

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson 5

The Complexity of 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. Literal Sense (1:52)

The literal sense examines Scripture according to the intentions of the authors and the historical contexts of their original audiences.

A. Multiple Meanings (4:56)

Some interpreters have said that the literal sense is only one of Scripture's multiple meanings.

Allegorical approach: Interprets people, places, things and events in Scripture as if they were symbols or metaphors for spiritual truths.

The *Quadrige* is an interpretive tool used to indicate that the Scriptures are harnessed to four distinct meanings.

B. Singular Meaning (17:41)

Other interpreters have argued that the literal sense is the singular meaning of Scripture.

III. Full Value (26:15)

Scripture's full value refers to the total significance of a text, consisting of its original meaning, all its biblical elaborations, and all its legitimate applications.

A. Original Meaning (28:15)

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

B. Biblical Elaborations (33:30)

Places where one part of Scripture directly or indirectly comments on an aspect of the meaning of another passage in Scripture.

C. Legitimate Applications (43:55)

The conceptual, behavioral and emotional impacts that the original meaning and biblical elaborations of a passage should have on the audience.

IV. Conclusion (52:47)

7. How can our legitimate applications assist us in finding the full sense of Scripture?

Application Questions

1. How does knowing the literal sense of Scripture personally help you as you interpret the Bible?
2. How can viewing the Scriptures as having multiple meanings affect the way you read and interpret the Bible?
3. Do you think there is any value to the allegorical style of biblical interpretation? Why?
4. Are you more likely to interpret the Bible literally or allegorically? Explain your answer.
5. How do you interpret the Scriptures and make them relevant for those in your sphere of influence without misapplying them?
6. How would you respond to critics that argue that the Bible's multiple meanings result from the inherent ambiguities of the language itself?
7. How has using a literal sense approach affected the way you have applied the Scriptures in your present circumstances?
8. What affect has reading the Scriptures with a multifaceted perspective to original meaning had on your biblical interpretation?
9. How can you emphasize the importance of seeking the full value of Scripture in your current ministry?
10. What parameters help you to remain faithful in your interpretation and applications of the Bible?
11. How do biblical elaborations aid your understanding and interpretation of the Bible?
12. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

allegorical sense – Approach to interpreting Scripture that treats people, places, things and events as if they were symbols or metaphors for spiritual truths

anagogical sense – Approach to interpreting Scripture that focuses on what the text says about the eschaton or last days

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

Bernard of Clairvaux – (1090-1153) Influential French monk and theologian who opposed theology as a purely intellectual pursuit and promoted imaginative interpretations of passages divorced from their literal sense

biblical elaborations – Places where one part of Scripture directly or indirectly comments on an aspect of the meaning of another passage of Scripture

Cassian, John – (ca. 360 - ca. 435) Medieval monk and theologian who popularized the approach to biblical interpretation known as the quadriga

eschatological – Having to do with the study or doctrine of the last days

full value – The total significance of a text, consisting of its original meaning, its biblical elaborations and its legitimate applications

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

Heidelberg Catechism – Sixteenth-century Protestant creed written to provide a unified summary of the teachings of Scripture.

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

legitimate applications – The conceptual, behavioral and emotional impacts that the original meaning and biblical elaborations of a passage should have on their audiences

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

London Baptist Confession – A Protestant summary of biblical doctrine for Calvinistic Baptists, first published in 1644; the Second London Confession was published in 1677 and republished in 1689

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

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"

Origen – (ca. 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

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

Philo of Alexandria – (ca. 20 B.C. - ca. A.D. 50) Hellenistic Jewish philosopher and writer; considered to be the originator of the allegorical approach to interpreting Scripture

quadriga – An interpretive approach to Scripture that considered a biblical passage to have four distinct meanings

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

sensus plenior – Latin phrase meaning "full sense" or "full value"; used to refer to the total significance of a text, consisting of its original meaning, all its biblical elaborations, and all its legitimate applications

tropological sense – Approach to interpreting Scripture that focuses on the moral or ethical aspects of the text