situations in the near future; and epideictic passages either celebrate or condemn someone in order to seek assent from the audience regarding a particular value. Speakers or writers would often interweave such patterns into their larger work. Philippians could be called primarily a judicial work in that it castigates many arrogant individuals in the church (2:1-18; 4:2-3) and the Judaizers (3:1—4:1), but it contains epideictic material in 2:19-30 and deliberative passages in 1:27-30 and 4:4-9.

The question is not simply the situation or problem behind the passage. It is the rhetorical statement of that issue and controls the development of the text. Watson (1988:11-13) speaks of "stasis theory" (stemming from Quintillian) as the means of defining the question more closely. There are three stases: fact (whether a thing is), definition (what a thing is) and quality (what kind of thing it is). One must determine how many questions are addressed in a passage and what type of questions are involved. In the case of the Judaizers of Philippians 3:1—4:1, the student will note Paul's queries regarding the fact of their teaching and its quality (that it constituted false teaching).

4. Analyze arrangement, technique and style. The arrangement of the material in the macro structure is the next important aspect. How do the various rhetorical segments achieve their desired effect? What persuasive purpose is seen as the writer creatively weaves the various parts together? The task is not only to determine the structural configuration of the text but also the writer's strategy behind that configuration. The rhetorical effect is created not only by the proofs utilized but by the way they are arranged. This is an essential component of the techniques used by the author. The basics of arrangement have already been discussed, and here the goal is to see what creative patterns have been used and what intended effect is envisaged. Style refers to the artistic arrangement of linguistic devices in order to enhance the intended effect. The goal of style is to induce pleasure, attract interest and persuade the reader. This includes not only the literary devices in chapter one, or the figures of speech in chapter four, but also the disposition of these in the whole structure of the developing argument. The choice of words, the metaphors and syllogisms artfully arranged, the examples and allusions presented, all figure in the style of the author. It is the task of the rhetorical critic to determine not only the what but the why of the individual style of a passage, not only what is said but why it is said, that is, the goal of the whole.

5. Evaluate rhetorical effectiveness. This does not mean simply to judge whether the argument was good or bad. Kennedy (1984:38) means by this that the critic must re-examine each step of the process and see if the critical study properly evaluated the audience, the problem and the rhetorical means used by the author in accomplishing his goal. Note how the author moved from the statement of the problem to the rhetorical solution. What implications did the passage have for the author and the audience? What is the overall impact of the passage not only upon the original readers but also upon the modern reader? In this latter sense one moves from meaning to significance, for rhetoric has a timeless quality which speaks crossculturally in many different situations.[24]

5

Historical & Cultural Backgrounds

HISTORICAL-CULTURAL EXEGESIS DIFFERS FROM HISTORICO-CRITICAL STUDY IN THAT IT applies background data to a passage in order to understand better its meaning, but does not use it in order to determine the authenticity or editorial expansion of that text. Since Christianity is a historical religion, the interpreter must recognize that an understanding of the history and culture within which the passage was produced is an indispensable tool for uncovering the meaning of that passage. "History" is the diachronic aspect, relating to the milieu within which the sacred writers produced their works; it refers to the events and times within which God's sacred revelation is couched. "Culture" is the synchronic aspect, referring to the manners, customs, institutions and principles that characterize any particular age and form the environment within which people conduct their lives.[1]

Biblical literature has two dimensions: historical intentionality, in which the author assumes certain shared information with the original readers; and literary intentionality, in which he encodes a message in his text. Authors either address (prophetic and epistolary literature with a present historical thrust) or describe (historical narrative with a past historical thrust) background situations. In both of these cases there are "shared assumptions" between the author and the original readers, information not found in the text, data that they knew but we do not. While semantic research and syntactical analysis can unlock the literary dimension, background study is necessary in order to uncover that deeper level of meaning behind the text as well as within it.

