

# He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 10

Biblical Culture &  
Modern Application

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

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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](http://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.

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- **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)

Culture: The intersecting patterns of concepts, behaviors and emotions that characterize a community.

### II. Foundations (3:10)

#### A. Importance (4:05)

The first eleven chapters of Genesis lay out God's ideal patterns for the world and human culture.

The cultural mandate (Genesis 1:28) indicated that humanity was to develop the creation in preparation for the final display of God's glory.

Every cultural development in accordance with God's will is a sacred priestly service to God.

**B. Opposing Ideals (11:32)**

For biblical authors, all cultures fell into one of two basic categories: cultural patterns that served God and cultural patterns that opposed him.

Adam and Eve's fall into sin led human beings to follow two distinct cultural paths (Genesis 3:15):

- The woman's offspring have sought to serve God faithfully.
- The Serpent's offspring have sought to oppose him.

Similarities between the two paths of human culture take place for two reasons:

- God's common grace restrains Satan and the sinful propensities of those who follow him.
- Sin continues to corrupt those who pursue the ways of God.

**C. Variety (16:41)**

God approved of cultural variety from the opening chapters of Scripture.

Cultural variety developed through:

- Special revelation: God's disclosures of himself and his will to a select number of people.
  
- General revelation: God's disclosures of himself and his will in all of creation.

God's faithful people obeyed the same special revelation in different ways, even at the same time.

Humanity often applied the same special revelation in a variety of ways over time.

This initial variety laid the foundations of cultural variety for communities of God's faithful people throughout biblical history and today.

### **III. Developments (23:33)**

#### **A. Importance (24:13)**

The importance of culture in the Old Testament appears most clearly in the amount of attention the early Scriptures give to Israel as a nation.

The greatest cultural development in Scripture occurred in the transition from the Old Testament epoch to the new covenant in Christ.

Jewish rabbis referred to history prior to the Messiah as “this age,” and taught that when the Messiah appeared, he would bring “the age to come.”

Jesus and his apostles made it clear that his rule would unfold in three stages: the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of his kingdom.



Every portion of the New Testament in some way deals with how Christ brings about the fulfillment of God's purposes for human culture.

**B. Opposing Ideals (28:38)**

Old Testament authors associated the offspring of the Serpent with Gentile nations and the offspring of Eve with Israel:

- Gentile nations developed their cultures in service to false gods and opposed the God of Israel.
  
- Israel embraced the righteous laws God gave through Moses, and attempted to live in ways that glorified the one true God.

The Old Testament and archeology also indicate that Israelite and Gentile cultures were similar in many ways.

New Testament authors associated followers of Christ with the seed of the woman and unbelievers with the seed of the Serpent.

As culture developed in the Bible, early Christians often endorsed customs and philosophical outlooks that unbelievers followed.

**C. Variety (34:20)**

As different communities within Israel faithfully applied God's special and general revelations, a variety of cultural patterns emerged.

Cultural variations among the communities occurred simultaneously:

- Levitical priests applied God's laws in certain ways in their communities.
- Kings and other political leaders applied God's laws differently.
- Families applied God's laws in ways appropriate for their members.

In the new covenant epoch, differences in people and circumstances led Christian communities to apply biblical teachings in different ways.

#### **IV. Application (39:00)**

The Scriptures emphasize the cultural dimensions of our faith so much that we must devote ourselves to applying the Scriptures to culture today.

##### **A. Importance (40:00)**

Great Commission or the "gospel mandate" summarizes the mission of Christ's followers until he returns in glory (Matthew 28:19-20).

The gospel mandate echoes the cultural mandate given to the human race in Genesis 1:28.

- Adam and Eve were to fill the world with images of God; Christians are also to multiply God's redeemed images.
- Adam and Eve were to obey God by filling the earth and subduing it; Christians are to teach all nations to obey God by following his commands.
- Adam and Eve were to obey God and build culture by subduing the earth; we are to obey God and build culture by discipling the nations.

When followers of Jesus devote themselves to teaching the nations, we can positively influence every facet of every culture.

