



# ***Principles for Interpreting Scripture***

**\*Welcome! Please sit in the middle section.\***



# ***Principles for Interpreting Scripture***

**The Foundations of Biblical Interpretation**

**April 2**

# NCIS: IA



# 1) The Necessity of Scripture

As result of sin, mankind could only know God in a *general* way; in order for us to know God in a *personal* and salvific way, God needed to reveal Himself

“The necessity of Scripture means that it is necessary to read the Bible or have someone tell us what is in the Bible if we are going to know God personally, have our sins forgiven, and know with certainty what God wants us to.” -Wayne Grudem

**“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”**  
(Romans 10:14-16)

## 2) The Clarity of Scripture

The Scriptures are straightforward, understandable, and self-interpreting on all matters of importance

“...all things necessary to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian are clear...” -Wayne Grudem

God did not speak to us in secret code!

### 3) The Inspiration of Scripture

Inspiration is the “supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers that rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or that resulted in what they wrote *actually being* the Word of God.” -Millard Erickson

**“no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”** (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

**“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”** (2 Tim. 3:16)

The Holy Spirit’s influence directed human authors to *the exact selection of words* used to convey the message God wanted them to convey

## 4) The Sufficiency of Scripture

Through the Bible, God tells us everything we need to know in order to be restored to fellowship to Him, to walk in fellowship with Him, and to move toward our eternal destiny in Him

**“the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:15-17)**

The Bible does not tell us everything about everything, but it completely accomplishes *God’s intended goal* in speaking: restoration of relationship

# 5) The Inerrancy of Scripture

“Inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings.” -Millard Erickson, Theologian

**“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”** (Prov. 30:5)

**“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”**  
(Psa. 119:160)

All of Scripture, in its original autographs and properly interpreted, is completely true and without error in all it affirms, whether doctrine, moral conduct, history, cosmology, geography, or anything else

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)



## 6) The Authority of Scripture

“...the Bible, as the expression of God’s will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to live...The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority.” - Erickson

*Because* we believe that the Bible contains very words of God and *because* we believe that it is fully truthful in all of its teachings, we give it *the supreme right* to define what we are to we believe and how we are to live

**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (Jas. 1:22)**

# NCIS: IA



# Canon of Scripture

“canon” = Greek word referring to *a rod that was used for measuring straightness*; adopted by early church to refer to collection of inspired, authoritative writings

Old Testament canon well established by Jews by 200 BC

- “Apocryphal” books came to be understood as being authoritative over time, starting with translation of Bible into Latin by Jerome in 4<sup>th</sup> century
- Reformers removed these books from their canon in 16<sup>th</sup> century

Most of New Testament canon recognized by end of 1<sup>st</sup> century

- A few books remained in debate until late 4<sup>th</sup> century

# Transmission and Translation of Scripture

Inspiration and inerrancy apply to *original autographs, properly interpreted*

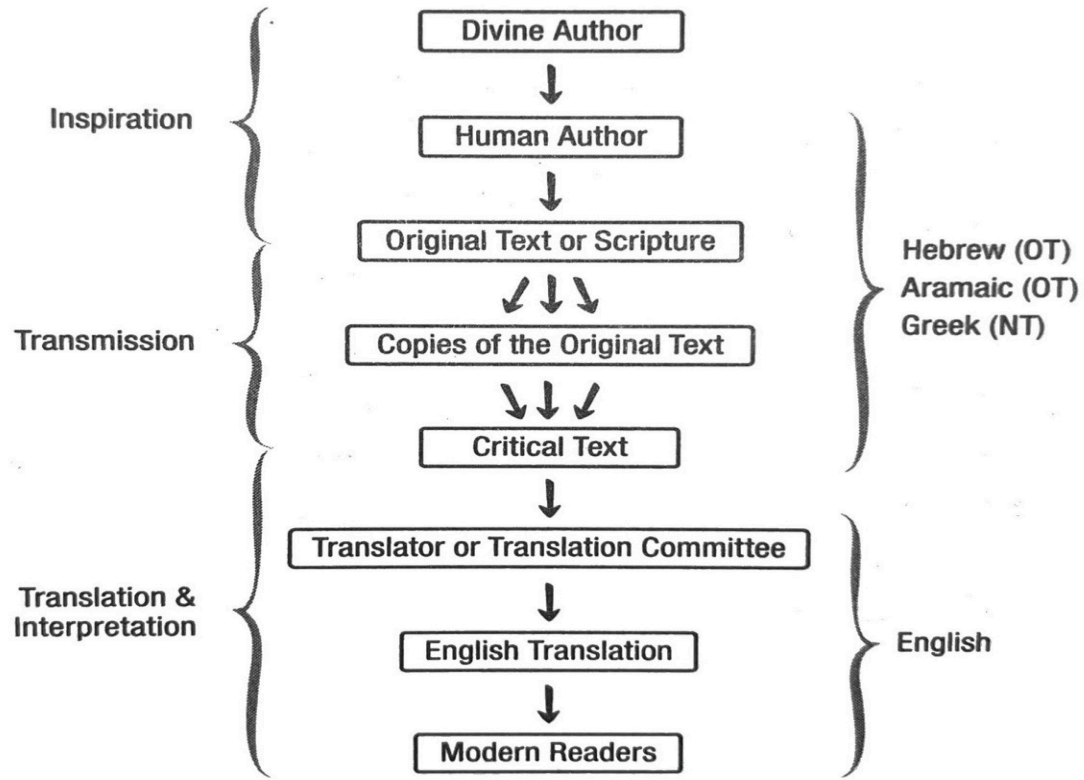
Old Testament: written in ancient Hebrew roughly 2,500-3,500 years ago

