, emphases, this kind of thing in the Gospels. But

you'll get scribes that are going to change the wording to make it say the same thing. Now that would be an *intentional* change. *Unintentional* happens when they're not hearing. Maybe they're in a scriptorium where they're copying this out and there's a lecturer who's reading the text out loud. That doesn't happen as much. Almost all the copies we have are copied by a scribe looking at a manuscript and writing down what he sees. Now in the process of doing that, he sees the text, then he has to remember what he just saw. And then he has to write it out, and he has to make sure that what he's written is the same thing as he saw. And that often has a lot of mistakes. And anybody who has copied out a lengthy text by hand is going to recognize that — “oh, I just made this mistake,” “I just duplicated this line,” or “I just skipped this line.” And that kind of thing happens with the scribes all the time. So you've got these two categories of intentional and unintentional. Now you can think about the nature of the scribal changes in a different way besides the two categories of intentional and unintentional. You can think in terms of, what are the kinds of mistakes that they make that are not meaningful? That is, it's not a meaningful change at all; it doesn't affect the meaning of anything. It's just an error that a later scribe... will easily correct. ... So, here's a scribe who — maybe through fatigue, or because his handwriting isn't as clear, or a number of reasons — is going to put the wrong word there. And a later scribe is going to be able to correct that. Those are the kinds of mistakes that we'd say are the vast majority of the kinds of scribal changes that were made in the manuscripts, unintentional changes that are nonsense, or they're spelling changes. Another kind of spelling change that we actually do see in the manuscripts is the word for "John" in Greek is either "Ioanes" or "Ioannes." Well, those sound the same, but one has a single "n" in the middle of the word, and the other has two "n's". And whenever you see the name John in the New Testament, you've got some manuscripts that spell it with two "n's" and some that spell it with one "n." And consequently that counts as a textual variant. The most common kind of variant we have when it comes to the nature of these differences is what's called a "moveable *nu*," and that's the "n" at the end of the word when the next word starts with a vowel. It's just like "a book," "an apple." And the moveable *nu*, it accounts for more textual variants than any other single category among our manuscripts. About 70 percent of our textual variants are spelling differences that affect *absolutely nothing* — 70 percent. And then you've got kinds that are transpositions of "this word versus that word," or "this letter versus that letter." A transposition is where you might say, "In the beginning," and instead somebody else puts "in beginning the" or "the in beginning." And that's just a transposition. That happens through inattention, through poor memory of what was said, writing it down quickly, there was fatigue. There's a number of reasons why you have that. And sometimes you'll get that where you have a transposition of letters. So instead of — and I'm sure all of us have done this — if you type out the word "the" — t-h-e — often I type it out as t-e-h. It's just called a transposition, and it's something that my computer typically corrects. And I'm grateful for that kind of correction, because I make that error all the time. Now, those kinds of mistakes happen very frequently as well. When you combine that with another kind which is called "synonyms" where, like in John 4:1, some manuscripts say, "...when *Jesus* knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was baptizing, making more disciples than John..." Other manuscripts say, "...when *the Lord* knew that the

Pharisees had heard..." So it's either, "when Jesus knew" or "when the Lord knew." There's no manuscripts that say "when Peter knew" or "when Mary knew." It's always the Lord or Jesus. Those are the two variants. But you've got that kind of thing that's a change of synonyms, and that happens very frequently. You take those kinds of transpositions and synonyms that are, they're sort of meaningful. They're not nonsense errors but they really don't affect much. That's another 15 percent or so of the kinds of variants. When you look at all the variants we have for the New Testament manuscripts, 99 percent, at least, essentially affect nothing. That is, they're nonsense errors. They're spelling differences. They're transpositions. They're synonyms, this kind of a thing. There's less than 1 percent of all the textual variants that are both meaningful and viable. And what I mean by "viable" is that it has a good possibility of going back to the original text. What I mean by "meaningful" is that it changes the meaning of the text to some degree. For example, in Mark 9:29, Jesus is talking to his disciples after they tried to cast out demons, and they said, man, this one's really stubborn, we couldn't get rid of him. So Jesus says, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer." Well, later manuscripts add two words: "and fasting." So did Jesus say, "... by prayer *and fasting*" or did he say that you can cast out this demon just by prayer? That's a textual variant that is meaningful, and it's sufficiently early that it may be that "and fasting" was what he actually said. So it's a difficult one to determine. But approximately one-fourth of 1 percent of all textual variants are both meaningful and viable. So, the nature of these things — the vast majority of them — are the kinds of errors or the kinds of changes that scholars have said, "This is a 'yawn,' and we have to deal with it so we can establish the wording of the original text." But the debates that have gotten into the public forum are about that one-fourth of 1 percent, and that's it.

