

BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics

Unit 4b Meaning and Application

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Hello again. Good to be with you. Today, we're going to be working through meaning and application. As you know, we just finished our series on context and the different types of context you want to find when observing a passage of Scripture. And now we're going to take those observational tools and move forward as it relates to understanding the meaning of the passage and then applying it accurately as well.

So let's get started. There are two different approaches to determining meaning. The first one is an authorial intention which is determined by the intention of the author. Pretty self-explanatory there. The person who was writing, what did they intend when they wrote this piece? And then the reader response is the meaning is determined by the reader or community of readers. And so which approach is the one that's most appropriate in the biblical context?

I just want to give you another example of this as we kind of come to some conclusions here. So the Wizard of Oz. If you haven't had the chance to see this classic American film, it's enjoyable. But the writer of the Wizard of Oz had some political and social satire and a lot of metaphors attached to this particular story. Many today would just see it as a story of good versus evil and taking you back to Americana early 20th century. But the writer did have some political agenda. And I don't know about agenda, but just commentary. The U.S. at the time was working through decisions about the gold standard. Thus, the yellow brick road. Dorothy's shoes actually were not originally ruby. They were silver in the original writing. And that was another symbol of going maybe to the silver standard. That was part of the conversation there. And then, of course, the cast of characters with Dorothy that kind of work that she meets along the way. Straw man representing middle America and the farmers. And the Tin Man, those in the machinery and industrial age. We know those workers. And then the lion is some of the politicians that lacked the heart, the courage to lead and make the tough decisions. But it's a fictional writing and you can take it both ways. I can sit down and watch the Wizard of Oz with my children and enjoy it. It's just a story of good versus evil. But I can also take you to a government class and analyze it from a political, social aspect in some of the imagery that's used there. But that's, again, fictional writing.

But let's talk about just traffic signs and something a little more authoritative. When you come up to one of these, which is a stop sign, what is the author's intent on that? Some interpret that sign as being a rolling, slow progression, and then you work your way through the intersection. Of course, that could result in a traffic ticket. So that's a little more black and white as it relates to the intention of the author. But this is also very important as we're going to be studying God's word because God's word was not written as just fun fictional reading. There was definite purpose and design behind it. And so we want to discover what that is. So if you're looking at the Scriptures themselves, look at it more as a stop sign as opposed to the Wizard of Oz.

And 2 Peter 1:20-21 definitely affirms that. "Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." So it's very important to know that God is the author of the Scriptures. Therefore, its meaning is not determined by the reader, but is the same for each Christian. There may be various applications of a passage for each reader, but it is each person's responsibility to discover the meaning of the passage as God intended. Something that my professors taught me when I was in Bible College was one interpretation, many applications. So it's our responsibility to find out what that one interpretation is, but we can approach a passage and come up

with different ways to apply it to our lives personally. I'm going to give you an example of that just to show how we could stay true to the meaning of the text and still walk away with different ways of applying it.

So one example, Matthew 28:18-20. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" And so each of us may be coming with a different context that's happening in our life, a different situation. And so you may have someone who is just really struggling, looking around at some of the events that are taking place in this world, and that first verse could be very comforting, that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." So nothing is happening here on earth that is outside of God's control, and he knows and he is allowing things to continue on because he eventually is going to bring things back to focus with him.

For example, I'll be leading a group of students on a ministry trip here shortly, a little bit later this year, and therefore, "Go and make disciples" is the passage that's really standing out to me personally right now. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." So as we go and minister, having an opportunity to share the gospel and, Lord willing, being able to see people come to Christ through our time there. And then some may be just, again, in a very dark place right now, maybe relationally some things you're struggling, and it's just very comforting to know that Jesus is with you always to the very end of the age. And I know that this has given a lot of comfort to those who may be struggling emotionally with something or a loss of a family member. It could be those who are maybe even being imprisoned for faith in Christ in other parts of the world.

And so, again, holding true to the meaning of the passage but walking away with different application points in where we're at right now. And that's the beauty of Scripture. God's word, you can't understand everything about it because his knowledge, he's omniscient, he is all-knowing, his wisdom and knowledge is far beyond ours. And so you could really come to a passage again and again and walk away with a new application point. And that's just the beauty and joy of studying God's word.

So, are there levels of meaning? This is one that we see a lot of not only in university classrooms, but also in churches and even some headlines and columnists of newspapers and magazines, etc. and other religious leaders. And so there are some dangers to looking for deeper knowledge. Whenever you come across someone who says, "Hey, I got something that no one else has seen before in the Scriptures," that's a big red flag. Listen. Feel free to listen to what they have to say, but just kind of have that guard up as it relates to "I'm not going to be convinced here that you have an inside angle over the last 2000 years of the Christian church and all the great spiritual minds and followers of Jesus who have pored through the Scriptures that you have something new." So just be very careful of that.