New Testament: written in ancient Greek roughly 2,000 years ago

*Transmission* is the process by which skilled scribes accurately copied and distributed copies of original autographs over following centuries

-Textual criticism is a field of study focused on this process

*Translation* is the process by which skilled linguists accurately translate these critical texts into modern languages



# Challenges to Translation

- 1) Languages do not often share “identical” words
- 2) Vocabulary of two languages varies in size
- 3) Languages put words together differently to form phrases, clauses, and sentences
- 4) Languages have different stylistic preferences

# Translation Philosophies

- Formal (literal or word-for-word)
  - Emphasizes maintaining structure of critical text
- Functional (idiomatic or thought-for-thought)
  - Emphasizes getting original meaning into understandable, modern form
- Paraphrase (more of an interpretation than a translation)

**More  
Formal**

**More  
Functional**

KJV  
ASV

NASB  
NKJV  
ESV

RSV  
HCSB

NRSV  
NET

NAB

NIV  
TNIV

NJB  
REB

NCV  
NLT

GNB  
CEV

*The Message*

# Principles for Choosing a Translation

- 1) Choose a translation that uses modern English (published in past 50 years)
- 2) Choose a translation that uses standard Hebrew and Greek critical texts
- 3) Give preference to translation by committee over translation by individual
- 4) Choose a translation that is appropriate for your own purpose at the time



# Who controls the meaning?



# Who controls the meaning?

Either *the reader* defines the meaning of the text (reader-response perspective)

Or *the author* defines the meaning of the text (authorial intention perspective)

# The Author Controls the Meaning

“If you read the Bible merely as great literature, merely for its aesthetic value, or merely for its suggestive moral guidance, not as communication from God, then you can interpret the text in any way you choose...If, however, you believe that the Bible is God’s revelatory word to you and that the Scriptures function as communication from God to you, you should interpret the Bible by looking for the meaning that God, the author, intended.” - Duvall and Hays

# The Author Controls the Meaning

~~What does this passage mean to me?~~

What does this passage mean, *period*?

How does this passage *apply* to me?

*meaning* = that which the author intends to communicate in writing

*application* = the appropriate response of the reader to the meaning of the writing

# What do we bring to the text?

One of most overlooked contexts in the study of Scripture is *the context of the reader*, who *does not* and *cannot* come to the text with a complete objective viewpoint

*Preunderstanding*: preconceived ideas, whether conscious or unconscious, which can create a dangerous interpretation bias if we are *not aware of them* or *if we assume they are correct*