Question 7: **Were New Testament authors sometimes unfaithful to the Old Testament?**

Many students of Scripture have noticed just how frequently New Testament writers relied on the Old Testament in their writings. But many times it's difficult to understand *how* those writers used a particular passage, or why they chose that passage in the first place. In addition, New Testament writers weren't always precise with their quotations. Were New Testament authors sometimes unfaithful to the Old Testament?

Dr. David Redelings

A lot of people wonder sometimes when they look at the way the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, there's a concern, that when you go back and look at the original context of the Old Testament, that it doesn't seem to be talking about the same thing. It's as though the New Testament writers have misquoted the Old Testament. I think this, probably, mostly reflects on our lack of familiarity with the Old Testament more than anything else. And the example I like to give is the example

from Matthew 2 where the evangelist Matthew says... he quotes from the prophet Hosea 11 saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son." And Matthew uses this in reference to Jesus, referring to Jesus returning from Egypt where... his family had fled from the authorities. And so, then when you turn back and you look at Hosea 11, and you find that Hosea begins that same section by talking about Israel. He says something to the effect that he had loved Israel, and then he says "out of Egypt I called my son." And he's clearly referring to the book of Exodus and the nation of Israel coming out of Egypt. So, the first thing, I think, in giving this as an example, is to point out that Matthew didn't just misunderstand what was happening. People think, "Well, Matthew just didn't understand," or "He made an error and he didn't know." ... Well, Matthew is obviously, throughout his gospel, quoting the Old Testament a number of times, quoting the Hebrew Scriptures. And he clearly is doing so because the audience he's writing to has a concern for, and values the importance of, the Old Testament Scriptures. And so, it's not as though he's writing to an audience that doesn't care, or won't know, or won't catch him out if he's trying to... you know, pull the wool over their eyes, so to speak. So instead of either of those ways of looking at it, I think we're kind of left with this, that if Matthew is trying to write a persuasive book — if he's trying to bring people to faith in Christ, or confirm those followers of Jesus in their faith in Jesus as the Messiah — then we can be confident that Matthew's not going to, sort of, put at risk his entire reputation or the reception of his book by introducing some sort of quotations which would actually just diminish or eliminate his credibility to his readers. So, then we need to take a look and say, well then, what exactly is Matthew doing? What is he thinking when he looks at these texts? And there are a couple of options which I would suggest, and I think other commentators would suggest at least one of these — you would find if you looked at other commentators. The first would be that Matthew conceives of Jesus as being, since he is called God's Son — the Messiah is called God's Son even in the Old Testament when God promises to David that his son would rule over the throne of the nation — since Jesus is the Son, and since Israel is also called God's son in the Old Testament, Matthew has this sort of sense of theological linkage. That since they both stand as God's son, that Jesus, in fact, fulfills that role in an ideal way which the nation of Israel failed to do. And an indication that this is the way Matthew looks at things would be found, for example, in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness where you see Jesus referring to the temptations of the nation and then experiencing those same temptations. And yet, in his case, he does not succumb to the temptations. And there are other examples in Matthew's gospel you could find along those lines. Another way to look at this is that Matthew may be thinking of God's fulfillment, or I should say God's actions in the present time in fulfillment of his plan. And he may be reading Old Testament Scriptures in the light of what he knows has already happened. And so because of that... the thinking would be that when God speaks to the prophet Hosea and says, "out of Egypt I called my son," that God himself knows and anticipates that, of course, the Messiah also will come out of Egypt. And so that, in a sense, there's sort of a double entendre, or two senses, in which God intends this prophecy to be carried out. And I think, maybe, an example of that kind of thing also would be where the evangelist refers to "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." If you look back in the Old Testament context, you see that this seems to have reference to a child of