The primary tool for uncovering this data is archaeology. However, its relevance for hermeneutics has been debated. It is quite common to use it primarily for apologetic purposes to "prove" the authenticity of the biblical account. Indeed, there is some value in the use of archaeology for confirming the veracity of the biblical record. The classic example is of W. M. Ramsay *(St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen),* the great historian and agnostic whose study of the archaeological evidence behind Luke-Acts led to his conversion. For instance, recently acquired knowledge of the history of the second millennium B.C. and of seminomadic movements in the ancient Near East has lent greater authenticity to the patriarchal narratives. LaSor, Hubbard and Bush (1982:102-7) summarize the evidence: (1) the names of the patriarchs fit the late second millennium but

not the first millennium; (2) Abraham's journey from Ur to Haran to Canaan fits the geographical and political conditions of the period; (3) the pastoral nomadic lifestyle of the patriarchs fits the cultural and topographical features of the period; (4) social and legal customs described in the biblical text accurately reflect the period in which the Bible sets them; (5) the portrait of patriarchal religion is authentic, especially the relationship between the patriarchs and local shrines and the portrayal of God as the personal God of the clan and not just as the God of the sanctuaries (as among the Canaanites). Nevertheless, there is great danger in using archaeology for apologetics. It is a two-edged sword. Jericho provides an excellent example. On the basis of John Garstang's excavations of 1930-36 evangelicals have argued that archaeological evidence indicates that the walls did indeed fall outward. Yet some today seem still unaware that Kathleen Kenyon's work of 1952-58 demonstrated that Garstang's fortifications actually stemmed from an earlier period, namely an early Bronze Age city destroyed by an earthquake and fire about 2300 B.C. (rather than the 1400 B.C. date of Garstang). To date, there is an absence of evidence for the biblical story regarding the walls of Jericho. This does not disprove the biblical data (see Dumbrell 1985:130-39) but does provide serious problems for an apologetic use of archaeology. We dare not reach too hasty conclusions as to the relevance of archaeological discoveries. Often the problems outweigh the solutions, and it is dishonest to use a tool only when it supports us and to neglect it when it does not.

Yamauchi discusses the "fragmentary nature" of archaeological evidence (1972:146-58). In a series of descending spirals, he studies the extent of the evidence that is available to us.

1. Only a very small fraction of what was made or written has survived, due to the erosion of the material by natural forces (wind, rain, soil) and the destructive nature of humans. In addition, site after site has been denuded when inhabitants have stolen priceless artifacts.

2. Only a fraction of available sites have been surveyed. Mound upon mound lies unnoticed in Greece or Syria. For instance, in Palestine alone the number of sites rose from 300 in 1944 to 5,000 in 1963 to 7,000 by 1970.

3. Of those surveyed only a fraction have been excavated. Of the 5,000 in Palestine in 1963 only 150 had been excavated in part and only 26 had become major sites.

4. Only a fraction of an excavated site is ever examined, due to the unbelievable costs involved and the amount of time required. Yadin estimated it would take 800 years to clear Hazor, a site of 175 acres. Some cities are small (Jericho comprises 7 acres and Megiddo 13) but many others are quite large. Babylon, with 2,500 acres, would take 8,000 years to excavate entirely! This can lead to skewed results. For instance, from 1894 to 1963 there was no evidence for a Bronze Age existence at Ephesus. Then in 1963 Turkish engineers building a parking lot found a Mycenaean burial ground. Few archaeologists are willing to make categorical judgments on the basis of an absence of data.

5. Only a fraction of the discovered material has been published. Important finds may languish in the basement of a museum for 50 to 75 years. For instance, 25,000 cuneiforms have been unearthed at Mari but to date only 3,500 to 4,000 have been published. Too many scholars have rushed new discoveries into print only to be embarrassed when later

studies have proved them wrong. Caution is the watchword!

Yamauchi estimates that being supremely optimistic we could have 1/10 of the material in existence, 6/10 of that surveyed, 1/50 of that excavated, 1/10 of that examined, and 1/2 of that published. This means that we have only .006 per cent of the evidence. One could become extremely pessimistic about the value of archaeology were it not for several compensating factors. We do not need complete evidence when studying customs. The more evidence we have, the more certain the conclusions, but even a few pottery shards depicting, for instance, the dress of the Egyptians will suffice to demonstrate such domestic customs. Yamauchi gives us a helpful discussion on methodology (1972:158). He divides evidence into three categories: traditions (written or oral evidence from Herodotus, Homer, the Old Testament and other sources), material remains (pottery, debris and so forth) and inscriptional evidence. Conclusions are stronger when there is overlapping evidence from more than one source (see figure 5.1).