**B. Opposing Ideals (45:20)**

During the continuation of the kingdom, the human race continues to be divided between the offspring of the Serpent and the offspring of Eve.

Until Christ returns, his people will continue to struggle with the remaining influence of sin.

As followers of Christ, it's our responsibility to follow cultural paths that are true to God's will and to avoid those that are not.

Four ways in which God directed cultural patterns:

- Permanent approval (e.g., marriage and work)
- Temporary endorsement (e.g., The arrangement of the tribes of Israel during their march from Egypt to Canaan)
- Temporary tolerance (e.g., polygamy and slavery)
- Permanent disapproval (e.g., injustice and idolatry)

To apply a cultural pattern found in the Scriptures to our lives today:

- Look for God's evaluation in the passage itself.
- Search out relevant moral standards from other biblical passages.
- Determine the motivations and goals behind the biblical cultural elements.

### **C. Variety (49:53)**

God's faithful people have faced the challenge of living for Christ in increasingly diverse cultures.

Paul's commitment to fulfilling the gospel mandate led him to embrace a wide range of cultural concepts, behaviors and emotions (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Paul embraced the culture without embracing cultural standards that ultimately would only bring him under God's judgment.

Followers of Christ must be prepared to apply the Scriptures differently when we encounter other cultural backgrounds.

Remaining true to the Scriptures as we apply them in different ways to our communities is one of the most complex aspects of modern application.

We have to distinguish the continuities and discontinuities of cultural patterns found in the Bible every time we apply them to our own day.

**V. Conclusion (53:00)**



3. How did cultural variety first develop through both special revelation and general revelation?

4. Why was culture important and essential in the development of biblical history?







9. What do the apostle Paul's experiences and insights teach us about embracing cultures that are different from our own? How should we deal with cultural variety when we apply Scripture in our modern context?

## Application Questions

1. What impact does the cultural mandate have on your current ministry and/or vocation?
2. How does the importance of biblical culture affect your study and application of Scripture?
3. What effect do the cultural divisions revealed in Genesis 3 have on your worldview and ministry outlook?
4. Give some specific examples of cultural variety you have personally experienced or observed. How did you deal with this variety?
5. How does the development of culture in biblical history influence your study of the Old Testament?
6. Since the opposing cultural ideals still exist in our modern context, how do you approach evangelism?
7. What are some specific things that have changed in your culture over time? What impact have these changes had on the church in your culture?
8. How are you influencing your culture through your present ministry or vocation?
9. What does it look like for you to be salt of the earth and light of the world in your culture? Would this look different in another culture? Explain your answer.
10. Choose a passage of Scripture and think of two different cultures in the world today. How would you apply this passage to each culture?
11. How can you faithfully apply cultural patterns found in the Scriptures to your current circumstance?
12. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

## Glossary

**avad** – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning "to work" or "to labor"

**common grace** – God's benevolence shown to all people

**consummation** – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

**continuation** – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

**cultural mandate** – The command in Genesis 1:28 instructing humanity to develop and rule the creation to display God's glory

**culture** – The patterns of human communities that develop out of shared concepts, behaviors and emotions

**epoch** – A distinct period of time in history; in theology, a period of time established by divine revelation and characterized by a substantial and long-lasting transition that distinguishes it from other periods of time

**general revelation** – God's use of the natural world and its workings to make his existence, nature, presence, actions and will known to all humanity

**Gentile** – Non-Jewish person

**Great Commission** – Christ's appointment of the eleven faithful apostles as his authoritative representatives and his charge to spread the kingdom of God throughout the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20)

**inauguration** – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

**Pentateuch** – First five books of the Old Testament

**shamar** – Hebrew term (transliteration) meaning "to take care of," "to protect"

**special revelation** – God's disclosures of himself and his will to a select number of people through dreams, visions, prophets, the Scriptures, and other similar means

**the age to come** – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the future age of righteousness, love, joy and peace that would follow the exile; time when all of God's purposes for history would be fulfilled

**this age** – Phrase used by rabbis and leaders in Israel to describe the present age of sin, suffering and death