

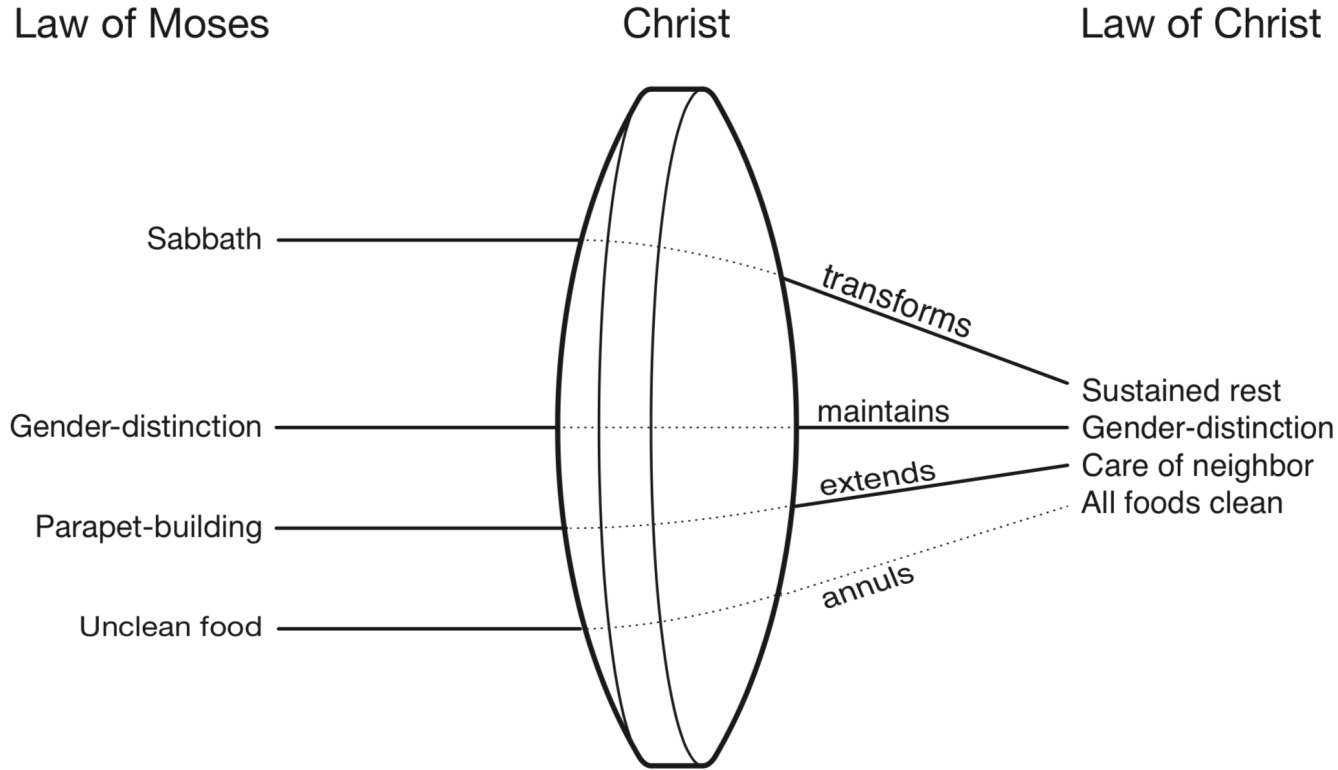


# ***Principles for Interpreting Scripture***

**Interpreting Old Testament  
Poetry, Wisdom Literature, and Prophecy**

**April 30**

# The “Lens of Christ”



# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

Over one-third of Bible would fall into category of poetry

Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Lamentations are largely poetic; poetry can be found within practically every OT book

Characteristics of Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Terseness
- 2) Structure
- 3) Figurative Language

## Genre: Old Testament Poetry

*Parallelism* is dominant structure of Hebrew poetry

- Text organized around poetic lines of verse; not sentences and paragraphs
- Author uses parallel structure to communicate how his thoughts fit together
- Typically, lines of text in units of two, although units of three and four can be found

## Genre: Old Testament Poetry

- <sup>1</sup> O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,  
nor discipline me in your wrath.**
- <sup>2</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;  
heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.**
- <sup>3</sup> My soul also is greatly troubled.  
But you, O Lord—how long?**

Psalm 6:1-3

# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

Types of parallelism:

## *Synonymous Parallelism*

-Second line repeats much the same idea as the first line, using similar terminology

**O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,  
nor discipline me in your wrath. (Ps. 6:1)**

# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

Types of parallelism:

*Developmental Parallelism*

-Second line develops further the idea of the first line

**Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean,  
but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.**

(Prov. 14:4)

# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

Types of parallelism:

## *Illustrative Parallelism*

-Second line illustrates by example or symbol the idea of the first line

**Lord, my Lord, the strength of my salvation,  
you have covered my head in the day of battle. (Psa. 140:7)**



# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

Types of parallelism:

*Contrastive Parallelism*

-Second line contrasts with idea of first line

**for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psa. 1:6)**

# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

*Acrostic* is an occasional structure of Hebrew poetry

- Each successive line of poetry starts with next letter of Hebrew alphabet

- Example: All...