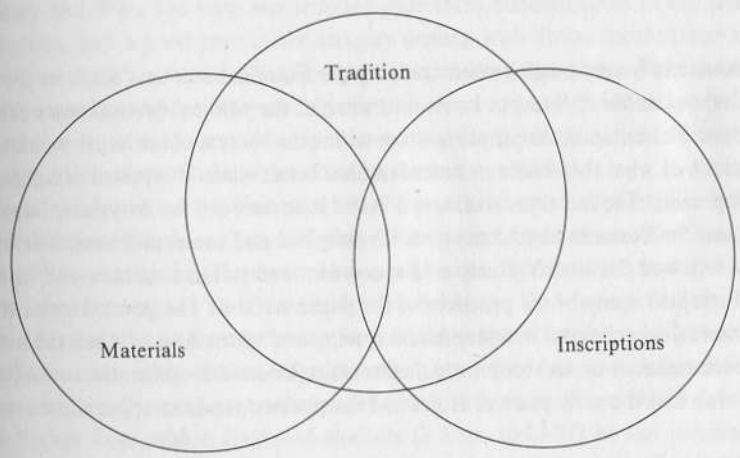

Fig. 5.1. Overlapping Sources of Archaeological Evidence.

This also means that the primary value of archaeology is descriptive (providing background material) rather than polemical (apologetics). It is too uncertain in its results to be used primarily in the latter. Certainly I do not mean that it is useless in apologetics, for it can affirm the basic veracity of John's or Luke's historical and geographical references. However, its major contribution is in providing sociological information so that the modern reader can better understand the milieu within which the biblical passage or event developed.

Areas for Research

1. Geography. The movements of peoples and topography of the land can add marvelous insights to the study of a passage. As Beitzel points out, "history itself in many respects is inseparably bound by and subject to the limitations of geography. Geography is an impelling force that both initiates and limits the nature and extent of political history,

what we might call geopolitics" (1985:2). Beitzel mentions two biblical examples (pp. 102, 170).

First, an analysis of the conquest of Canaan shows that all the cities overrun lay in the highlands, while the plains and valleys, where Canaanite chariots could turn the tide of any battle, remained outside her control. Interestingly, in the 1967 Six-Day War Israel reconquered almost exactly the same territory (see the map on p. 103, which visualizes and traces the modern conquest in 1967 alongside the ancient conquest under Joshua). Even with the millennia in between and immense technological changes, geography still dictates military conquest. Second, Jesus' choice of Capernaum for his Galilean headquarters may well have been due partly to geographical factors. The city lay on the "Great Trunk Road," or major trade artery, that linked Egypt and Mesopotamia. The cosmopolitan nature and international flavor of Capernaum made it a natural center for Jesus' forays into Galilee and Trans-Jordan as well as a place of preparation for the universal mission.

2. Politics. It is very helpful when studying the historical accounts (such as the history of Israel or the life of Jesus) to know something of the political developments behind the accounts. For instance, the prophets wrote within the context of the larger political arena, and much of what they said can be understood better when interpreted in light of those developments. The fact that Israel was a buffer state between the Assyrians, Babylonians and then the Persians created many of the religious and social problems. For instance, Ahab followed Solomon's practice of syncretism and political treaties and under him Israel adopted many of the practices of the pagan nations. The governmental structure had increasingly changed to a semifeudal system, and by the time of Ahab the monarchy had been replaced by an absolutistic dictatorship. Under this system the social justice of the Torah and the early years of Israel had disappeared, and the upper classes exploited the poor.

3. Economics. Every culture may be defined somewhat on the basis of its socioeconomic situation. There are several difficulties, however, in tracing the economic background of any given era. One must study long periods of time and generalize when specific practices probably differed slightly from period to period. It is too easy to apply practices seen at Mari or Ugarit, for instance, to Israel or Canaan. Moreover, it is quite difficult to make a qualitative analysis of the trade situation during the time of Solomon or of Christ when one does not possess specific quantitative data on the movement of materials or artifacts. Since the evidence (wood, textiles, dyes, spices) did not survive and since few accounts have been found (Yamauchi estimates there were twenty-four *million* meters of papyri used for temple records but only twenty-five meters have survived), this is very difficult to trace. However, the evidence we do possess is highly illuminating.