And here's some of the dangers when you're looking for that deeper "knowledge." Spiritualizing. Sometimes you may ignore the literary meaning of a passage in its context, which lends itself to more reader response interpretation. Instead of taking the passage itself for what it says, coming up with spiritualizing it and broadening it and generalizing it. It's just dangerous ground when you start to water things down into your own personal level.

Allegory. Using an extensive amount of symbolism and metaphors to create a deeper, unified meaning. There are definitely some who approach different aspects of Scriptures, and sometimes from the Old Testament, looking at everything allegorically. Some of the events of the Old Testament, in their estimation, didn't even really happen. It was just more of a fictional story that God told to teach something bigger. Be careful of that. I've even heard that as it relates to Noah's flood that that really didn't happen. It was just something that there's a lot of symbols and God didn't really intend that story and that wasn't real and so we can't take it literally. Let's be careful of that.

Typology. In the biblical sense, this is seeing scriptural references as foreshadowing of Christ. Now, there are times in Scripture in which it does say this is a type, this is a shadow of things that lie ahead or making a connection to an Old Testament type. And so if the Bible does it, then that's okay. Then you can take that as an accurate type. For example, in Hebrews 5, the Bible talks of it. It makes that connection between the king, high priest, Melchizedek from the City of Jebus during the time of Abraham, as a type of Christ or Messiah, referencing him with Jesus and making some parallels there. Obviously, Melchizedek was a real person. He had sin in his life and wasn't perfect, but there were things about his role and his function as a king and a priest that definitely are a type as it relates to Jesus' role who is prophet, priest, and king as he was here on this earth, and it continues to be until today.

And then you get into even some crazier stuff. The Bible codes, finding hidden messages in the Bible to make predictions about world events or personal endeavors. That has really taken off. I guess that's always been around. But even the last couple of decades from 9/11, people going back in Scripture and saying, "Put these verse combinations together and you can see that God was talking about the Twin Towers coming down." You just got to be careful when you start getting into some of the secret knowledge. You start to delve into some of the gnostic approaches to biblical interpretation, and that's very dangerous ground. Hebrew Gematria, which you see there on the right, is just kind of that wheel and certain number of letters have certain value points and you put things together. And this is where you get some of those crazy... I remember they were talking about political leaders and how this political leader is the antichrist. And you figure out the numerology on the letters of their name and it comes up to 666. And that's just nonsense, to be honest. And so when you see that, just shake your head and walk away. Of course, be respectful, but definitely not going to be biblical truth there.

So the role of the Holy Spirit. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this? Well, of course, the Spirit is the divine author. All Scripture is inspired by God, for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. And the Holy Spirit was very much the main player as it relates to inspiring the human authors to write out God's word. And so the role of the Holy Spirit is significant as it relates to interpretation. But there's some caveats, if you will, that we need to be mindful of. So can we grasp God's word apart from the Spirit? Well, yes and no. Can unbelievers understand some things about the Bible? Certainly. There's historical narratives and grammatical structure and different types of things. Chronologically, cultural contexts. Those are definitely things that an unbeliever can understand. But when it comes down to accepting these truths, especially the ones that are transformative, these life change principles, especially about salvation and the gospel message, the defect of sin has been devastating on our minds and our hearts. And so we are spiritually blind. We will not be able to understand those things apart from the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to those things. And 1 Corinthians 2:14 speaks to that.

What are some other roles of the Holy Spirit as it relates to how much involvement is there into understanding biblical truth? Well, the Spirit in the Christian interpreter. Let's see how that works. Having the Holy Spirit in our life does not mean that he will do all of the interpreting for us. The example of a toddler learning to walk. So the parents sit a couple of feet apart and the toddler kind of wobbles back and forth as the parents kind of play catch, if you will, with the toddler learning to walk. Well, if the toddler is just like, "You know what? Hey, my parents are here, so I don't really need to do anything more. They're here. They got me," that child is never going to progress. Yes, he's going to take some bumps and bruises but never going to progress to the point of being able to walk on its own. Not that we ever get to the point where we don't need the Holy Spirit. Don't get me wrong on that. It's not a perfect analogy.

