

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 6

Discovering Meaning

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

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ABOUT THIRDMILL

Founded in 1997, Thirdmill is a non-profit Evangelical Christian ministry dedicated to providing:

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing award-winning multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our writers and editors are theologically-trained educators, our translators are theologically-astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world. In addition, our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards using state-of-the-art equipment and techniques.

In order to accomplish our distribution goals, Thirdmill has forged strategic partnerships with churches, seminaries, Bible schools, missionaries, Christian broadcasters and satellite television providers, and other organizations. These relationships have already resulted in the distribution of countless video lessons to indigenous leaders, pastors, and seminary students. Our websites also serve as avenues of distribution and provide additional materials to supplement our lessons, including materials on how to start your own learning community.

Thirdmill is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit www.thirdmill.org.

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

II. Guides (1:43)

The grammatical and historical factors of grammar and context, as well as the original authors and audience, serve as guides to discovering the meaning of Scripture.

Any knowledge we gain about the writer, the document or the audience has the potential to improve our understanding of Scripture's meaning.

A. Writer (7:50)

General historical research and the Scriptures themselves always enable us to create a profile for every biblical author.

Consider the writer of John 3:16: Through his books and what others said about him, we gain a useful understanding of John's beliefs.

When we have knowledge of the writer's purpose and beliefs, it helps us interpret their writings more appropriately.

B. Document (12:36)

To interpret Scripture responsibly, we must pay close attention to the actual words and phrases the inspired author wrote.

The significance of the word “so” in John 3:16 can be interpreted appropriately when we look at its larger context.

C. Audience (17:56)

Biblical writers usually composed their books with original and secondary audiences in mind.

The more we know about the primary and secondary original audiences, the better we can investigate the original meaning of biblical passages.

D. Interdependence (25:33)

Each of the guides to the meaning of Scripture informs and is informed by the others.

We need guidance from all of these sources so that our readings of Scripture aren't skewed by an imbalanced emphasis on just one or two.

Three interpretive fallacies:

- Intentional fallacy: Relies too heavily on what we think we know about a writer and his intentions, and de-emphasizes the things we learn about the document and audience.
- Graphic fallacy: Overemphasizes the document itself, to the relative exclusion of contextual considerations like the writer and audience.
- Affective fallacy: Overemphasizes the audience and focuses too heavily on how Scripture affects the audience.

III. Summaries (34:55)

Summary: A description of a passage.

Summaries help us by narrowing our study, allowing us to focus on just a portion of what the passage has to say.

Multiple legitimate summaries bring us closer and closer to the passage's full meaning.

A. Complexity of Passage (37:55)

The complexity of Scriptural passages is largely due to the fact that their original meaning is multifaceted.

Since Scripture is multifaceted, we can summarize it in many different ways and still be true to its literal sense.

B. Uniqueness of Interpreter (45:33)

All interpreters come to biblical writings with different sets of concerns, assumptions, backgrounds and questions.

Personal strengths and weaknesses lead each interpreter to bring out different aspects of a passage's original meaning.

C. Needs of Audience (50:58)

In order to apply the Bible in responsible and relevant ways, we have to find summaries that are helpful to our specific audiences.

The investigation of Scripture is about bridging the distance between the original meaning and our contemporary audience.

IV. Conclusion (57:04)

7. Explain why we should adapt our summary of a biblical passage to the needs of the intended audience?

Application Questions

1. Do our presuppositions always influence our biblical interpretation? If so, how do we guard against faulty interpretation in light of our individual backgrounds, assumptions and concerns?
2. How has your knowledge of biblical writers influenced your interpretation of Scripture? Give at least two examples.
3. Which features of a biblical text have been most helpful in your own interpretive efforts (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, etc.)? What effect has studying all the features of a biblical text had on your reading and interpretation?
4. Why should you make investigating the historical setting of a biblical book a regular part of your bible study?
5. How much do you know about the Bible's original audiences, and how has this information influenced your interpretation?
6. Of the intentional fallacy, the graphic fallacy, and the affective fallacy, which has been your greatest weakness when interpreting Scripture? Why?
7. Give an example of two legitimate summaries for the same biblical passage. In what circumstances would each summary be most effective?
8. Give some specific examples of times when another person's summary of Scripture has been useful to you in your previous and/or present ministry context.
9. What background and gifts do you bring to ministry? How do your gifts and background help you in summarizing biblical passages? How do they hinder you?
10. What benefits have you gained from studying the Scriptures in a group setting? Has studying the Scriptures with others been easier or more difficult than studying on your own?
11. In your current work or ministry, how do you discover the needs of your audience? What has helped you in adapting the Scriptures to their circumstances?
12. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

affective fallacy – Interpretive mistake of focusing too heavily on how a passage of Scripture affected its original audience

authority-dialog – A model of interpreting Scripture in which the reader asks questions of the text while recognizing that both objective and subjective judgments must be viewed in submission to the authority of Scripture

christos – Greek word (transliteration) for Christ; used in the Septuagint to translate "mashiach" or "messiah," meaning "anointed one"

Gentile – Non-Jewish person

grammatico-historical method – A method of hermeneutics which investigates the Scriptures in their original languages and in view of their original contexts

graphē – Greek word (transliteration) meaning "writing"

graphic fallacy – Interpretive mistake of overemphasizing the document itself to the relative exclusion of contextual considerations like the writer and audience

hermeneutics – The study of interpreting the meaning and significance of Scripture

houtōs – Greek adverb (transliteration) meaning "thus," "in this manner," "so"

intentional fallacy – Interpretive mistake of relying too heavily on what we think we know about a writer and his intentions and de-emphasizing the things we learn about the document and audience

literal sense – Term referring to the original or grammatico-historical meaning of a biblical passage; the plain or ordinary meaning of a text

morpheme – The smallest unit of meaning in linguistics, including words and features of words that indicate singular, plural and verbal tenses

Samaritans – People of Samaria whose pagan ancestors had intermarried with Israelites living in the northern kingdom; practiced a syncretistic form of the Jewish religion; considered by the Jews to be unclean and despicable

summary – A concise description of a passage

typology – The study of how significant persons, institutions and events throughout biblical history prefigure later persons, institutions and events in Scripture; the study of types