The development from the seminomadic economy of the patriarchs to the agrarian economy of early Israel to the mercantile economy of Solomon and the cosmopolitan situation during the Graeco-Roman period helps us to understand details in the text. For instance, Beitzel theorizes that Egypt did not intervene while Israel was conquering the highlands of Canaan because her trade routes through the Canaanite plains were never threatened (1985:102). As a further example, Elliott argues that the recipients of 1 Peter were resident "aliens" (1:17; 2:11) who were not allowed to own land and were restricted to tilling the land or working in local trades (1981:677-73). Rome's urbanization program had failed in Asia Minor, and the province was predominantly rural. This was an economically depressed area, and the economic factors probably contributed to the oppression of the saints, the focal point of the Epistle. Since their conversion had forced a further break with previous alliances, the situation of the Christians was doubly difficult. While I would question the extent to which *paroikos* ("alien") and *parepidēmos* ("stranger," 1:1) are intended to be socioeconomic descriptions rather than spiritual metaphors (for those who are spiritually alienated from society), the material Elliott provides adds depth to an understanding of 1 Peter.

4. Military and War. The term *war* is found over three hundred times in the Old Testament alone, and a good part of the imagery dealing with divine succor (God as our "refuge," "strength" or "present help") stems from military metaphors. Palestine's position as the sole land-bridge between Africa and Eurasia meant that for reasons of trade routes and strategic military position it was essential for powerful nations to control it. No other portion of real estate in the world has been so embattled.

It is interesting to trace the history of Israel from a military standpoint. For instance, Abraham's defeat of the four kings with only 318 men (Gen 14) has been called impossible from a military standpoint. However, Abraham chose to fight in the canyons of Mount Hermon near Damascus ("Dan" in 14:14 is probably the Dan-Jaan of 2 Sam 24:6 in northern Peraea), and in the narrow confines of the gorges a small but well-trained and mobile force has a distinct advantage. Another interesting fact is that Israel did not become a technically competent military force until Solomon. When David defeated a sizable Syrian force with a thousand chariots (2 Sam 10:17-21) he did not keep the chariots, probably because he felt they would do his forces little good. This is startling in light of the fact that for centuries chariots had been the prime military weapon. However, it was not until Solomon that chariots became common in Israel (1 Kings 10:26). Israel still controlled the highlands rather than the plains and this dictated their strategy. They won victories on the basis of superior tactics and primarily through divine intervention.

5. Cultural Practices.

a. *Family customs,* such as marriage ritual or educational practices, are critical. For instance, Israel practiced "endogamy," with marriage to non-Israelites excluded. This was true even in the patriarchal period (Gen 24:4; 28:1-2). Great stress was placed upon ancestry, for it became crucial to ensure the purity of family lines. Also, ancient education was geared to preserving the scribal and ruling classes, with the emphasis upon rote memory and imitation. For the Hebrews, however, this was a religious duty required of all and the daily life of the family was conceived as an instrument of religious education. Parents gave their children religious, moral and vocational training. The home was the

focus until the postexilic period when synagogues took on an educational function. Elementary schools began in the first century B.C., with children (that is, sons) beginning between the ages of five and seven.

b. *Material customs* (homes, dress) can also provide valuable information. For instance, Israelite villages throughout the Old Testament period were constructed of inferior materials and workmanship. The architectural masterpieces of Solomon, Omri or Ahab were all constructed by Phoenicians. Otherwise, a rough rural architecture predominated. Most homes were simple one-story affairs, small rectangular or square buildings with dirt floors and with mud-brick walls sealed by layers of mortar and whitewash. They were restricted to a size of about ten-feet square because they had not learned to "vault" (laying stones side by side in a diagonal direction); the ability of the Canaanites to do this intimidated the spies in Numbers 13:28. They had few lamps; since oil was expensive the average family would have one, usually set in a niche in the wall or on a "bushel" or grain-measure turned upside-down to use as a table (see Mt 5:15). Roofs consisted of beams over which were laid branches or reeds, then packed dirt. Grass often grew upon it (Ps 129:6; Is 37:27). Wealthier homes had Hellenistic tile roofs (Lk 5:19) and, since they were flat, families would often rest there or entertain friends there.

c. *Everyday customs* affect far more passages in Scripture than one would think. Even daily hygiene was more a religious custom than a personal one. As described in Mark 7:3-4 the Jews would dip their hands if remaining home but immerse and wash them thoroughly if they had been to the marketplace (where they could have come in contact with Gentiles). While the Romans were clean-shaven, the Jews let their beards grow but had to keep them trimmed. Young men liked to wear them long and curled, with special pride in thick, abundant hair (Song 5:11; 2 Sam 14:25-26). In fact the cry to Elisha, "Go up, bald head" (2 Kings 2:23), may have been a curse rather than just mockery, since baldness led to suspicion of leprosy.

