

BIB105 Biblical Hermeneutics

Unit 1c Introduction to the Interpretive Journey

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All right. Welcome back. Hopefully, you enjoyed the first video, which we've learned about how we got the Bible and the biblical translations, and we were able to examine some of the sacrifices of those who have gotten us the English Bibles that we have today. And so very thankful for them. Today we're going to look at the interpretive journey as far as five steps to understanding God's word. These steps are something that I think is important that you write down and keep in mind every time you look at Scripture and get into the habit of doing these things. Without even thinking, it just becomes a part of the process. So let's look at these five steps together.

So step number one is context. The goal of context is to grasp the meaning of the text that God has intended, not to create meaning out of a text. I always tell my students, "Context, context, context." What did God intend to communicate to the biblical audience? And so it's always important for us to get into the habit of looking at who was the target of this communication from God, and that will help us understand then the meaning that God intended. It's not something that we can insert a few thousand years after the fact of what we think it means. It's really important that we understand the biblical audience, the life that they were living, understand the context of where God inserted this communication.

So, a couple of things to look at when we're trying to understand context. First of all, grammar. As much as you may loathe getting into English grammar and grammatical structure, it is vitally important. If you're going to become a good student of God's word, you really need to become a good student of grammar. It's so important to understand past, present, future, passive, active, and so many different aspects to grammar. And we'll look at some of those specifically. But you just can't get around it. So just embrace it. It's one of those you're just going to have to get used to doing. Another point when you're looking at context: What are the significant words that are used in the passage? Are there some things that are repeated? Are there some keywords that the whole verse hinges on? Are there some words that you don't understand and so you need to do a little more digging? So what are those significant words that bear some weight within the passage?

Historical context is very important. Where does the passage fit in the timeline of Scripture? Are you going back in time pre-Mosaic law, the time before Moses? So those Old Testament saints, how many Scriptures did they actually have to use and what was their understanding of God's overall plan? That's very different, especially those days before Moses, vastly different than getting into some of the New Testament churches because they have the privilege of looking back and seeing kind of the summary of God's message in written form. And so very different. So understanding the historical context will provide us some better understanding of what God intended when he was communicating.

Literary context. What does the passage mean in light of the verses before and after it? God doesn't do random. And so when you look at a verse, it wasn't there just as like "Well, I don't know where to put this. We'll just jam it here." He had an intentional flow of thought through the human authors. And so it's up to us then to try to understand how this passage then fits within the whole section.

And then something to practice, and this will give you some feedback as to how much of the passage you understand, is to rewrite the passage as it was intended for the biblical audience. And we'll look at some tools to help you see whether you got it or not, some commentaries and concordances and Bible handbooks, etc. that will give you some feedback as to how close you were in understanding the original meaning.

So historical context is step two. Vitaly important in understanding the time period in which the message was being given. So what are some of the significant differences between the people in the biblical story and of today? And what are some similarities between then and now? Human nature is human nature. And as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. So, yes, technology has definitely advanced here in the 21st century, but human nature and the human heart and the sinful condition hasn't changed. Maybe the forms in which selfishness and pride are exhibited in humanity today may be different than how they were exhibited back biblical times, but it's still selfishness and pride. And so understanding some of the differences and also some of the cultural norms and values. There was a difference in some of the Middle Eastern cultures and how they welcomed guests and how they treated guests as opposed to, especially here in the West, how we treat guests today and some of the expectations that come with that. So take a look at some of the similarities and differences, and that will give us some important clues on understanding the meaning.

Step three, then, is finding the meaning. So once we've done some legwork in understanding the cultural context, understanding the biblical audience, what is the theological principle then in the passage? So were these principles for the biblical audience only, or are they universal principles for everyone today? We're going to look at an example from Joshua 1 a little bit later in the presentation and you're going to see that some of those principles were just geared toward Joshua and the nation of Israel, but also there are some principles that were universal that we can definitely apply to our own lives here and now. So it is very important to try to think through. What is the principle that God is trying to teach all of us?

