

## **Studying the Bible 1: The Interpretive Journey**

The goal – to grasp the meaning of the text that God has intended. We do not create the meaning; rather, we seek to understand the meaning that is already there. There may be several applications but there is only one meaning from which those applications come.

1. **Question 1: What did the text mean to the Biblical audience?**

The first step is to see as much as possible in the text. Look. Look, and look again. Study the historical and literary contexts. Also, see how the text you are studying fits into the passages before and after it. After completing this step, write the meaning of the passage for the biblical audience in 1-2 sentences in past tense. Be specific, do not generalize or apply yet.

2. **Question 2: What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?**

These could include culture, language, situation, time and covenant. For example, if you are studying an OT passage, be sure to identify those theological differences that come as a result of the life and work of Jesus Christ. Make a list of the differences but also consider the similarities as well.

3. **Question 3: What is the theological principle/truth of the text?**

After reviewing the differences and identifying the similarities, return to the meaning for the biblical audience in step 1 and try to identify the main theological message of the passage. It should be reflected in the text. It should be timeless, not culturally bound, and should correspond with the rest of Scripture. It will be relevant to both the biblical and contemporary audience. Write out the theological principle (or principles) in 1-2 sentences. Use present and future tense verbs. This is where the questions "What does this passage teach us about God and His Purpose?" or "How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?" come into the process.

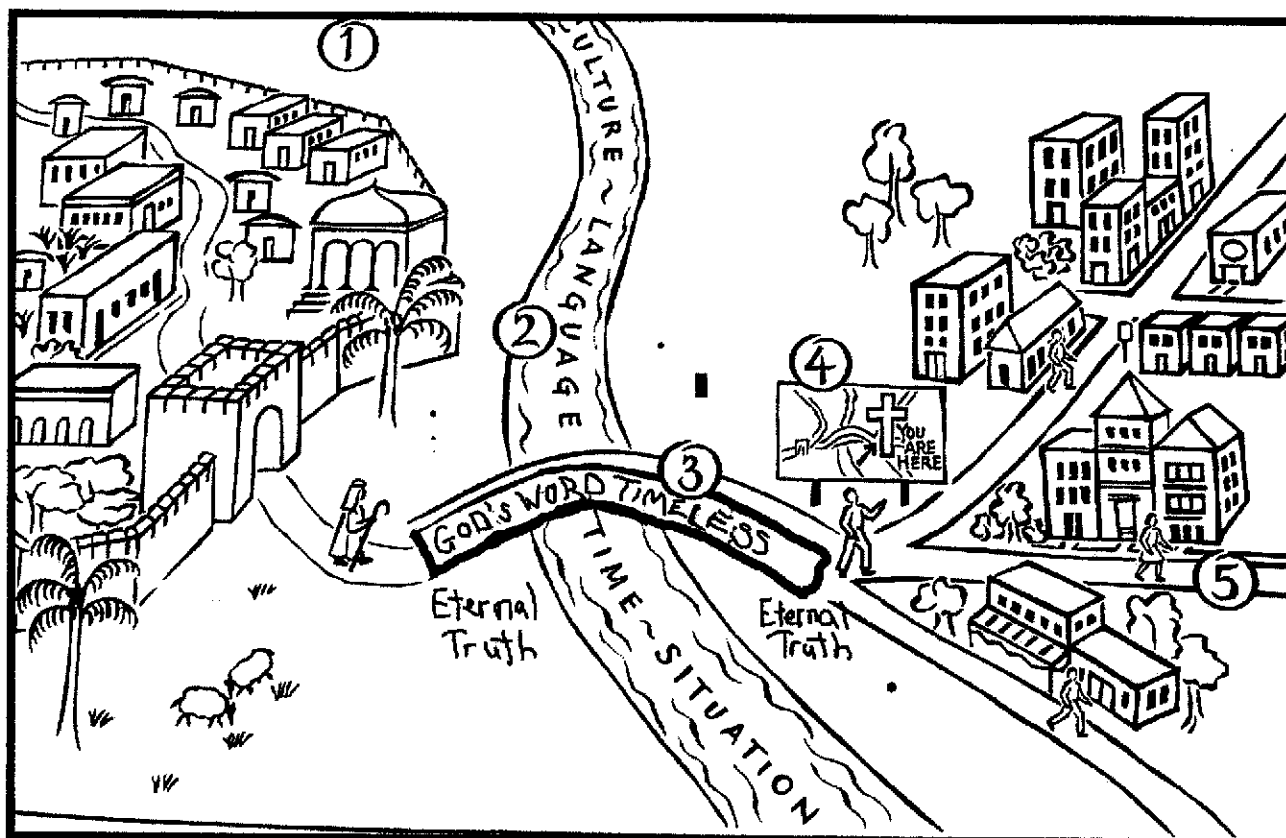
4. **Question 4: How do these theological principles/truths fit with the rest of the Bible?**

Is your principle consistent with the rest of Scripture? Do other parts of Scripture add insight or qualification to the principle? For example, if you are studying the OT, the NT will likely add insight since the mystery of Christ is now revealed. Fine tune your theological principle based on the rest of Scripture if needed. Cross references are used most heavily during this step in the process.

5. **Question 5: How should I live out and apply the text today?**

We must know grapple with how we should respond to the meaning of the text. How does it apply to real life situations today? While for each passage there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principles relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous application possibilities. This is because Christians today find themselves in many different specific situations. Each of will grasp and apply the text in slightly different ways, depending on our current life situation and where we are in our relationship with God.

**A Picture of the Interpretive Journey (adapted from *Grasping God's Word* by Duvall and Hays)**



1.

Start with the meaning for the original audience – observe, learn and look, look, look. Write it out in 1-2 sentences. Be specific – no generalizations or applications yet. Just the facts.

2. Identify the differences between the original audience and us (pictured as the river)
3. God's Word and is living and active – sharper than a two-edge sword. Its truths are timeless; the Spirit transforms us through all of Scripture. So, identify the Truth (or truths) in each passage that applies to all believers everywhere. Write this out.
4. Look to all of Scripture to see how it fits and learn from other passages that add insight or qualification.
5. What are specific ways you are called, convicted, and challenged to apply the truth of this passage to your life? Look to your heart knowing that Lord's desire is to grow us to be like Christ.
6. In prayer: Bring confession, repentance, and praise to God. His Word never returns void. 🙏