

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 3

Investigating Scripture

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.

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE	1
NOTES.....	2
I. INTRODUCTION (0:19).....	2
II. ORIGINAL MEANING (2:00).....	2
III. THEOLOGICAL BASIS (6:42)	3
A. Writer (7:10)	3
B. Audience (13:25)	3
C. Document (21:43).....	4
1. Organic Inspiration (23:12)	4
2. Divine Accommodation (29:08).....	5
IV. IMPORTANCE (33:58).....	6
A. Church History (34:08).....	6
B. Modern Church (41:44)	6
V. CONCLUSION (45:35).....	7
REVIEW QUESTIONS	8
APPLICATION QUESTIONS.....	11
GLOSSARY	12

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. Original Meaning (2:00)

The concepts, behaviors and emotions that the divine and human writers jointly intended the document to communicate to its first audience.

Three main concerns of original meaning:

- Document: It is the actual word of God sent to the first audience.
- Writer: Through organic inspiration, the document reflects the author's thoughts, intentions, feelings, literary skills, etc.
- Audience: Both the Holy Spirit and the human author crafted the document in a way that spoke particularly to them in their own context and circumstances.

III. Theological Basis (6:42)

A. Writer (7:10)

The Holy Spirit chose to communicate his word through human writers.

Focusing on the human writer helps us understand many features of Scripture.

B. Audience (13:25)

Divine Accommodation: God designed his revelation to be understood by its first audience.

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Universal accommodations in Scripture appear most dramatically in anthropomorphisms.

God accommodated his revelation to the specific people to whom he spoke.

C. Document (21:43)

1. Organic Inspiration (23:12)

Definition: The Holy Spirit inspired human authors to write Scripture.

Only the original texts of Scripture have the full authority of God.

Responses to objections made about copies and translations of Scripture:

- The original documents of the Old Testament didn't exist in Jesus' day. Jesus and his apostles believed that the Scriptures they had were trustworthy.

- Many decades of scholarly research devoted to studying and comparing ancient copies of Scripture are available today.

2. Divine Accommodation (29:08)

Definition: The words, grammar and style of Scripture rose out of the cultural and linguistic conventions of its day.

IV. Importance (33:58)

A. Church History (34:08)

Throughout history, theologians have urged that pursuing the original meaning of Scripture is an essential part of biblical interpretation.

During the Protestant Reformation, scholars investigated the Scriptures in their original languages and historical contexts.

B. Modern Church (41:44)

In the early 20th century, modern schools of literary criticism began to disregard original meaning.

In the middle of the 20th century, many interpreters ignored the ancient writers and audiences and focused entirely on the text.

The only way to avoid hermeneutical tyranny is to pursue the Bible's original meaning.

V. Conclusion (45:35)

5. Describe some key examples of the proper investigation of Scripture found in church history?

6. What are some of the challenges in the modern church that have discounted the importance of original meaning?

Application Questions

1. How can discovering the original meaning of a biblical passage help us in our teaching and preaching?
2. How can giving attention to the biblical writers affect the way you read the Bible?
3. What are some methods you use for grasping the original meaning of biblical passages?
4. What measure of confidence do you find in knowing scholars today have access to many manuscripts that contain the original words of Scripture?
5. What are some specific ways you can demonstrate your confidence in organic inspiration in your present circumstances?
6. How has divine accommodation influenced the way you interpret the Bible within your cultural circumstances?
7. What encouragement do you gain from the early church's focus on original meaning in their investigation of Scripture?
8. How have you seen modern literary critics have an impact on the way we interpret the Bible today?
9. How are you pursuing the Bible's original meaning within the current ministries you are engaged in?
10. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

anthropomorphism – Term referring to how God sometimes speaks or behaves in ways that seem almost human

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

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

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

didaskalos – Greek word (transliteration) for teacher or instructor

divine accommodation – Term used to explain how an infinite God speaks to us in finite terms by adapting his communication so that we can understand it

Gnosticism – Early heresy from the first centuries after Christ; believed that material things were evil, including the human body; therefore, God would never take on the form of human flesh, so Jesus was not both God and man

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

Irenaeus – (ca. A.D. 130-202) Second-century bishop and early Christian writer who wrote *Against Heresies* in which he refuted Gnosticism and affirmed the validity of the four gospels

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

organic inspiration – View of inspiration that asserts that the Holy Spirit used the personalities, experiences, outlooks, and intentions of human authors as he authoritatively and infallibly guided their writing

original meaning – The concepts, behaviors, and emotions that Scripture's divine and human writers jointly intended the document to communicate to its first audience

post-structuralism – Broad intellectual movement that emerged in the mid-20th century in France; characterized by a skepticism towards structuralism and a focus on language, power, and subjectivity; challenged the idea of stable structures or systems underlying human experience and argued that meaning is always deferred, contingent, and context-dependent

Protestant Reformation – A sixteenth-century religious movement that attempted to reform the Roman Catholic Church, but eventually broke away, forming the Protestant church

rabbini – Aramaic word (transliteration) meaning "teacher"

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

sensus literalis – Latin phrase meaning "literal sense"; refers to the original or literal meaning of a biblical passage

structuralism – Broad philosophical outlook of the 20th century built on the linguistic insights of Ferdinand de Saussure; theory that linguistic structures were capable of rational and objective descriptions of the real world because all aspects of reality and knowledge are governed by universal laws and can be understood by their relationship to established structures or systems that underly all human experience