So when you're formulating a theological principle, there's just some points that you just reflect on and keep in mind. So it should be reflected in the text. God has the words there for a reason. He had the human authors write these things down in the way that they did, so let's make sure that we're not developing a theological principle that just simply doesn't exist in that passage. And also, 21st century, we should be looking for those that are timeless and not tied to a specific situation. Yes, very important to understand the cultural, historical context of principles and promises that were just given to the nation of Israel, for example, in the Old Testament, but there's also timeless principles that we can learn from those and apply to our own lives today. And it also should not be bound by culture. Be careful of finding, giving principles that "Well, God only intended it... That was just cultural. It doesn't apply to us today." Careful of that. Make sure that you're understanding the culture and understanding that maybe this is a principle that is timeless and does apply to us today and it wasn't just for that particular time. And then it should also agree with the rest of Scripture. God is not going to contradict himself. He's incapable of that.

And so if we are coming up with an understanding of a passage and it is in direct contradiction to something that is taught in the New Testament, for example, as it relates to sexuality, purity, whatever the topic may be, we need to make sure that we're getting the whole view of Scripture and understanding how everything fits. And so, yeah, again, make sure that you're not just looking at one verse, ripping that out, and saying, "Aha. This is everything that God has to say about this topic." That's very dangerous because you're going to be missing a lot with the rest of Scripture. And then also, it should be relevant to all audiences. So whether young or old, no matter where you are in the globe, this is a principle that applies to everybody because, again, yes, God did have some of those specific things for some specific people or a person, but he has plenty to say to everyone, things that directly relate to all of us.

Step four, then, is interpretation. So how these biblical principles then fit with the rest of Scripture, we talked about that a little bit. And this is something to get in the habit of doing. It's the parts to the whole spiral, if you will. And that's reflecting back and forth from the text that you're studying to the rest of Scripture. And so, as you zoom in like your microscope on the passage that you're studying, make sure that you're also taking a few moments to pan back and see the panorama, if you will, of how this puzzle piece fits within the big picture of the entire puzzle, making sure that the conclusions that I'm coming to about the meaning of this passage fit within the big picture. So that's very important. And just get in the habit of doing that every passage that you approach and you get to the point that you start to do it without even thinking. It just comes as second nature.

And then do other Scriptures add insight or qualifications to the principle? That's also very important. So one that is commonly just ripped out is the Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge others. Aha. Therefore, we shouldn't judge anybody." Well, is that everything that the Bible has to teach about judging others and about accountability? And is there a difference between those who are of the household of faith and those who are unbelievers? And so if we start to add in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 4 and 5 and what Paul taught about accountability and how we interact with the unbelieving world, Matthew 7 is just one piece of a bigger puzzle. And so you got to make sure that you are understanding how this fits and the other insights that are added in the rest of Scripture.

When you're studying the Old Testament, always make sure that you check how the principle has been taught or even maybe adjusted in the New Testament. Some of these things, like for example, when Jesus is giving the sermon on the mountain and he's talking, the Pharisees were like "Well, hey, I've never committed adultery, so therefore, I'm living a just and pure life." Well, Jesus is like, "Well, actually, if you've had a lustful thought in your mind, in your heart, you've also committed sin." And so it's not just the act itself. It's having those thoughts and dwelling on those thoughts as well. So make sure that when you're looking at the Old Testament, look and see how things were taught in the New Testament because that kind of adds to it. And then another example is the Passover lamb. That was something that the nation of Israel was to do every year at Passover from the original story there in Exodus 12. But since Jesus was a fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice when he died on the cross for our sins, we don't need to do that anymore. So it has definitely been adjusted because Jesus was a fulfillment of that.

Step five, then, is the application. So how should individual Christians today live out these principles? Ultimately, we don't want to just be a bunch of walking encyclopedias of head knowledge of Scripture. It has to play out in our actions. We want our lives to be changed and transformed by the principles of God's words. So while there may only be a few principles from a passage, there may be many varied practical applications for believers today. And we're going to look at an example from Joshua 1. And I'll talk about that a little bit, how there's only one interpretation of Scripture that's correct and as God had intended, but there may be many different applications that come from that.

