

# Session Six

## I. LAW OF OBSERVATION

## II. LAW OF INTERPRETATION

### A. Literary Context

### B. Grammatical Context

### C. Cultural Context

- the Bible is historical (people, events)
- the Bible is geographical (places)
- the Bible is cultural (Ancient Near East...ca. 1400 BC - AD 100)

### **LAW 1**

What Do I See?

### **LAW 2**

What Does It Mean?

## Historical Toolbox

1. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Hays and Duval, eds.), Baker [Recent, helpful]
2. Norm Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the OT*, Wonder Book
3. Robert Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, Baker
4. *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (2 vols), Walvoord and Zuck, (eds.), Victor
5. [soniclight.com](http://soniclight.com) (search for Tom Constable notes on all the Bible—free download)

## Geographical Toolbox

1. *Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2 vols), W. Elwell (ed.), Baker
2. *NIV Atlas of the Bible*, C. Rasmussen, Zondervan
3. Bible Maps (in the back of most Bibles)

## Cultural Toolbox

1. Commentaries (books that explain the meaning of the Bible by referring to language, culture, history, theology, et al.—from easy to read to highly technical)
2. *IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Old and New Testament available), Keener (ed), IV Press

### III. CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### A. Historical

Much of the Bible is historical in nature...all of the Bible is set in an historical context (of some time period far removed from our present day).

See the previous page for resources that assist the serious student in historical background and interpretation.

#### B. Geographical

The drama of the Scripture story is played out on the “chessboard” of ancient Israel/the Middle East/the Greco-Roman empire.

Careful map work can aid the student in understanding.  
(see previous page)

#### C. Cultural

The language and social customs and patterns of Bible times are ancient, near-eastern in practice, not modern western.

Cultural factors must be understood to enrich Bible understanding. (see previous page)

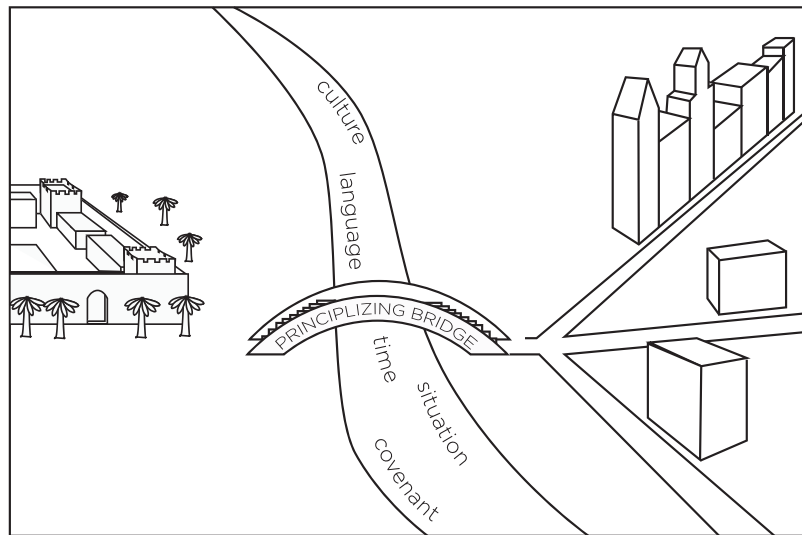
**HISTORY...**  
the God who acts

**GEOGRAPHY...**  
the chessboard upon  
which God acts

**CULTURE...**  
the milieu within  
which God acts

**James 1:22-25**

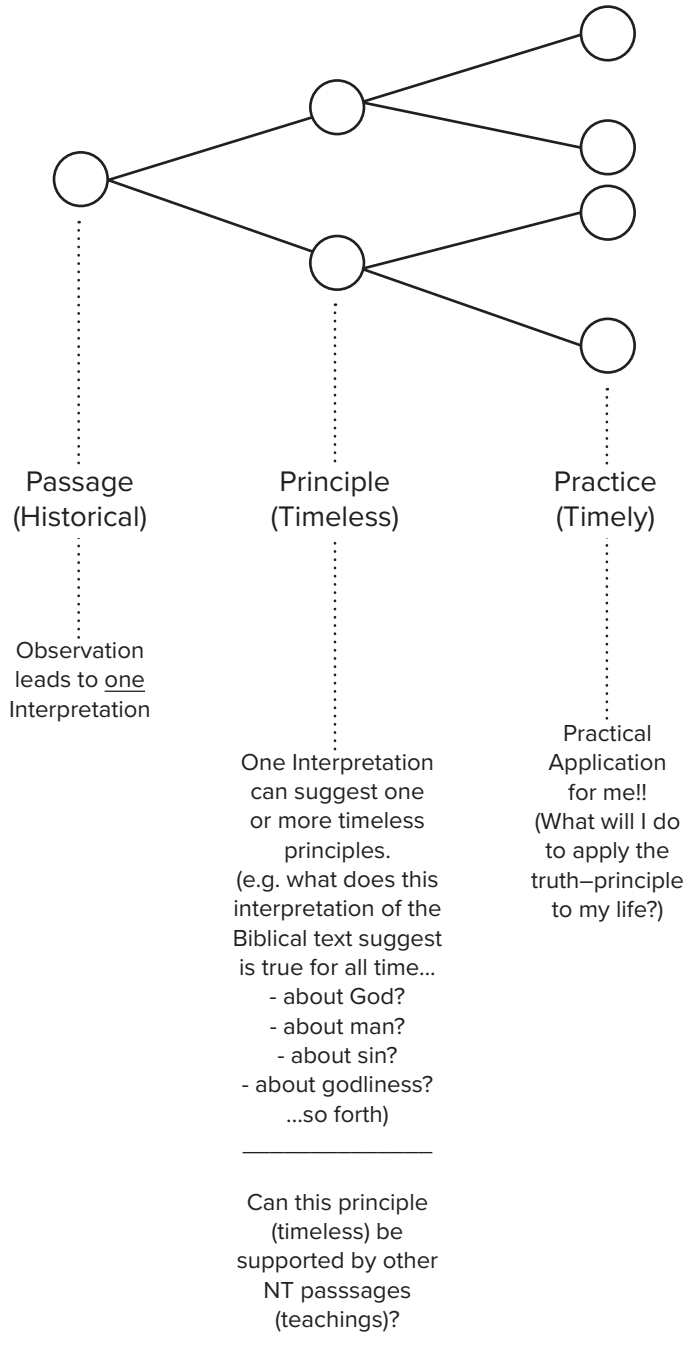
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup>Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.



Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 24

## IV. LAW OF APPLICATION

Consider what we've learned...



- One interpretation
- One or more principles
- Many applications

### Key Idea!

Not all of the Bible is addressed **to** me (interpretation); but all of the Bible is **for** me (application).

APPLICATION GRID			
Passage:			
Vv.	Truth About God	Truth About Others	Truth About Me
Practice:			

Practice on James 1:2-8

APPLICATION GRID			
Passage: James 1:2-8			
Vv.	Truth About God	Truth About Others	Truth About Me
Practice:			

# The Application Grid

...to help the student **apply** a Biblical “principle” (timeless truth), based upon a clear understanding of a Biblical “passage” (observation leading to interpretation), a helpful way to find a personal “practice” is to use an “application grid.”

Note the grid on the preceding page. This simple chart helps the student to personally think through principles-practices.

Try the exercise on **James 1:2-8**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,  
<sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

*<sup>4</sup>Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup>If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup>But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

*<sup>7</sup>That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup>he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

“Scripture was not given to increase our knowledge, but change our conduct.”

—ANDREW MURRAY

I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep your word.

—PSALM 119:101 NASB

Give me insight so I can do what you tell me—my whole life one long obedient response.

—PSALM 119 MSG

# The Student, The Fish, and Agassiz

by the student

**I**t was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well-grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.

“Now,” I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he took from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

“Take this fish,” said he, “and look at it; we call it a Haemulon (pronounced Hem-yúlon); by and by I will ask what you have seen.”

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

“No man is fit to be a naturalist,” said he, “who does not know how to take care of specimens.”

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all

the old students will recall the huge, necklace glass bottles and their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a, cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor why had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish was infectious; and though this alcohol had “a very ancient and fishlike smell.” I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed when they discovered that no amount of Eau de Cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, I found my specimen to be dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting spell, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around, looked it in the face-ghastly; I looked at it from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters’ view-just as ghastly. I was in despair.

*Continued on page 88*



## V. LAW OF CORRELATION

The Law of Correlation speaks of comparing Scripture to Scripture.

This acts as a check-and-balance to our “tentative” interpretations; as such, correlation occurs all along the Bible study process.

Some call this phase, “doing theology.”  
How do other portions of Scripture add to or clarify our tentative interpretations?

Note the chart on Systematic Theology and the various doctrinal components. This discipline attempts to “systematize” all that the Scriptures teach about a particular subject.

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### SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

- I. Doctrine of the Bible
- II. Doctrine of God
- III. Doctrine of Angels, Demons, Satan
- IV. Doctrine of Man
- V. Doctrine of Sin
- VI. Doctrine of Christ
- VII. Doctrine of Salvation
- VIII. Doctrine of Holy Spirit
- IX. Doctrine of the Church
- X. Doctrine of the Last Things

### **Systematic Theology:**

a branch and discipline of Biblical studies that arranges and systematizes truth in selected categories (e.g. the Biblical doctrine or teaching about man... et al.)

### **“We Believe”**

(Survey of Theology)  
...is a Core Training class taught by The Training Center.

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At an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, I carefully replaced the fish in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation looked at it again. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish-it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me-I would draw the fish-and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

"That is right," said he, "a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked." With these encouraging words he added, "Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me: the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body.

When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment, he said, "You have not looked very carefully. And he continued, more earnestly, "You haven't seen one

of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again! Look again!" And he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and then, towards its close, the professor inquired, "Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied, "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you then, before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting. Not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring. Here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he

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## VI. LAW OF COMMUNICATION

### **Ezra 7:10**

*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

“Teach” means to communicate. Sharing the fruit of your Bible study with others brings at least eight positive results:

1. It “fleshes out” the truth of Scripture for others.
2. It clarifies and personalizes the truth within us.
3. It motivates us for further study.
4. It checks us against unbiblical thinking.
5. It builds and bonds friendships
6. It plants seeds of truth in other’s lives.
7. It turns us outward (not inward) in our life experiences.
8. It enlightens others in unlearned areas.

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.  
—ACTS 8:30-31

N.B. Thanks and a tip of the hat to Stephen R. Graves for these eight benefits.

had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically, as he always did, upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said, and then left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good, that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so, for three long days he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had, a lesson whose influence has extended to the details of every subsequent study. It was a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, a legacy of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

A year afterwards, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts upon the blackboard. We drew prancing starfishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydro-headed worms; stately crawfishes standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The professor came in shortly after, and was as much amused as any at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

“Haemulons, everyone of them,” he said, “Mr. \_\_\_ drew them.”

True; and to this day, if I attempt to draw a fish, I can draw nothing but Haemulons.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the

first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and difference between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves. The odor had become a pleasant perfume, and even now the sight of an old, six-inch, worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!

The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought into view; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz’s training in the method of observing facts and their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

“Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.” At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

—Appendix *American Poems* (probably Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Co. 1880). From *Independent Bible Study* by Irving L. Jensen. Copyright © 1963 by Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Used by permission.