d. *Athletics and recreation* form an important part of the leisure time of any people, and this is true in biblical times as well. Athletic prowess in the ancient world was closely tied to the military. The "mighty men" of Israel were famed for their swiftness (1 Chron 12:8) and strength (Samson). While there are no Old Testament references to games, archaeology has uncovered several; for instance, a game with pegs and a board similar to cribbage (one such with fifty-eight holes has been found at Megiddo). A game with dice played at Sumer has actually been reproduced and sold in stores under that name. Paul is the sacred writer who uses the imagery most consistently. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he juxtaposes two events, the foot race with an emphasis on the goal and prize (vv. 24-26a) and boxing with a defensive emphasis upon avoiding blows (vv. 26b-27a). Paul demands rigorous discipline and training so as to win the laurel wreath (v. 25) and avoid defeat (v. 27b).

e. *Music and art* are among the noblest of human endeavors, expressing the deep sensibilities of the soul. It is obvious why worship became one of the primary functions of music. However, this is one of the more difficult aspects to trace, for musical scores have not survived the ravages of time (indeed, music was taught orally without actual "scores"), and we have to divine from bas-reliefs and lyrics the actual melodies used.

Werner mentions four types of music in the ancient world: social merrymaking (Gen 31:27), military (Judg 7:18-20), magical incantation (pagan) and worship (1962:457-58). I would add a fifth—work or harvest songs (Num 21:17; Is 16:10). The flute and horn existed early in seminomadic tribes, and tambourines were used at the song of Miriam upon crossing the Red Sea (Ex 15:20). In 1 Samuel 10:15 the prophetic band ministered with harps, tambourines, lyres and flutes. With David's influence a great choral and orchestral tradition soon developed (2 Sam 6:5, 10), which predominated throughout Israel's history.

Many have called Israel a "nation without art" due to the prohibition of Exodus 20:4 (Deut 5:8), "You shall not make for yourself any idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." However, this censured idolatrous art and a genuine artistic tradition did develop, centered upon the tabernacle and the temple. To be sure, foreign artisans did most of the work on the temple (1 Kings 7:13-14), but the tradition was Israel's. The sculptured panels of wood inlaid with gold; the pomegranates, grapes, gourds, lilies and palm trees embroidered on curtains (but note that there were no animals); and the cherubim sculptured in the Holy of Holies demonstrate a love for religious art that rivals that of the surrounding nations. In the New Testament period Herod was famed for his artistic and architectural achievements, not only in terms of the temple; he also erected many structures employing Hellenistic style and statues—gymnasiums, theaters, amphitheaters and the entire city of Caesarea Philippi. The Hillel school apparently allowed such buildings and art work so long as they were not used for religious purposes. Gamaliel himself wore a signet ring engraved with a human head to demonstrate this attitude of tolerance.

6. Religious Customs. This area controlled every aspect of the daily life of the people. Every activity carried religious overtones, and the modern dichotomy between religious and secular simply did not exist. As Daniel-Rops says, "Since the civil authority identified itself with the religious authority, secular law was merely the application of the law of God" (1962:341). What people wore, how they spent their free time and related to one another, even the very type of home they lived in had an essentially spiritual dimension. Many passages cannot be understood without relating the religious situation behind them. For instance, tracing the pagan-Jewish syncretism in the Lycus Valley is quite helpful when studying the heresy addressed in Colossians. Moreover, knowing the actual purpose behind the oral tradition and the Pharisaic injunctions is necessary before studying the encounters on the part of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament.

