

“WHO DETERMINES MEANING? AUTHORIAL INTENT, ALLEGORY, LITERAL READING, & BIBLICAL THEOLOGY”

I. Where do we find meaning?

A. Do we find meaning in the *reader's interpretation*?

1. Naturalistic reader
2. Super-naturalistic reader (“spiritualizing” or “allegorical” method)
3. Dogmatic reader

B. Do we find meaning in the *author's intention*?

1. Definition:
2. How can we know what the author intends to mean?
 - a. Historical context
 - b. Literary context
 - c. Biblical-Theological context (context of the entire Bible)

3. Figures of Speech

Examples of figures of speech in John's Gospel

- Simile (John 1:32; 3:14)
- Metaphors (“I am statements”)
- Hypocatastasis – (John 1:29; 2:19)
- Euphemism (John 11:11)
- Hyperbole (John 21:25)
- Irony (John 11:50)

Examples of literary devices in John's Gospel

- Inclusio (Cana Cycle in 2:1 and 4:46; deity of Christ in 1:1 and 20:28)
- Puns or double entendre – “born again”
- Repetitio (John 16:12–15)
- Hyperbaton (John 6:60) – intentional misplacing a word out of its usual order for emphasis: “hard is the saying this” [σκληρός ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος οὗτος]

Examples of Old Testament symbols/patterns in John's Gospel

- Bread of life/manna; light; born again/born of the Spirit

II. Practical Exercise: “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12)

A. Historical Context – what is the setting?

B. Literary Context – what is happening in the passage?

C. Biblical-Theological Context – how does John use “light/darkness” throughout John’s Gospel and are there parallels in other parts of the Bible?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... In him as life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (1:1, 4–5)

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.... And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” (Gen 1:1, 3).

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (3:19–20)

[reminder of the Fall]

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (8:12)

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Ps 27:1; cf. Isa 49:6)

“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” (12:36a)

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another... (1 John 1:5-7; cf. 2:8–10)

“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (12:46)

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev 21:22-23; cf. Isa 60:19–22)

Concluding thoughts:

1. Read and reread the Bible.
2. Study the Bible with others in your local church.
3. Read the Bible as one story.
4. Depend on the divine author, the Holy Spirit, for understanding.

Suggested Sources on Bible Interpretation (links to Amazon kindle):

Introduction: [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#) (Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart); [Basic Bible Interpretation](#) (Roy B. Zuck); [Knowing Scripture](#) (R. C. Sproul)

Intermediate: [How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology](#) (Jason S. DeRouchie); [How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology](#) (Andy Naselli); [Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology](#) (Andreas J. Köstenberger & Richard Patterson)

Advanced: [Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation](#) (Grant Osborne); [Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge](#) (Kevin J. Vanhoozer)