Beautiful...

Christ...

Examples: Psalms 25, 34, 111, 112, 119, 145; Proverbs 31:10-31;  
Lamentations 1, 2, 3, 4

# Genre: Old Testament Poetry

## *Figurative Imagery*

-Old Testament poets “do not write essays; they paint pictures”...and the “paints” they use are figures of speech and wordplays

**<sup>1</sup> O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge;  
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,  
<sup>2</sup> lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,  
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver. (Psa. 7:1-2)**

# Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Poetry

- 1) Remember the way figurative language works
  - Authors convey “real thoughts, events, and emotions to us - *that is, literal truth* - but they express this truth figuratively.”
- 2) Identify each parallelism in given passage
- 3) Combine lines of parallelism into single thought or image
- 4) Study passage thought by thought
- 5) Identify and visualize figures of speech
- 6) Consider emotional world of image

# Genre: Old Testament Wisdom Literature

- Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

- Wisdom literature starts with the covenantal and theological underpinnings of Old Testament

- Overarching purpose of these books is to guide God-centered character development

- Vast majority of wisdom literature is poetic in nature

- Wisdom literature is *NOT* a collection of universal promises

# Genre: Old Testament Wisdom Literature

-Four books balance each other theologically and were designed to be read and understood together

*Proverbs* presents *rational, ordered norms of life lived in relationship to God and one another*

*Job* presents the exception that the righteous still suffer

*Ecclesiastes* presents exception that simply ordering one's life around way world generally works cannot give us ultimate meaning

*Song of Songs* presents exception of romantic love between husband & wife

# Principles for Interpreting Wisdom Literature

## General Principles:

-Wisdom literature starts with the covenantal and theological underpinnings of Old Testament

**“The reward for humility and fear of the Lord  
is riches and honor and life.” (Prov. 22:4)**

# Principles for Interpreting Wisdom Literature

## General Principles:

- Wisdom literature starts with the covenantal and theological underpinnings of Old Testament
- Wisdom literature is *NOT* a collection of universal truths; rather, this literature describes the way the world *generally* works, or exceptions thereto
- Use interpretive tools for poetry



# Principles for Interpreting Wisdom Literature

## Book-Specific Principles:

### *Proverbs*

-General nuggets of wisdom about way world *generally* works,  
*not* universal truths

### *Job*

-Interpret everything you read in light of last five chapters

# Principles for Interpreting Wisdom Literature

## Book-Specific Principles:

### *Ecclesiastes*

-Interpret everything you read in light of Ecclesiastes 12:13: **“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”**

### *Song of Songs*

-This is not an allegory but a collection of love poems between a young man and a young woman who openly and joyfully extol human sexuality as God designed it

# Genre: Old Testament Prophecy

“Major Prophets”: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel

“Minor Prophets”: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

*Primarily* a collection of short, spoken messages that were proclaimed by the prophet to either the nation of Israel or the nation of Judah

-May also contain visions, short narrative sections, and symbolic acts

## Genre: Old Testament Prophecy

<5% of prophetic literature foretells new-covenant age

<2% foretells Messiah

<1% foretells events still in our historical future

# Genre: Old Testament Prophecy

- Frequent use of poetry and figures of speech
- Not always arranged chronologically or thematically
- Repetitive thematic messages:

*1) You have broken the covenant; repent*

-Idolatry, social injustice, religious ritualism

*2) If you will not repent, you will face judgment*

-Assyria, Babylon, and exile from Promised Land

*3) Even in midst of judgment, God gives hope for a glorious future restoration*

-Return from exile, restoration, Messianic hope

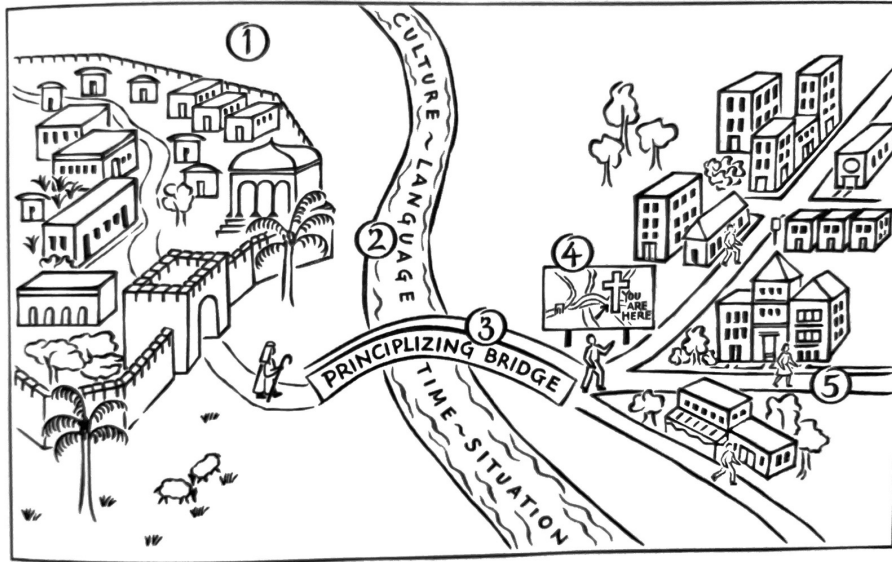
# Principles for Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy

- 1) Remember and apply interpretive tools for poetry
- 2) Remember historical-cultural and theological context
  - Sinaitic Covenant, Deuteronomy 28
- 3) Remember major thematic messages
  - You have broken the covenant; repent!
  - If you will not repent, you will face judgment
  - Even in midst of judgment, God gives hope for a glorious future restoration

# 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

# Literary Context

**“The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” (Isa. 1:1)**



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John Oswalt, “Though the Sinai covenant is not mentioned explicitly, it is everywhere assumed. It is the basis of the charges of rebellion, and it is the essential ground of the supposed relationship between God and Israel. The Davidic covenant is mentioned, and it is the foundation of the promises of the Messiah.”

# Literary Context

Oswalt on the major themes of Book of Isaiah: “On the thematic level, as with the figures, a recurring feature is the pairing of opposites, such as judgment and hope, servanthood and kingdom, trust and rebellion, and arrogance and humiliation. Other important themes are the uniqueness of Yahweh, righteousness, and the nations.”

Oswalt on the grand function of chapters 6-39, “In chapters 6–39, Isaiah is given a sweeping vision of God’s absolute superiority over the nations of the earth. All of history is in his hand, and he is able to deliver those who trust him out of the hands of the nations.”

# Historical-Cultural Context

-Geopolitical dynamics (Assyria and Egypt)

# Historical-Cultural Context

-Geopolitical dynamics (Assyria and Egypt)

Oswald on horses and chariots, “In the ancient Near East at this time, the horse and chariot were something like the ‘ultimate weapon’...These were the elite troops in the armies of the time. They were, of course, expensive to obtain and to maintain...But they were so desirable that even countries like Judah, whose hills and valleys meant chariotry was of limited usefulness, felt they had to have a chariot force...The Assyrian field commander’s sarcastic comment in 36:8 about the Assyrian king providing Judah with horses if they had men to ride them might be a way of saying that they were not trained in this latest tactical skill.”

- <sup>1</sup> Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help  
and rely on horses,  
who trust in chariots because they are many  
and in horsemen because they are very strong,  
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel  
or consult the LORD!
- <sup>2</sup> And yet he is wise and brings disaster;  
he does not call back his words,  
but will arise against the house of the evildoers  
and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.
- <sup>3</sup> The Egyptians are man, and not God,  
and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.  
When the LORD stretches out his hand,  
the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall,  
and they will all perish together.

<sup>4</sup> For thus the Lord said to me,  
“As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey,  
and when a band of shepherds is called out against him  
he is not terrified by their shouting  
or daunted at their noise,  
so the Lord of hosts will come down  
to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.

<sup>5</sup> Like birds hovering, so the Lord of hosts  
will protect Jerusalem;  
he will protect and deliver it;  
he will spare and rescue it.”

