

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 1

Introduction to
Biblical Hermeneutics

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

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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 (0:19)

II. Terminology (2:25)

A. Biblical Hermeneutics (2:36)

Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation or explanation of some kind of message or communication.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) is the father of modern hermeneutics.

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of interpreting the meaning and significance of Scripture.

B. Hermeneutical Processes (6:14)

Hermeneutical processes are the main procedures we follow as we interpret the Bible.

1. Preparation (6:45)

The process of preparation takes place before we begin our interpretation because we always approach Scripture influenced by various concepts, behaviors and emotions.

2. Investigation (8:28)

Investigation is the process of concentrating on the original meaning of a biblical passage.

3. Application (9:50)

Application is the process of appropriately connecting Scripture's original meaning to contemporary audiences.

III. Scientific Hermeneutics (11:25)

Scientific hermeneutics refers to how biblical scholars have approached the interpretation of Scripture like a scientific exercise.

A. Biblical Roots (12:45)

The biblical roots of scientific hermeneutics make it a legitimate exercise.

Biblical authors interpreted other Scriptures with an orientation toward factual and logical analysis (Romans 4:3-5).

B. Examples (15:46)

- Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185 – 254)
- Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430)
- Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274)

Renaissance (13th - 16th centuries): Meticulously analyzed the grammar and ancient historical contexts of classical and biblical manuscripts.

The Protestant Reformation (16th century): Determined the meaning of Scripture through analysis of the Bible's grammar and historical contexts.

sola Scriptura: "Scripture alone." Protestants believed that the only infallible interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself.

Enlightenment (17th & 18th centuries): Emphasized modern, factual and rational scientific standards for judging all truth claims, including those of Scripture.

Modern biblical scholars have followed two main paths:

- Critical biblical studies reject *sola Scriptura* and consider only reason and scientific analysis as the supreme standard for discerning truth.

- Evangelical biblical studies affirm *sola Scriptura* and endorse the scientific analysis of the Bible as long as it does not contradict the teachings of the Bible.

C. **Priorities (26:15)**

1. **Preparation (26:48)**

Biblical interpreters have developed priorities for preparation similar to the priorities required for other academic disciplines.

2. **Investigation (28:41)**

The two methods of biblical investigation:

- Exegesis: to pull out or derive meaning from a text
- Eisegesis: to read meaning into a passage

3. **Application (30:15)**

Application is establishing the kinds of facts that the Bible teaches modern followers of Christ to believe.

IV. **Devotional Hermeneutics (33:23)**

Devotional hermeneutics is the Christian tradition of emphasizing our need to draw near to God as we interpret the Scriptures.

A. Biblical Roots (35:22)

The biblical authors approached the Scriptures devotionally.

B. Examples (38:38)

Letter of Origen to Gregory: Origen told Gregory to devote himself to divine reading or *Lectio Divina*.

Through the medieval period *Lectio Divina* was practiced in four steps:

- *lectio*: reading of Scripture
- *meditatio*: silent pondering of the content of what is read
- *oratio*: earnest prayer for God to grant enlightenment
- *contemplatio*: waiting for the Spirit of God to grant intuitive, deeply emotional and transforming convictions of a passage's significance.

John Calvin: rational and logical biblical interpreter of the early Reformation who pursued scientific and devotional hermeneutics.

Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758): meticulously rational and logical, but believed Scripture must be read with a deep sense of the presence of God.

C. Priorities (46:33)

1. Preparation (47:45)

We must draw near to God if we want to experience his special presence (James 4:8).

Preparation for devotional hermeneutics involves sanctification or holy consecration to God.

Three dimensions of preparation:

- Conceptual: We must conform our beliefs to God's true word.
- Behavioral: We must repent of our failures and have a sincere desire to behave in ways that please God.
- Emotional: We must address the full range of our emotions.

2. Investigation (52:35)

Devotional hermeneutics entails investigating Scripture's original meaning in ways that bring us near to God.

Three dimensions of investigation:

- Conceptual: Paying attention to the concepts that God intended for the original audiences.
- Behavioral: How biblical authors and audiences' actions affected their experience of God's nearness.
- Emotional: Drawing out the emotional dimensions of original meaning.

3. Application (55:17)

Reading the Word of God in his presence so that we can apply the Word of God as God intended.

Three dimensions of application:

- Conceptual: How God impacts our concepts of himself, humanity and the rest of creation through the Scriptures.

- Behavioral: How the presence of God affects our behaviors as we contemplate the Scriptures.
- Emotional: How our attitudes and feelings are affected by reading the Scriptures in the special presence of God.