So let's look at Joshua 1:1-9. And I'm going to read through this. And I know it may just take a few moments, but I think it's going to be worth our while to work through this together, and this will set a precedent as we approach Scripture moving forward in the course. So, Joshua 1:1-9 [NIV]. "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land that I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the

Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

This is a great story. Many people have gone to this passage over the centuries to draw courage when facing a daunting task, whatever that may be. And so, hopefully, all of us have had a chance to benefit from the principles here. But let’s take a look at this. Let’s use the five steps and see, what are some real simple things that we can come up with? So working through the five-step process, just kind of a review and we just read the passage.

So step one, what was God communicating to the biblical audiences? Well, first of all, we see that God commanded Joshua, the new leader of Israel, because Moses had just passed away, to draw strength and courage from his empowering presence. He said that multiple times. And to be obedient to the Law of Moses and to meditate on the law so that you would be successful in the conquest of the Promised Land. So the context here, Israel has a new leader. They’re going in to conquer a new land, to lay claim to it. And God gives some guidelines as to how that’s going to happen.

Step two, then, so what are the differences between the biblical audiences and us? Well, we are not the leader of the nation of Israel. And if you are the leader of the nation of Israel modern day, welcome. Glad to have you with us. But we are not embarking on the conquest of Canaan and we are not under the Law of Moses anymore. Obviously, as we know, Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection put the Law of Moses to rest and fulfilled those things. So those are some major differences between us today and Joshua and what he was experiencing.

So step three, then, what is the theological principle in this text? I think there’s a few things. One, to be effective and successful in serving God, we must draw courage from his presence, be obedient to his word, and meditate on it constantly. Those are definitely themes that we see throughout the rest of Scripture.

And that leads to step four. So how does our theological principle fit into the rest of Scripture? Well, the rest of Scripture has many examples of God’s people drawing courage from his presence. The New Testament affirms the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and our need to be regularly engaged with his word. Those are things that are taught time and time again throughout the rest of the Bible, and so I think our theological principles here definitely fit with the big picture, with what the rest of the Scripture has to say.

And then step five, how should individual Christians today live out these principles? Well, we can spend more time meditating on God’s word through the many different platforms available today, depending on the technology available to you. You can listen to podcasts of sermons. You can even have Scripture read to you. You can be doing work around the house or your apartment and you could be listening to God’s word, or on the commute to work or school. You can definitely access so much online. You can

actually read a Bible itself, on the pages itself. So there's so many different resources to be able to meditate on God's word and to have it constantly in our mind. Christian music, worship music is also an excellent way of having the principles of God's word put together in song.

Another principle that could be lived out today is if God calls you to a new ministry opportunity that may seem kind of daunting. Maybe it's scary. Maybe God is asking you and your family to move to another location. You can draw courage from his presence and by clinging to the promises in his word, "I will be with you." So that promise that he gave to Joshua definitely applies to us today. And then also, if you're a leader of an organization or a ministry, realize that true success comes from the strength and courage that we gain from God and his presence in our lives. We will fail if we try to do things out of our own strength, and so it's important that we're constantly tapping into our Lord through meditation and through listening to him and his word and through prayer. If we're doing those things, then there will be great success. I'm not guaranteeing health, wealth, and prosperity, but definitely eternal blessings and eternal fruit, which is really what matters the most.

So hopefully, just showing you an example of Joshua 1:1-9, working through the five steps gives you a little bit of an idea of how we're going to be approaching each passage moving forward. And so I encourage you again, if you haven't done so, write these five steps down and even practice on your own. Get a passage of Scripture and work through these five things and start to get into the habit of answering these questions every time you approach Scripture. So that wraps things up for this particular lesson. And we'll see you then moving forward with the next lesson.