<sup>6</sup> Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel.  
<sup>7</sup> For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of  
gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

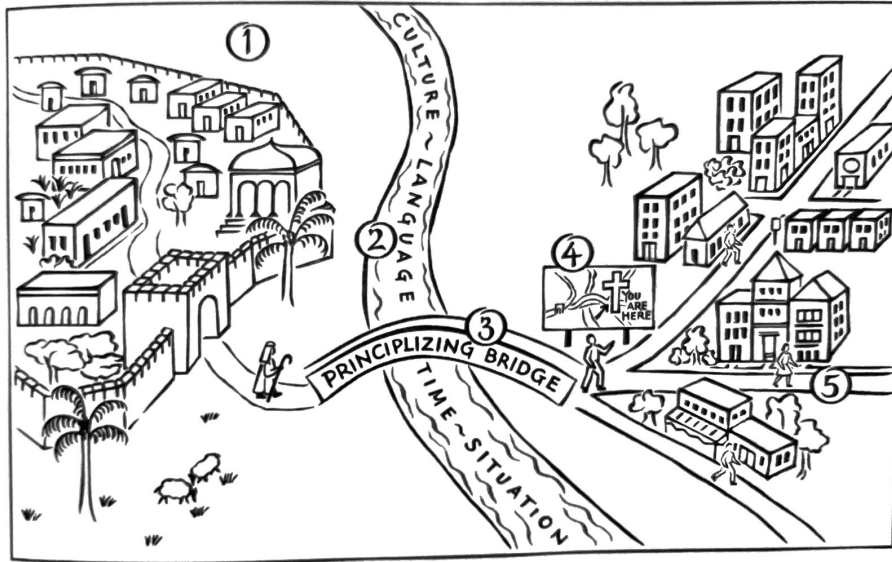
<sup>8</sup> “And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man;  
and a sword, not of man, shall devour him;  
and he shall flee from the sword,  
and his young men shall be put to forced labor.  
<sup>9</sup> His rock shall pass away in terror,  
and his officers desert the standard in panic,”  
declares the Lord, whose fire is in Zion,  
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 31:1-9

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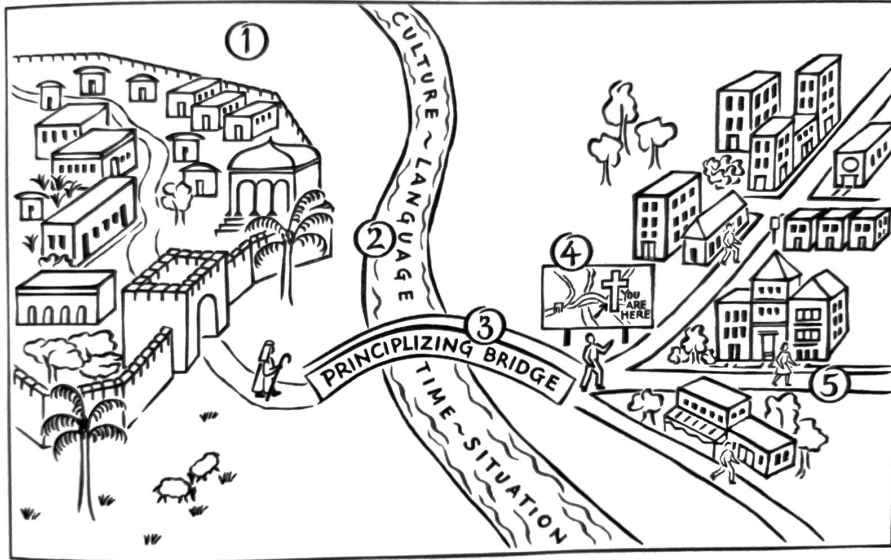


*God is absolutely supreme over Egypt and Assyria. Even the best-made battle plan, if it does not involve unwavering trust in Him and absolute allegiance to Him, will result in Israel's ruin. Israel must live by faith that He will protect and deliver her from her enemy, even in dire circumstances.*

# The Interpretive Journey

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

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

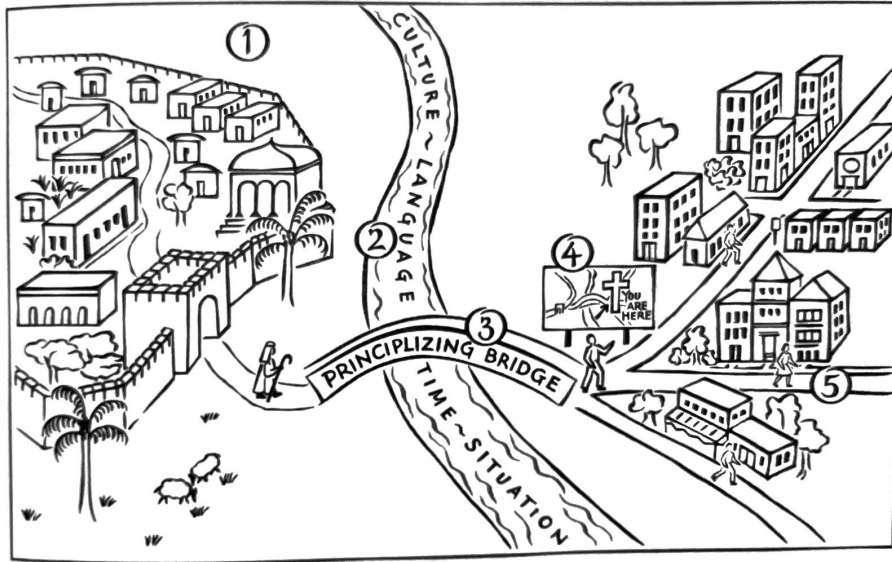


- Culture, language, situation, time, covenant?
- What are the similarities between the biblical audience and us?