V. Conclusion (58:56)

Review Questions

1. What is biblical hermeneutics?
2. Describe the three main hermeneutical processes.

5. Describe the priorities of approaching the Scriptures using scientific hermeneutics?

6. What are the biblical roots of devotional hermeneutics?

7. What are some historical examples of biblical scholars who practiced devotional hermeneutics?

8. Describe how devotional hermeneutics shapes our priorities for the process of interpretation?

Application Questions

1. How does applying biblical hermeneutics change the way you understand the Bible?
2. How do you prepare yourself for the study of Scripture personally or in a group setting?
3. How does interpreting the Scriptures more like a scientific exercise influence your interpretation of it?
4. What comfort and encouragement do you draw from the fact that biblical authors often interpreted the Scriptures with an orientation toward factual and logical analysis?
5. How should *sola Scriptura* aid and guide your reading and interpretation of the Bible?
6. What confidence do you gain from the historical examples of scientific hermeneutics?
7. How are you drawing near to God as you read and interpret the Scriptures in your current circumstances?
8. How important is it for you to approach Scripture by prayerfully being dependent upon the Holy Spirit?
9. What benefits have you gained from a devotional approach to Scripture?
10. How has a faithful practice of confessing your sins affected your ability to understand the Bible?
11. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

Aquinas, Thomas – (ca. 1225-1274) Italian theologian and Dominican friar who wrote *Summa Theologica*

Aristotle – (ca. 384-322 B.C.) Ancient Greek philosopher and scientist who studied under Plato and founded the Lyceum in Athens

Augustine – (A.D. 354-430) Bishop of Hippo who believed in the Scriptures as our final authority in doctrine and considered the creeds of the church to be helpful summaries of scriptural teaching; wrote numerous works that continue to influence the church today

Calvin, John – (1509-1564) French theologian and key Protestant Reformer who wrote *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

contemplatio Latin term meaning "contemplation"; fourth step of the four-step process known as *Lectio Divina* in which a person quietly waits for the Spirit of God to grant highly intuitive, deeply emotional and transforming convictions of a biblical passage's significance

Crusades – Series of military campaigns waged primarily between 1095 and 1270; organized and promoted by European Christians to stop Muslim expansion and recover the Holy Land from Muslim rule

Edwards, Jonathan – (1703-1758) Early American theologian known for his meticulously rational and logical analysis of Scripture and for being strongly influenced by Enlightenment rationalism

eisegesis – From a Greek term meaning "led into" or "put into"; a faulty method of interpretation where one reads his or her own ideas into the meaning of a passage of Scripture

Enlightenment, the – A philosophical movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that emphasized human reason over religious, social, and political traditions

Erasmus, Desiderius – (ca. 1466-1536) Dutch theologian and author during the time of the Renaissance whose writings and ideas contributed to the Reformation

exegesis – From a Greek term meaning "led out of" or "derived from"; the process of drawing out the proper interpretation of a passage of Scripture

Gutenberg, Johannes – (ca. 1395-ca. 1468) German metalworker, printer, and publisher who, in the 15th century, invented the first-known mechanized printing press in Europe; revolutionized the distribution of written material, especially the Bible

hermeneuo – Greek word (transliteration) meaning "interpret" or "explain"

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

Hexapla – A work of more than 50 volumes written by Origen of Alexandria that compared the words of various Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament

lectio – Latin word meaning "reading"; first step of the four-step process known as *Lectio Divina* in which a person carefully reads a passage of Scripture, often slowly and repeatedly

Lectio Divina – Latin term meaning "divine reading"; ancient tradition of devotional hermeneutics that entails prayerfully reading through passages of Scripture; commonly practiced in four steps: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation)

logizomai – Greek verb (transliteration) meaning "to take into account," "estimate" or "conclude"; often translated as "reason," "credit," "impute," "reckon" or "count"

Luther, Martin – (1483-1546) Sixteenth century German monk and Protestant reformer who initiated the Reformation when he posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517

meditatio – Latin word meaning "meditation"; second step of the four-step process known as *Lectio Divina* in which a person silently ponders the content of a passage of Scripture

Neo-Platonism – A philosophical school of thought rooted in Plato; begun by Plotinus (A.D. 205-270); idealistic, spiritualistic teaching bordering on mysticism; taught that all existence comes from the "One," the "Absolute"

oratio – Latin word meaning "prayer"; third step of the four-step process known as *Lectio Divina* in which a person prays earnestly for God to grant enlightenment in response to a passage of Scripture

Origen – (ca. A.D. 185 - 254) Early Christian theologian from Alexandria; his works include: *On First Principles*, in which he defended the Scriptures as our final authority for Christian doctrine, and the *Hexapla*, a comparative study of various translations of the Old Testament

Renaissance – A period of "rebirth" between the middle ages and the modern era (from the 14th to the 17th centuries) that stimulated a renewed interest in classical Roman and Greek literature, art, and culture

Schleiermacher, Friedrich – (1768-1834) German philosopher, theologian and linguist, often called the father of modern hermeneutics

Sola Scriptura – Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone"; the belief that the Scriptures stand as the supreme and final judge of all theological questions; one of the basic principles of the Reformation

tabula rasa – Latin term meaning "blank slate" or "erased tablet"; the state of being entirely without preconceived notions or thoughts

Zwingli, Ulrich – (1484-1531) Influential Swiss Reformer and priest who is regarded as the founder of Swiss Protestantism