

4 Steps to Biblical Interpretation

1. Identify the meaning in “their town”

Figure out what the text meant to the original audience. This is the boundary that determines the range of meanings and applications for us today, so it is important to get this step right. What was the situation in their town? Why did the author decide to communicate that point that way? You may need to consult commentaries or Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias to help complete this step. Pay attention to the literary context of your passage. Is the author building up to a main idea in the passages around yours?

2. Identify the differences between “their town” and “our town”

Populate the river, so use the analogy from the video. What differences are there between the biblical audience and us? Things to consider: time, location, geography, cultural customs, national infrastructure, communication methods, and even covenant (if you’re coming from an Old Testament passage).

3. Identify the Theological Principle

Build a bridge, so to speak, over the river. Figure out what similarities there are between us and them. What is the theological principle the author is trying to communicate that is not affected by the differences between us? Each passage will have one (or possibly two) main principle(s) that it is teaching. This principle should be stated in such a way that it would make sense to the original audience and your modern audience.

4. Apply the principle

Once you have done the heavy lifting of discovering the theological principle, the application should be relatively straightforward. Once we understand the principle the author was trying to communicate to his original audience, we can ask ourselves the question, “How can we apply that same principle in ‘our town’?” Our town is whatever the principle requires it to be – your church, family, town or personal life.

One final note (this was addressed in the beginning of the video. Find a translation that does a good job of staying as true to the text as possible and use that to study from (ESV, NIV, CSB). However, when you preach, please use a text that the students will be able to understand (NLT, CSB, NIV). If your students cannot understand the text, they will lose interest and will be hampered in their ability to apply the text accurately. Remember, the goal of our ministry is to equip these students to be ministers themselves (Eph 4).