Isaiah, if you look at Isaiah 8. And so, again, Matthew seems to be looking back at this and seeing some sense in which God spoke something which, unknown to anyone else at the time, he actually had in mind a double fulfillment.

Dr. Darrell L. Bock

The short answer to the question that New Testament writers were unfaithful to the Old Testament is, no. But let me explain what that means, because the fact is, these New Testament writers do use the Old Testament in a variety of ways, and some writers will appeal to the same text but make a different point from it. That's because those texts themselves are making multiple points. And sometimes a writer, rather than summarizing everything that a passage is doing, is zeroing in on one thing that a passage is doing. Another thing that produces a difference that's important is, is that sometimes writers are citing a passage kind of by itself, and other times they're citing a passage in light of a larger context, which they may not name but that they presuppose in making the point that they're making. This also allows them to bring in a larger frame of reference, and in that larger frame of reference, bring this passage in and look at it from a certain angle. That results, perhaps, in a slightly different reading with a slightly different emphasis than if you're just looking at the words themselves. A good example of this is a place in the Gospel of Luke where Luke is citing Isaiah 40, and he comes to the end, and he talks about, "all flesh will see the salvation of God." Well in fact, the text reads at that point, "all flesh will see the *glory* of God." That's what the Old Testament reads. But if you read the context in which the glory of God is being discussed, we're talking about the coming of salvation to God's people. And so he makes the substitution in light of the totality of the context so that he doesn't have to go on and cite five or six more verses but simply collapses the meaning of the text by making that substitution. So sometimes that explains where a difference is coming from. And that larger frame — it can be a near context of just the paragraph, it might be a book, it might even be the whole theme biblically — sometimes impacts the way a particular passage is being read and what's said about it.

Dr. Robert L. Plummer

When we look at the way that the New Testament writers used the Old Testament, I think we can conclude a number of things. Number one, the persons in the New Testament, whether they're authors or not — Jesus, the disciples and the apostles who wrote the New Testament — first off, they viewed the Old Testament as historical and as factual. They refer to people, events, circumstances as if they're referring to actual historical, factual events, not legendary events. Secondly, I believe that they used these Old Testament texts in a way that the original authors would have agreed with ... Now at the same time, we need to realize that many of us in modern times come to the Bible not understanding one of the main methods that the New Testament uses in interpreting the Old, and what the Old Testament authors shared was this sense of correspondence in history divinely ordained by God. It's sometimes called "typology." So when people say, you know, there are three hundred-something prophecies of Christ that are fulfilled in the New Testament, oftentimes people think, "Oh, that means if I look that up it's going to say something specifically about a propositional prediction." And there are those. Isaiah 53, I think, is very clear and

propositional, fulfilled only in Christ. Or Micah 5 fulfilled with Jesus born in Bethlehem. But there are also those patterns that find their climactic final statement in the New Testament, and that's called typology. And if we understand the Old Testament authors do the same thing, and point lines of trajectory out, that they show they expect future authors to use their text in that way ... So I think when you understand that the Old and New Testament authors shared that assumption of correspondence in history and God's divine superintendence over that, that then you see that the New Testament authors are very faithful to the Old Testament authors' intent.

Question 8:
How can learning from other interpreters help us interpret the Bible better?

We all have strengths and weaknesses in the body of Christ. And as biblical interpreters, we also have strengths and weaknesses that can affect how we interpret a particular passage. This can lead to variety in interpretation. So, how can learning from other interpreters help us interpret the Bible better?