A brief perusal of prayer practices may demonstrate the value of this. In the first century the Jews prayed three times a day and recited the Shema (Deut 6:4, 5-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-4) in the morning and evening. Jews normally prayed standing and knelt or prostrated themselves only at solemn times. It was common to pray aloud with upraised hands (1 Tim 2:8; folding the hands did not originate until the fifth century A.D.) and downcast eyes (Lk 18:13). It was also customary to don the prayer shawl (the *tallith)* and the phylacteries or amulets (the *tefillin).* The prayer *(tefillah)* consisted of a series of liturgical blessings, codified by the end of the first century in the "Eighteen Benedic-

tions." After this liturgical portion the individual would present personal petitions to God. Jesus participated in this (Mk 1:35, morning prayer; Mk 6:46, evening prayer) but transcended it by beginning often "a long time before daybreak" (Mk 1:35) and praying at times through the night (Lk 6:12). Luke especially stresses Jesus' prayer life (see 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28). Jesus transformed earlier prayer teaching in his "Abba" theology, which introduced a new intimacy into the communion between the person and God (see Jeremias 1967 contra Barr).

7. Summary. Mickelsen follows Eugene Nida *(Message and Mission)* in noting the influence of cultural diversity on communication (1963:170-72). Any communication takes place when a "source" gives a "message" to a "receptor." God, the ultimate source, speaks through the human writers of Scripture (the immediate source) within the diverse cultures of their day. The receptors, or recipients, of that message interpret it from within other cultures. Therefore, the task of the receptor in the modern cultural framework is to recapture the total framework within which the sacred writer communicated and to transfer that message to our own day. The cultural aspects presupposed in the passage help interpreters get behind the words to the underlying message, understood by the original readers but hidden to the modern reader. This becomes a necessary prelude to the application of the text to current situations (see figure 5.2).

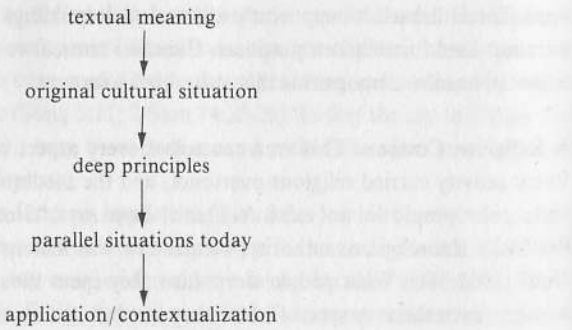

Figure 5.2. Steps from Original Text to Contemporary Application.

The cultural background not only deepens our understanding of the original text but also provides a bridge to the current significance of the text (see chap. fifteen). A delineation of the customs presupposed or addressed in the text enable us to separate the underlying principles (the doctrines used to address the original context) from the surface commands (the contextualization of the deeper principles from the original situation). Next, we can identify similar situations today and allow those deep principles to address us anew.

Specific Sources for Background Material

1. Old Testament Allusions. As noted earlier, there are more Old Testament allusions

than outright quotes. Yet most books on the use of the Old Testament in the New focus upon the quotes. As Moo states, the allusions may actually have had greater emphasis because the writer was presupposing his readers' knowledge (1983:169). This means that the source and significance of these allusions must be discovered if the original meaning of the passage is to be recaptured. I would note five principles for finding and evaluating allusions:

a. Does the wording and the style point to an Old Testament passage? This could well demonstrate a deliberate allusion. Style, however, is difficult to evaluate. There are "Semitisms" (Hebrew or Aramaic style rather than Greek) and Septuagintalisms (due to the influence of the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament), but they may be unconscious rather than conscious reflections of the Old Testament. Without any linguistic similarity the possibility of an allusion should not be pressed.

b. Consider the individual writer's traits. First Peter, Hebrews and the Apocalypse, for instance, have a very high incidence of allusions. In the cases of these books a potential allusion has greater probability.

c. Does the reflection of an Old Testament background make sense in the context? If it is out of keeping with the thought- development of the passage it is less likely. However, if the context is favorable the allusion will add richness to the meaning of the passage. For instance, the use of Isaiah 53:10, 12 in Mark 10:45 (Mt 20:28) adds the nuance of the Servant of Yahweh who atones "for the sins of many" (Is 53:12). Several scholars (such as Hooker 1959:140-47) argue that (i) the language ("servant," "for") is not used in Isaiah 53 (principle "a" above); (ii) the paucity of allusions to Isaiah 53 in the Gospels makes any allusion here doubtful (principle "b" above); and (iii) atonement imagery does not fit the context (principle "c"). However, Moo responds that while the linguistic parallels are not exact the conceptual meaning of Mark 10:45 is so close to Isaiah 53 that an allusion is highly probable (1983:122-27). Further, while the Gospels do not contain many direct allusions to Isaiah 53, there are many indirect reflections (see the chart in Moo 1983:163-64) and these may well have greater force (as noted above). Finally, as Carson points out (1984:432-33), it is common in Jesus' teaching to begin with the disciples' death to self (Mk 10:43-44) and to illustrate this with the example of Jesus' atoning death (10:45). In short, the use of Isaiah 53 in Mark 10:45 is probable and becomes a powerful illustration of the servanthood attitude enjoined of the disciples.