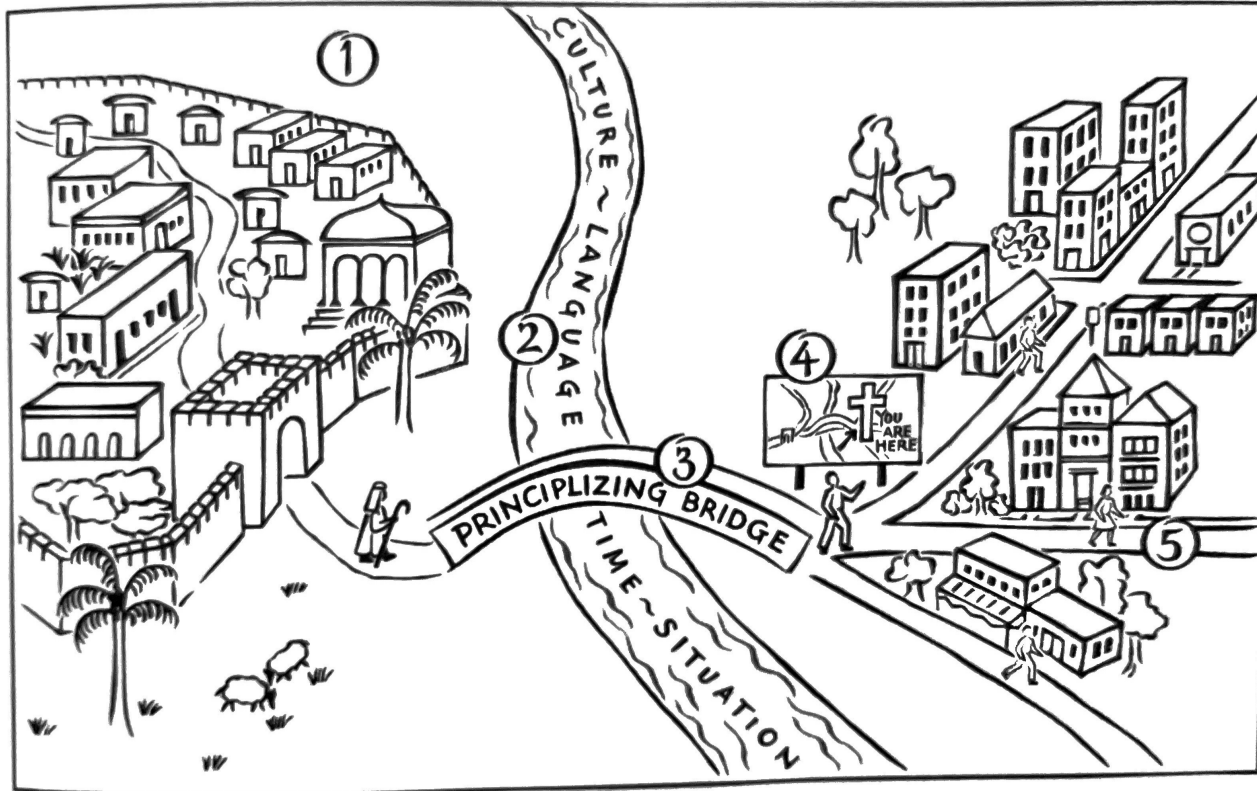
We either come to the Bible to *understand* it, or to *overstand* it

# What do we bring to the text?

Four dangers types of preunderstanding to be aware of:

- 1) A philosophical, theological, or social agenda
- 2) Familiarity
- 3) Culture
- 4) Family background