Dr. Greg Perry

It's so important for us not to read to Bible in isolation, first of all because the Bible really is given to the whole people of God. And as we're told, the Spirit has given gifts, and each part of the body really is interdependent on the other. And so gifts of teaching, gifts of discernment, gifts of exhortation and encouragement really bring to light different aspects of meaning within the text that, if we're in relationship with people who have those gifts, we can really benefit from the way that they're reading. But also, I would say in terms of just building relationships across cultures as well. I know that in terms of my own upbringing, there are great benefits and strengths to how I was brought up in a particular place at a particular time. But there are also cultural blind spots associated with that place and time. And so, I've really benefited from some of my African students who have a much stronger sense of spiritual warfare, the importance of prayer, of the demonic, and things that they have seen in their life. And so as we read the gospel narratives about demon possession and these types of things, I have really benefited from listening to them and appreciating things that I might have discounted as a Western Christian were really an everyday reality for them. So, building relationships with people with different spiritual gifts, building relationships even across against gender as we read as men and women, building relationships across cultural lives really brings a richness of gifts and insights into the text that we all need that we wouldn't have if we just read as isolated individuals.

Dr. Simon Vibert

So, we have strengths and weaknesses in the body of Christ, and we can learn from people who have different approaches to reading the Bible that can help us in our interpretive process. At the most basic level, if somebody reads the Bible from the

perspective of the farmer, then they can have better insight, I think, in terms of how you care for animals or how you might till the ground and things like that ... I think we've established quite clearly that the meaning is inherent in the authorial intent, in the fact that God still stays close to his Word and is able to make his meaning plain today. But nevertheless, a Christian sister who reads a biblical passage from the perspective of being a woman, perhaps being a woman who's experienced at the hand of oppressive male views, certain perspectives on the Bible, can bring insights to the text that I really need to hear. And that's something very positive, I think, about reading from the perspective from which you come. Similarly, those who have experienced extreme poverty or deprivation can identify more closely with certain passages within the Bible. The thing that keeps a control, as it were, on this hermeneutical process is helping us appreciate that God does have a meaning in the text that he wants to get over. And that our own interpretive perspective should be submissive and humble under God's Word, not thinking that we're standing over it judging it in some way.

Dr. Stephen J. Bramer

The great strength of learning from other interpreters is that we recognize the gifting of the Holy Spirit. That he has gifted others with the gift of teaching and that the Spirit can work in their lives as well as in our own. Each one of us comes with certain biases, presuppositions. Hopefully most of them are based upon Scripture, but we all come from a different background. And by consulting other teachers who the Holy Spirit has worked with, we can actually see how we either have been in error or have been too narrow. Or actually open up for us some applications and insights that we might never have noticed. It's possible to actually skip over something in our humanness and not recognize the importance of a word or a statement or a tense even within the verses — a feature of the narrative. And by having other teachers who can point this out to us, it actually allows us then to be a better teacher. And we recognize the giftedness in the way the body of Christ is supposed to work... collaboratively working together to sense what the Spirit of God is saying to us.

Question 9:

How can pastors and teachers learn to adapt their teaching to the needs of different audiences?

For pastors and teachers, the work of interpreting Scripture responsibly is simply the first step. Once they come to a proper understanding of a passage, they must then think through how best to explain that passage and make it relevant to their audiences. How can pastors and teachers learn to adapt their teaching to the needs of different audiences?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Adapting our message to the needs of various audiences is actually a very biblical approach. For example, when Paul preaches in a synagogue in Acts 13, he gives a

