



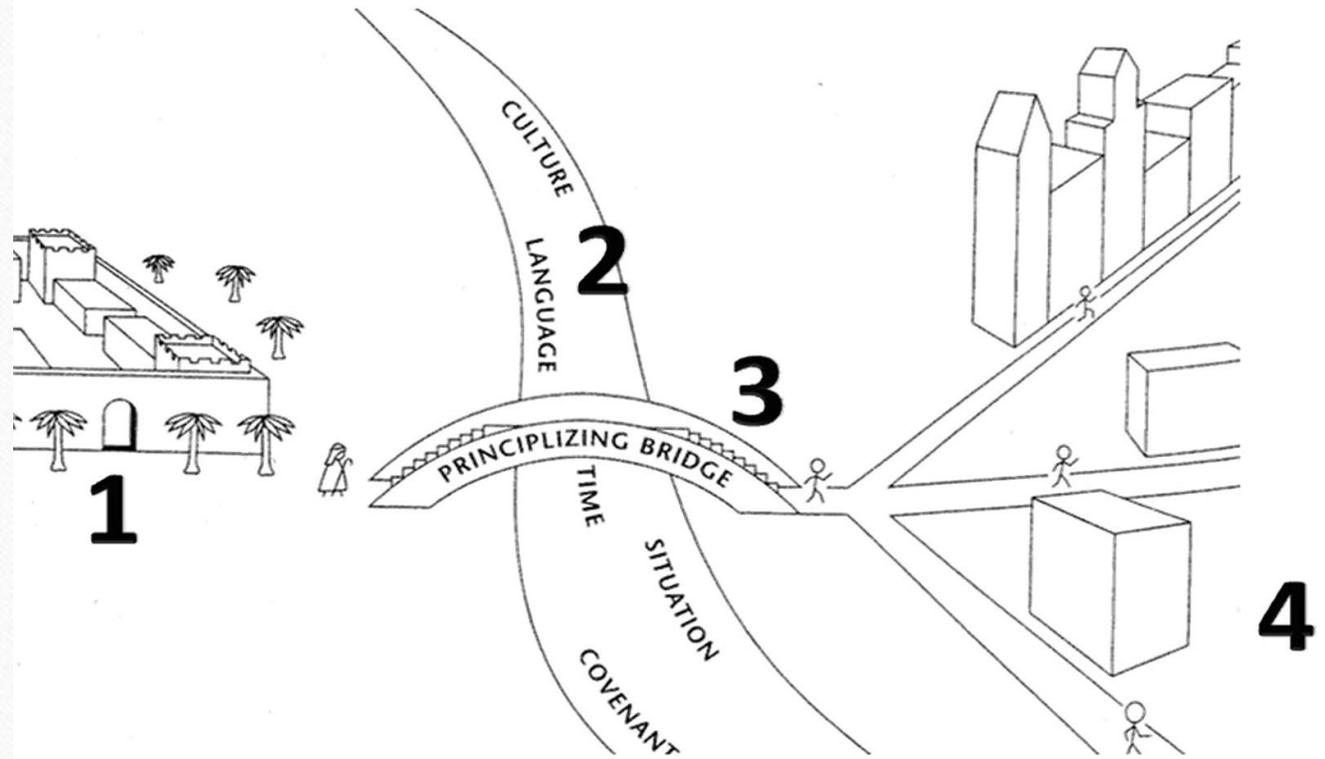
Interpreting the Bible

Hermeneutics for the Layperson

How to Interpret a Passage



1. What is the author's intended meaning for the original audience?
2. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?
3. What are the theological principals in this text?
4. How should Christians apply the theological principals today?



General Principals of Interpreting Scripture: Context



- Context Example #2: Rev 3:20

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

- Is this a good verse to use for evangelism? Why or why not?
- No!
 - The historical and grammatical context is directed towards a lukewarm first century church—i.e. believers that need to repent. Verse 19 says:
“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”
- Also, failure to consider context results in many misinterpreting ‘lukewarm’



Interpreting Rev 3:20 in Context of Rev 3:14-22



- Step 2: What are the differences between a first century church and us?
- Step 3: What are the theological principles this passage teaches that transcends the time difference?
- Step 4: How should we apply these principles today?

Step 2:

Is the Church Lukewarm Today?



- Fewer than 25% of Christians attend church weekly, and while reports vary – approximately 12% of Christians tithe regularly.
- About 25% of Christians who regularly attend worship read their Bible daily. About a third claim to read it “a few times a week”.
- Some studies have shown pornography use among Christians is similar to that of non-Christians (~65% men, 15% women), while 80% of Christians admitted to having sex outside of marriage.
- Approximately 26% of Christians have been divorced at least once and somewhere around 20% of Christians have had an abortion.
- Only about 10% of Christian children receive an explicitly Christian education.
- 51% of Christians believe that the theory of evolution is the best explanation for the origin of human life.

Source: Survey of multiple websites, data population is USA

Step 3:

Theological Principals that Transcend Time



- In the midst of an anti-Christian culture, we must guard against worldliness that leads us to live according to the rules of the surrounding culture—we are aliens in this world, called to be “other-worldly”
- If we fail to do this and grow “lukewarm,” Jesus will chasten us because He loves us
 - Matt 5:13 - You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.
- If we desire God’s blessing that comes from close fellowship with Christ, we must repent and be zealous for good works

Step 4:

What does Repentance from Lukewarmness Look Like?



- Do we pursue and promote personal piety and faithfulness?
 - Attend worship every Lord's Day unless providentially hindered?
 - Tithe faithfully?
 - Train our families in the faith?
 - Biblically address sin in our personal life and in the Church?

Step 4:

What does Repentance from Lukewarmness Look Like?



- Is our priority seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness, or is it seeking the comfort, pleasures, and wealth of this world?
- Do we confront the unjust systems and rulers of this world enforcing those systems, even if the status quo is to our own advantage?
- Are our hearts broken by the sin and brokenness in the world around us, and moved to give our lives in self-sacrificial love to fix it?
 - Are we willing to sacrifice our own wealth and comfort to rescue the abused, oppressed, and voiceless?
- And then finally, how do we in Trinity promote a return to faithfulness in the larger Evangelical Church?

General Principles

The Analogy of Faith (or, Scripture)



“The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself, and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 20.

- How might this principle apply to the story of Rahab in Joshua 6?
- In Josh 6, Rahab, a prostitute, lies to the city officials to protect the Israelite spies, which seems to break the 9th Commandment (Exod 20:16)
- In the NT, Rahab is depicted in a positive light as in the lineage of Christ (Matt 1:5) and a hero of faith (Heb 11:31, James 2:25)

How do we reconcile this?

Rahab: A Lying Prostitute or a Repentant Hero of the Faith?



- Regarding her life of prostitution, the passage implies that she repents and becomes a follower of God when she cuts the deal with the Israelite spies
- Regarding Rahab's lying, we observe that the situation is a time of war and in other Scriptures, deception is a valid wartime tactic for God's Army
 - Gideon and his 300 men blew trumpets, broke pitchers, and yelled to illicit fear in the heart of the Midianites, leading to a rout (Judges 7)
 - Joshua's feint to draw the army out of Ai (Josh 8)
 - David acting crazy before Achish (1 Sam 21:13)
 - Add to that the Egyptian midwives example (Ex 1)
- The Analogy of Scripture helps us to conclude that deception is allowed, and indeed necessary, in the protection of innocents

Learning the Rules of the Game: Literary Genres



- The 66 books of the Bible have several different forms of literary genre—these include:

- Narrative
- Law
- Poetry
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Prophecy
- Epistles

Note:

- Different types of literature can and do occur in the same book
 - What genre(s) do we find in the Gospels?

Different genres have different rules of interpretation

Learning the Rules of the Game: Narrative



- More than 43% of the Bible is written in narrative
 - God has chosen to reveal Himself and our redemption predominantly through story
- Narrative is a literary form that...
 - is characterized by sequential time action
 - involves plot, setting, and characters
- The meaning of a narrative...
 - derives primarily from the actions of the characters
 - shows us how to live or how not to live

We learn from narrative as we are pulled into the action of the story
“Jesus often taught by ‘showing’ with stories, then asking questions, rather than
‘explaining’ with analysis.” – David Gibson

Learning the Rules of the Game: Narrative (cont.)



- Recognize there are three levels of story in the Bible
 - The first level is the metanarrative of the God's overall storyline of creation, fall, and redemption
 - The second level is the account of God's chosen people
 - Covenantal view: One story about the Covenant of Grace, consummated in Christ and the Christian Church
 - Dispensational: Two overlapping stories: OT Israel, and the NT Church
 - The third level is the hundreds of individual narratives that feature dozens of individual people (Abraham, Daniel, Hezekiah, Peter, etc.)
 - These are real historical people these events actually happened to

Learning the Rules of the Game: Narrative (cont.)



- In narrative, discovering this “big-picture” is one of the important goals (i.e., connecting the three levels of story)
 - Deductive vs. Inductive reasoning
- God is always the main character and “hero” of every story (even when He doesn’t make much of an appearance, such as with Esther)
 - Though He shows up in Providence if not in name
- In every story, it is always appropriate to ask: What does this story teach about God? What is He communicating about Himself?

Some Useful Rules to Interpret Narrative



- Pay careful attention to the narrator (the one telling the story) in Scripture.
 - The narrator often gives hints or clues to help the reader know how to think about or interpret various events in the story
 - The narrator gives God's perspective on the story
 - The narrator speaks with divine omniscience. He knows (and often reveals) details about the story that even the characters in the story do not know about
 - Example: Job 1-2

10 Things to Remember when Interpreting Narratives



1. A narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine.
Example: Samson marrying the Philistine girl
2. A narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere
Example: Haman hanging on the gallows he built for Mordecai
3. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time
Example: Hosea, go take a harlot for a wife
4. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. In fact it is usually the opposite
Example: Achan hiding the booty, Peter denying Christ

10 Things to Remember when Interpreting Narratives (cont.)



5. Most characters in the Bible are far from perfect and their actions are too
Example: David
6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We should be able to judge this from what God has taught us elsewhere categorically in the Scriptures
Example: Solomon multiplying wives and building large reserves of gold
7. All narratives are incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given. What appears is what inspired the author to think important to let us know
Example: All

10 Things to Remember when Interpreting Narratives (cont.)



8. Narratives are not written to answer all of our theological questions. They have particular, specific issues in which they deal with, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere and in other ways

Example: Job

9. Narratives may teach explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually saying it)
10. In the final analysis, God is always the hero of all biblical narratives, and all narratives ultimately find their full purpose and meaning in Jesus.

Coming up (Three weeks left)



- Specific literary type interpretation rules
 - ~~Narrative~~
 - Poetry, Songs
 - Prophecy and Apocalyptic
 - Wisdom
- Bible Study Tools
- How can the layperson Be a Better Berean?