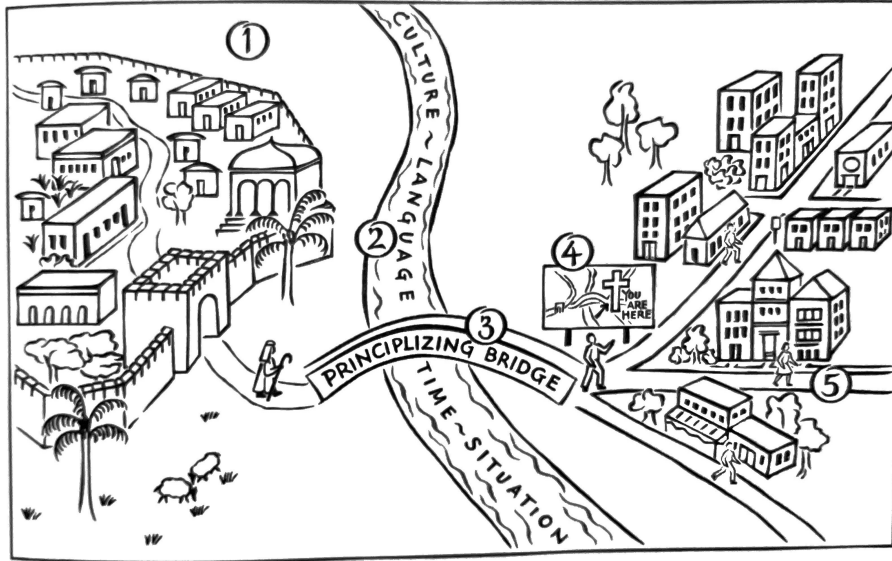
# The Interpretive Journey



# The Interpretive Journey

## Step 1: Grasping the text in “their town”

*What did the text mean to the biblical audience?*



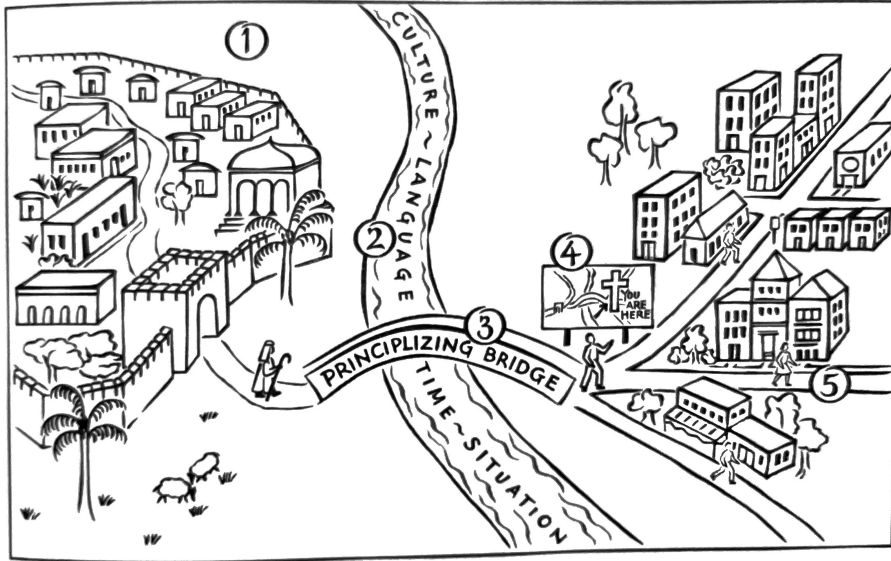
- What is the genre of the passage?
- What are some guiding principles for this genre?
- Where does this passage fit within the large, overarching story of the Bible?
- Read and observe the text carefully
- Synthesize the original meaning of the passage in one or two sentences
- What is the purpose of this truth? Why did God give it?



# The Interpretive Journey

## Step 2: Measuring the width of the “river of differences”

*What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?*

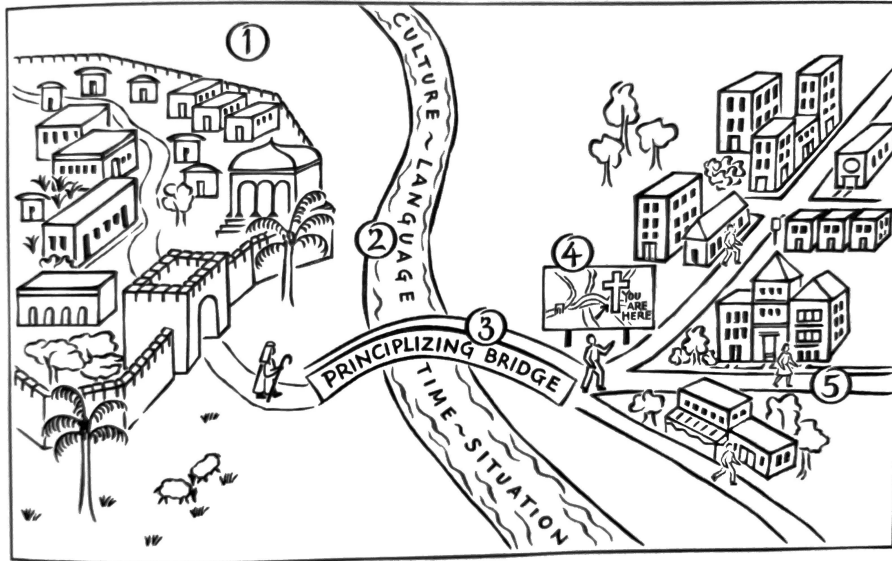


- Culture, language, situation, time, covenant?
- What are the similarities between the biblical audience and us?