message that's full of Scripture quotations. He uses standard Jewish approaches as he's speaking to the synagogue audience. In Acts 14, he's speaking to farmers and he speaks of how God gave us rain in fruitful seasons. In chapter 17, he speaks to Greek intellectuals and he quotes from Greek poets. So Paul contextualizes the message for different audiences, but the message is still the message. It's still a biblical message that he preaches in each case. When we adapt the message for different audiences, we need to make sure, first of all, we understand what the message of the biblical text is. But having understood that message, we can see how it relates to the struggles and the questions that people have. You don't start with the struggles and the questions in a way that makes you twist the text, but their questions may, and their struggles may lead you back to the text saying: "How does God speak to this? Where in Scripture is this addressed? And how can I put this in ways that they can best hear it?" Contextualization is not a matter of watering down the text to make it fit our culture. It's a question of helping people hear the text — sometimes it may be more comforting, sometimes it may strike us more forcefully — but to hear what the message of God really is. In Revelation you have messages to the seven churches, and each church there's a different message. But in each case it concludes by saying, "Let the one who hears hear what the Spirit is saying to the *churches*..." So that there's something even to the churches that are addressing different situations, that can also speak to our situations too if we're going to hear it.

Dr. Dan Doriani

Well, teachers and preachers must adapt their teaching to different audiences, and I'll specify, *even* the different audiences within their audience. So for example, let's suppose a pastor or teacher is talking about work. Now there will be some people in this group that are working too hard, they have too many responsibilities. Others will be unemployed or under-employed and they don't have enough to do. Some will be working exactly where they always hoped to work — not many, but some. Others will be close. Others will be very far from what they ever expected or wanted to do. And in a sense, all you have to do is look at the people, or imagine them in advance as you prepare, so that you don't spend all of your time talking about people like you ... One of the mistakes we sometimes make — to stick with the question of "calling" or "work" — is teachers tend to think in sometimes elitist terms. We're leaders, and so we tend to think of other people as being vaguely like ourselves. The great number of people, we must remember, are simply trying to bring enough food to the table to eat this day. And they'll take really almost whatever they can that's honest in order to do that. And so for them, the notion of "calling" is not something noble, but the most basic call to have enough food, clothing and shelter to care for themselves and for the people who depend on them. And we must address them in the reality of their daily struggle... if we want to bless them, nurture them, pastor them.

Dr. Luis Orteza

Pastors and teachers need to be aware of their language that they use to communicate with their audience. For example, the language of the 50's will sound different from the language of today. And so that, I think it's necessary sometimes, you know, for pastors and teachers to learn what the current thought forms are in terms of the way

people are expressing themselves ... To be aware and know these expressions, I think will be helpful as far as learning to adapt and communicate with your audience.

As we seek to understand the original meaning of a particular passage of Scripture, we must realize that we have been afforded multiple guides in this process. We can look to the writer, the audience, the text itself, and its historical context to help in our interpretations. When we keep all of these in proper balance, they can guide us toward a responsible interpretation. Then we have a firm foundation for preaching and teaching God's Word in ways that are relevant and applicable to God's people.

Dr. Bruce Baugus is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Darrell L. Bock is Executive Director of Cultural Engagement and Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Dr. Stephen J. Bramer is Department Chair and Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Dr. Gary Cockerill is Academic Dean and Professor of Biblical Interpretation and Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Brandon Crowe is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Dr. Dan Doriani is the senior pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Clayton, Missouri.

Dr. Howard Eyrich is Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program in Biblical Counseling at Birmingham Theological Seminary and Minister of Counseling at Briarwood Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando Campus.

Rev. Thad James, Jr. is Vice President of Academic Affairs at Birmingham Theological Seminary in Alabama.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson is Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in California.

Dr. Craig S. Keener is Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Dr. Miguel Nunez is Senior Pastor of the International Baptist Church in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Dr. Luis Orteza is a professor at Birmingham Theological Seminary where he teaches courses in advanced biblical counseling and counseling theory.

Dr. Greg Perry is Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of City Ministry Initiative at Covenant Theological Seminary St. Louis, Missouri.

Dr. Robert L. Plummer is Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Dr. David Redelings is a New Testament professor at Bethel Seminary in San Diego, California.

Dr. Miles Van Pelt is the Alan Belcher Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages, and the Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson Campus.

Dr. Simon Vibert is the former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Wimbledon Park, UK, and is presently the Vice Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Director of the School of Preaching.

Dr. Peter Walker is Tutor in Biblical Theology at Wycliffe Hall and lectures in New Testament studies and Biblical Theology.

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace is a member of the Society of New Testament Studies and serves as Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.