But 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Couple that with the other side of the coin which is John 14:26. "But the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will bring those things that I've taught you to your remembrance." Jesus promised that to his disciples. So it's both/and. We have a responsibility to do our part to handle God's word accurately, to do the study, but the Holy Spirit is also going to open our eyes to biblical truth as well. So the Spirit expects us to use our minds. That's vitally important. And he's not going to give us a different meaning. Again, God cannot contradict himself, and so he's not going to have one passage and mean one thing which directly contradicts another passage. So again, we got to do our part in that. And that's part of the process of the Holy Spirit allowing us to learn and to grow and to develop these good habits of study. That's definitely part of it. I can sit in front of a classroom and give my students everything that they need to know, but they will learn a lot more with me being around, but they look at the Scriptures themselves and dig and study. And of course, I can come in and correct or say, "Hey, have you looked at this first?" And so that kind of guidance, the Holy Spirit does play that part in our lives too and wants us, though, to develop these skills and become sharper with his word.

Another aspect as it relates to the role of the Holy Spirit, and this is a very different approach to studying Scripture. We've talked a lot about really digging deep and analyzing in study, but I haven't talked about the prayer and devotional side of studying God's word and meaning and application. There's an ancient way of reading the Bible known as the *Lectio Divina* or prayerful reading. And so this isn't a time for deep analysis and study. This is a time for personal, more intimate communion with the Lord where you slow down. And so I'm going to give you just five of these points. These are really interesting for me and actually a challenge and convicting for me to implement these in my own life.

So point one is called *silencio*. Prepare your heart to hear from God by slowing down and quieting yourself. Our busy world today, that is really difficult to do. We have jam packed our schedule. Technology is a wonderful thing. It makes our life more efficient. But with that efficiency, we cram more into our day and we don't slow down. We don't slow down enough to just be quiet. Actually, here in the west, people are very uncomfortable with quiet. If I stand in front of a classroom with my students and I don't speak for about 15, 20 seconds, they look at me as if "Okay, you're going to say something now, right?" Just not comfortable at all with silence. And so we need to quiet ourselves. That's very important. Hear that still, small voice from the Lord.

Next point is *lectio*. Select a passage of Scripture and read it slowly and out loud. Of course, Scripture was meant to be read out loud. That's how it was passed around to the synagogues and churches, and it

was read out loud in front of the congregation. And so that's how it was written. And so it's designed to be read and heard that way. And so it's good for us to do that every once in a while in the quiet of our own wherever your prayer closet is, whether that be in your home or if you have a café you like to go to or somewhere out in nature. But to read it slowly and out loud. Hear yourself saying the words.

Point three is *meditatio*. Read the passage again, pausing to let the words sink deeply into your mind and heart. As a word or phrase catches your attention, repeat it. This is just repeating and hearing yourself repeat. And if something stands out, you saying that word again and again, this starts to etch that word into your mind. And of course, as you get it into your mind, it starts to get to your heart. And again, this is just you and God, just you and him having a conversation, and you're reading out loud what he has written to you as that love letter.

Point four is *oratio*, which is respond by praying the passage as you read it a third time. Enter into a conversation with God. Praying Scripture is really an excellent way to study God's word, to learn it. Convert it to prayer and the Lord is very pleased when we commit his word to prayer and to our minds and hearts.

And then last one is *contemplatio*. Rest and wait patiently in the presence of God. Give the Spirit time to work in your heart and mind. Listen for that small voice. It's a discipline. It's going to take time. And maybe it's not something you're comfortable with. Maybe some of you are already at that point where you're very good at being quiet and having that conversation back and forth with the Lord, with his word. I applaud you for that. And continue to do that and grow in that area.

So, application. We cannot apply the Bible without knowing what it means, but we can know the Bible without living it. And this is the danger. We can study God's word and analyze it and have so many answers as to biblical truth, but ultimately it comes down to are we living these things out? Are we applying them in our life? I can talk all day about the armor of God, but if I am not applying that to my daily life, then I'm going to be struggling with sin and struggling with the same things over and over again.

So what are some of these steps? And they definitely connect with the five steps we've been learning through this process. So step one. Summarize the historical, cultural contexts and the meaning of the text for the biblical audience. That's always where you want to start. Context. What does it mean for them? Step two. What are the differences between the biblical situation and our situation? Make that contrast and that comparison. Step three. List the theological principles communicated by the passage. Step four. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible? Always making sure you compare Scripture with Scripture. And then finally, how should individual Christians today live out the theological principles? That's what it comes down to. So any story from the Bible, there's something that we can get from it. Even if it's the craziest of stories, like Jonah and the whale, something that's not going to happen to any of us, but yet there's principles that we can get from that story and apply to our own life today.

So that's a look at meaning and application. The next few lessons, we're going to get into the interpretive journey. We're going to just do a brief overview of the Old Testament and the New Testament. We're going to start in the New Testament, actually, and have a chance to look at the gospels and the Book of Acts. And hopefully, that will give you some guidance as you start to maybe dig into those areas of Scripture and start to study a little bit more. So, looking forward to doing that with

you. Thanks for listening, and I really hope you enjoy some of the extra activities for this particular lesson.