# The Interpretive Journey

## Step 3: Crossing the “principlizing bridge”

*What is the theological principle in this text?*



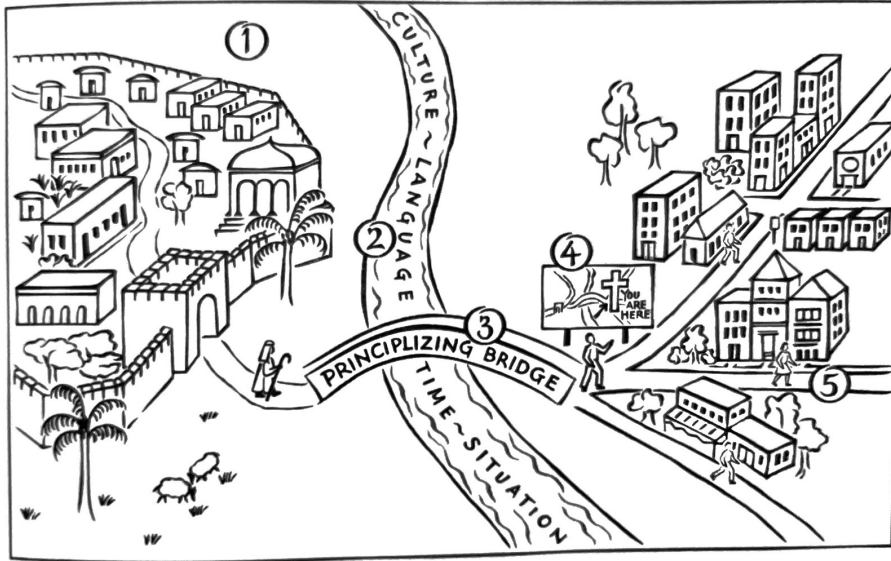
- What is the theological principle in this text?
  - It should be reflected in the text
  - It should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation
  - It should not be culturally bound
  - It should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture
  - It should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience
- This principle becomes the “principlizing bridge” for crossing river of differences

*God is the sovereign Lord over all things. He calls His people to trust in Him alone for salvation and life. Through the battles, He will preserve and protect those who trust in Him, but those who put their hope for salvation and life in lesser things will ultimately be brought to ruin.*

# 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 (Analogy 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

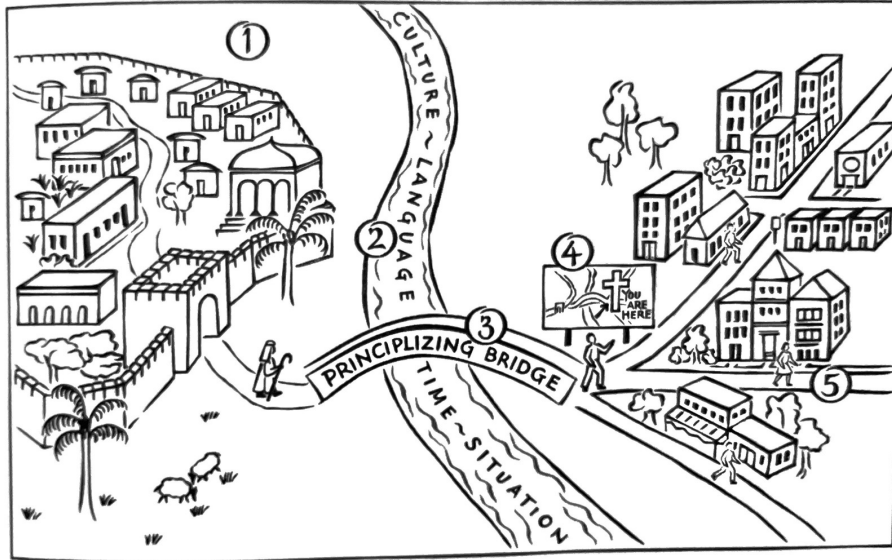
<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-38)

# 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