Scripture and Meaning

• The nature of Scripture
• Aspects of meaning
• The four ideas of this course

Nature of Scripture

• Revelatory
• Both human and divine
• Inspired = God’s supervision of the writing of Scripture through the Holy Spirit’s influence on the human authors (2 Tim. 3:16)
• Confluent authorship (see 2 Peter 3:15-16)

We need hermeneutics...

• To ask in what way this is God’s particular word to particular people in particular circumstances
• To ask in what way this is God’s eternal word to all people in all circumstances
• We seek the eternal in the historical, as in the Incarnation.
Nature of Scripture

• Shows unity and diversity in harmony.
• Has primary penultimate authority.
• Distinguish issues of authority from issues of interpretation.

Humpty Dumpty says...

“There’s glory for you.”
“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant, ‘There’s a nice, knock-down argument for you.’”
“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean a nice, knock-down argument,” Alice objected.
“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means exactly what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

Is Humpty Dumpty right?

Aspects of Meaning

“A text is a discourse in which someone says something to someone else about something.”

• Someone = author
• Something = text
• Someone else = audience
• Something = universe, subject matter

Paul Ricoeur
Aspects of Meaning

“We presuppose the goal of hermeneutics to be the meaning the biblical writers ‘meant’ to communicate at the time of the communication, at least to the extent that those intentions are recoverable in the texts they produced.”

Klein, 98

Aspects of Meaning

Our goal is “to achieve a credible and coherent understanding of the text on its own terms and in its own context.”

Gorman, 9
Aspects of Meaning

- **Sense** = what the text says (dictionary definitions of words, common understanding of grammar). “What does this mean?”
- **Reference** = what text refers to (the real world, the subject matter). “What is this about?”
- **Significance** = how the text relates to the life of any given audience. “What does this mean to me?”

Aspects of Meaning

- Sense
  - Literary context
  - Linguistic context
- Reference
  - Historical/cultural context
- Significance
  - Biblical/theological context
  - Personal application

Four Ideas

- The Bible comes out of particular historical/cultural contexts, so we must understand those contexts to interpret it.
- The Bible is literature, so we must understand its literary features to interpret it.
- Although a divine/human work, the Bible has come to us through a human process and is mediated by human language.
- We also live in particular historical/cultural contexts, which influence our reading and application of Scripture.
Four Ideas

• Use the instruction handouts to guide your research, not to outline your essays.
• Use good research tools.
• But do your own thinking first.
• Don’t use notes in study Bibles.
• (Usually): Don’t use free online or CD-ROM resources.