

Redeemer Bible Fellowship - Sunday School (Jan. 2025)

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES

(With an emphasis on the NT use of the OT)

I. Biblical Meaning is Single in Nature

1. Human author's intent is the same as God's intent

-2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21

Matt Waymeyer: Peter does not explain how the Holy Spirit guided this process, but it is clear that the human authors were not mere secretaries, passively and mechanically writing whatever was dictated to them. Instead, without suspending, suppressing, or negating their individual freedom and personalities, the Holy Spirit superintended the biblical writers in such a way that they wrote precisely what he was pleased to reveal through them, and yet in words of their own choice and in the style they were accustomed to using. In this way, the Spirit was not simply standing by, ready to correct or supplement any inadequacies in the human authors as they composed the biblical text. Rather, he was actively working within them, supervising and guiding the process so that they freely composed the Scriptures in their own words-words that simultaneously were nothing less than the very words of God.¹

-Mark 12:36; Acts 4:25, 28:25 (cf. Mark 7:9-13)

2. Meaning vs. Significance

The terms defined: Meaning refers to the specific intended idea of an author expressed in a text. It is single and linked with an author's intent. But "significance," as Chou explains, "denotes the various valid repercussions...or implications stemming from the author's meaning." Significance involves the consequences of a text's meaning and "the ramifications of a text's meaning on our lives today or its bearing on a theological topic." Significance, therefore, involves the sum total of all the various consequences of an author's meaning. Succinctly, Paul Feinberg states, "Meaning has to do with the interpretation of a text, while significance is concerned with its application." While meaning is one, there can be several or multiple implications...²

¹ Matt Waymeyer, "Word of God and Words of Man" in *The Inerrant Word*, (Crossway, 2016), 299-300.

² Michael Vlach, *The Old in the New* (Kress Biblical Resources: The Master's Seminary Press, 2021), 10. This quotation contains citations from: Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 32 and Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 113-114.

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The terms applied: an OT author had a specific, conscious meaning is what he wrote. But he might not foresee all the implications and applications of his text as they relate to later audiences, including those in the NT era. Yet, these ramifications are consistent with what he meant. Significance, although different from meaning, operates on the same plane as meaning. In fact, an author's meaning establishes the parameters of significance. While the OT author does not see all the applications or significances that a NT writer might make, these applications are consistent with what the OT author meant. They are tied to the intent of the author.³

-Acts 4:25-26/Ps. 2:1-2;1 Tim. 5:17-18/Deut. 25:4

3. The danger of sensus plenior

Sensus plenior defined:

1) **Raymond Brown:** The additional, deeper meaning, intended by God, but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.⁴

2) **Graeme Goldsworthy:** The sensus plenior of an OT text, or indeed of the whole OT, cannot be found by exegesis of the texts themselves. Exegesis aims at understanding what was intended by the author, the sensus literalis, but there is a deeper meaning in the mind of the divine author which emerges in further revelation, usually the NT.⁵

Sensus plenior refuted:

-It undermines the doctrine of verbal, plenary (revelation came in the form of words and all those words are from God) inspiration of Scripture. If *Scripture* in 2 Tim. 3:16 does not represent the precise words in the OT, then what exactly is *God-breathed*? Furthermore, if the *meaning* cannot be directly obtained from the words, then how could the OT be referred to as *revelation*? (Ps. 19:7-9, 119:160)

³ Michael Vlach, *The Old in the New* (Kress Biblical Resources: The Master's Seminary Press, 2021), 10-11.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore, MD: St. Mary's University, 1955), 92.

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, "The Relationship of the Old Testament and New Testament," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 88.

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- How could God expect the original recipients to believe OT promises and obey OT commands if the *meaning* could not be determined until the NT era?
- By implication, *sensus plenior* suggests that a text can *mean* something at one time period and something entirely different in a later time period.
(No wonder many people and leaders have abandoned the OT altogether!)
- When something is a *mystery* that is revealed in the NT, by definition, it cannot be found in the OT (Eph. 3:4-6) and it is specifically referred to as a *mystery* in NT (Col. 1:27).
- When studying how the NT authors utilize the OT, it is unnecessary to conclude that the NT authors unearthed a previously hidden *meaning* in the OT (which is the definition of a mystery), but rather *applied* the text or a principle in the text to Christ and/or the NT context. (Acts 2:25-32/Ps 16:8-11)
- Jesus' and the apostles' use of OT Scripture was never challenged by their opponents. What was opposed was that Jesus was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies.