

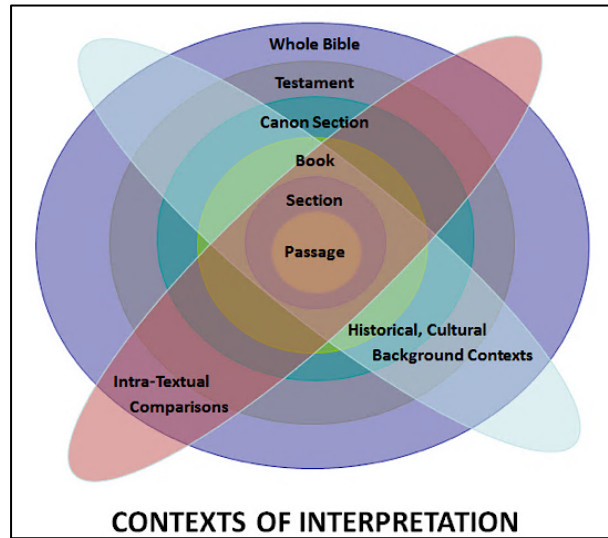
## Lesson 15: INTERPRETING IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT (part 1)

- I. **Using The Two-Lens Prescription:** The Grammatical-Historical Method is the best 2-lens prescription for reading the Bible clearly and accurately.
- A. The Grammatical side of the name refers to studying words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, sections, & books in their normal sense, in their own contexts, in the kind of literature in which they're found.
  - B. The Historical side of the name refers to studying the historical period of the writer (whether mentioned or not), cultural backgrounds, historical parallels, and the period of redemptive history.
    - 1. This side of biblical study covers much more than the history of Bible times. '
    - 2. It also includes historiography (approaches to history), geography, geology, meteorology, zoology, archaeology, & sociology.
  - C. The dominant eye must be the Grammatical lens since only the text of Scripture is inspired. If we must choose between the meaning of the words of Scripture versus the perspectives of historians, we must always side with the words of Scripture.
    - 1. Example: Bruce Malina is a renowned NT scholar and a proponent of Socio-Critical Hermeneutics. His studies have sometimes brought a fresh perspective to texts. But other times his emphasis on socio-cultural studies has become a monocle of sorts.
      - a. Consider how he treats **Luke 17:12-19**, the story of the ten healed lepers.

- b. He argues that there are social rules at play in the lepers' lack of thanks that should make us view them charitably.
  - c. He says that in that cultural setting, an honorable person does not thank an equal for services unless he plans to have no more dealings with him.
  - d. Malina explains the nine lepers did not return to thank Jesus because they might need Jesus' services again.
  - e. The last leper figures he will not have further contact with Jesus because he is a Samaritan and thus unlikely to develop an on-going relationship with Jesus, a Jew. Furthermore, he may have felt more confident that he was permanently healed.
2. This interpretation completely misses the significance of Jesus' disappointment with the nine ungrateful lepers.
- a. One of the great purposes of the Gospel of Luke is to show Theophilus that Jesus was the Savior of non-Jews as well as Jews.
  - b. Moreover, Malina's interpretation falls under its own weight because the lepers address him as "Lord" & do not consider him their equal.
3. While historical studies can inform the grammatical understanding of the text, they should never override the grammatical-literary understanding.
- II. **A Different Kind of Context:** The study of the historical-cultural context of Scripture is no less important than the study of the written context of the Scripture itself.

**A. Historical-Cultural Contexts** are of a different sort than literary contexts because they are largely extra-biblical.

1. They are no less vital to understanding the Scripture.
2. Just as the Spirit used human languages in which to reveal God's Word, so he also revealed that Word within human contexts which can be historically & culturally explored & understood.



**B. The Surprise of Cultural Differences:** "Do My Eyes Deceive Me?"

1. The more one realizes the difference between his own world and that of the biblical world, the more one experiences a kind of culture **shock**.
  - a. This sense is sometimes disconcerting. It sometimes undoes popular devotional understandings of verses.
  - b. In **Isaiah 40:31**, the prophet was not thinking that Israelites would "mount up with wings" of an American bald eagle. The bird he envisioned was likely the Griffon **Vulture**.



2. This sense of being a **foreigner** is actually a good place to begin. If one isn't aware of one's own pre-understandings, one will be more likely to import misconceptions into one's reading of the biblical text.

"To the extent that we seek to transport ourselves into the historical situation of the Bible writers and disengage ourselves from our own cultures, to that extent the likelihood of our being more accurate in interpreting the Bible increases." – Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 77.

3. Of course, the Bible teaches that there is a **commonality** that all humans share, and thus we have a kind of continuity with the people of the Bible. Some things are readily understandable to us.
4. On the other hand, the Bible understands that different people are somewhat different. For instance, Mark often explains Hebrew words & customs to its Roman readers who would otherwise not understand them.
  - a. Aramaic words are translated. **Mk 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36**
  - b. Jewish customs are explained. **1:21; 2:14, 16, 18; 7:2**
  - c. Latin expressions are used. **5:9; 6:27; 12:15, 42; 15:16, 39**
  - d. Palestinian Geography is detailed. **5:1; 6:53; 8:10; 11:1; 13:3**