# The Interpretive Journey

## Step 3: Crossing the “principlizing bridge”

*What is the theological principle in this text?*



-This principle is supplied by the meaning you grasped in “their town” but informed by the “river of differences” you measured in step two

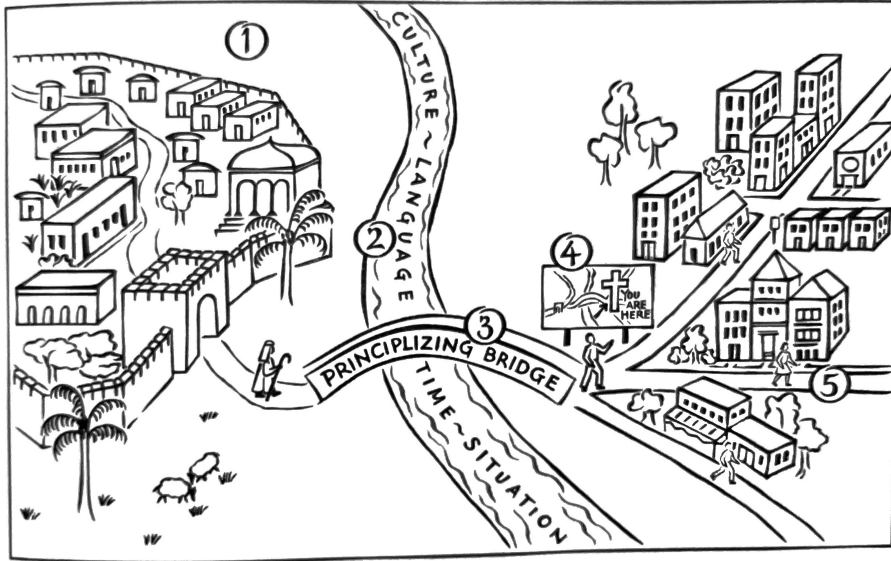
- It should be reflected in the text
- It should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation
- It should not be culturally bound
- It should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture
- It should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience

-This principle becomes the “principlizing bridge” for crossing river of differences

## The Interpretive Journey

### Step 4: Consulting the “biblical map”

*How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?*

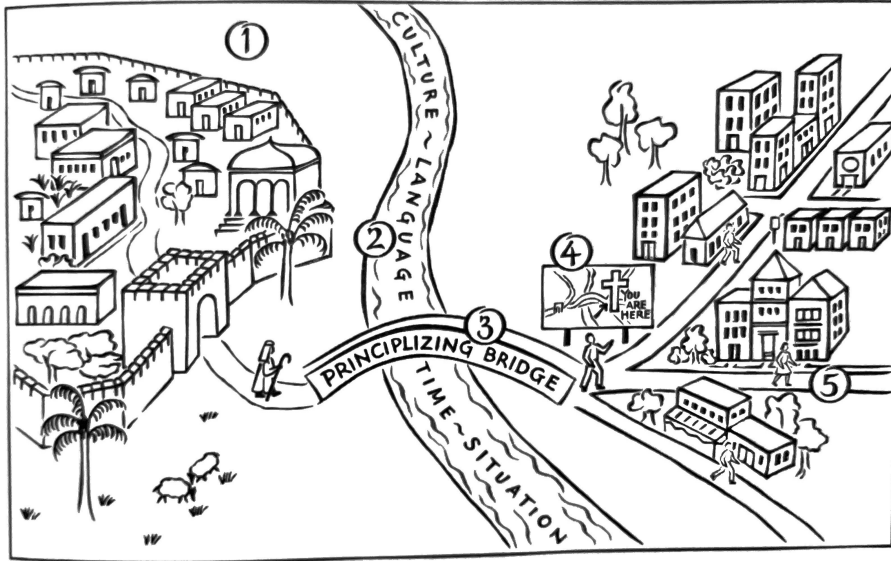


- Reflect back and forth between this teaching and rest of Scripture
- Is this teaching consistent with rest of Scripture?
- Do other portions of Scripture add insight or qualification to this principle?
- Reword your theological principle, if necessary, to ensure it fits with rest of Scripture

# The Interpretive Journey

## Step 5: Grasping the text in our town

*How should individual Christians today live out this theological principle?*



- How does it apply to real-life situations today?
- While there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principle in a single passage that is relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous applications of that principle in the lives of people