d. Dodd argues that an allusion or quote often presupposes the original Old Testament context behind the allusion and not just the allusion itself (1952:126-33). This is an important point. Of course, the extent to which it is true depends upon the immediate New Testament context. For instance, some think that the cry of dereliction in Mark 15:34 ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?") should be understood in light of the whole psalm (Ps 22, see vv. 22-31) as a faith statement placing trust in the God who will vindicate (see Trudinger 1974:235-38). Yet this ignores the obvious thrust of the context, for it occurs on the cross and the sense of abandonment is paramount. The lament is stressed here, although the whole psalm may still be in the larger context. The thanksgiving may be proleptic in the cry, anticipating the later joy of the resurrection.

e. Do not overexegete. It is common especially for Old Testament scholars to read all

views. While the majority of scholars hold to the basic continuity of the two groups, all agree that individual rabbinic quotes cannot be assumed to be representative of Pharisaism. This is the problem with the massive work of Strack-Billerbeck (1961-65), which places quotes from third- and fourth-century rabbis alongside New Testament passages without asking whether these actually reflect first-century Pharisaism.

b. We cannot assume that the early material is authentic, that it actually represents the period claimed. The ancient rabbis may have edited and re-created many of the sayings. However, I believe we can be more optimistic than Sanders allows. As with the sayings of Jesus there is more reliability in the collection of rabbinic quotes than many scholars concede. The burden of proof is upon the skeptic to disprove their reliability.

c. We cannot assume that the material is united in its views. It is varied and very eclectic. Many of the sections in fact involve rabbinic dialogue giving both sides of the question. A common pattern of religion binds the whole together but does not give a united perspective on isolated issues. For instance, several famous quotes demonstrate a misogynist strain within Judaism (such as j. Sot. 19a, "Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to a woman"). These are often presented as *the* Jewish position, but this was only one strain of Judaism. The rights of women were often upheld (divorce was the husband's prerogative but the woman was given the right to petition the court to force him to divorce her) and on occasion women filled positions of leadership (see Stagg 1978:51-53).

d. We should consider the possibility that the New Testament and the rabbis borrowed from a common Jewish tradition. Vermes posits this as a solution to the problem when a Jewish source seems to lie behind a passage but cannot be shown to be before A.D. 70 (1982:373). He would like to consider the New Testament to be a valid witness to first-century Jewish beliefs and as such to study it as part of the line of development from Targum to midrash. When considered from this perspective rabbinic (and Targumic) material takes on a new relevance. We must still be careful not to misuse this by ignoring the historical dimension (points a-c above). However, as a further possibility this can be extremely helpful.

5. Hellenistic Parallels. Since Hellenistic backgrounds have been so misused by the History of Religions schools, many have virtually denied the relevance of Greek ideas in favor of Jewish ideas as proper backgrounds for New Testament study. Unfortunately, this has developed into an adversarial relationship. However, since the work of Martin Hengel (1980:110-26) scholars have recognized that Hellenistic ideas had permeated Judaism by the Maccabean period and on into the Christian era. With the onset of the universal mission this influence had increased, and we must consider Greek as well as Jewish parallels to all New Testament literature. Here of course I want to repeat the cautions on using Hellenistic material mentioned in chapter two as well as the principles for interpretation in the summary following. Hellenistic backgrounds can be extremely helpful for understanding those epistles addressed to gentile churches and many individual customs mentioned—for instance, Graeco-Roman attitudes toward women in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 or 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Also, they help to clarify details regarding the

missionary journeys, such as divination practices behind Simon Magus (Acts 8) or the possessed slave girl (Acts 16). Aune provides an excellent example of Hellenistic backgrounds (1983:5-26), convincingly pointing out that the throne room scene of Revelation 4—5 is built upon the imagery of Roman imperial court ceremony. This fits the emphasis throughout the book opposing the imperial cult and provides excellent illustrations for sermons today dealing with the problem of church and state.

6. Summary. Since I have discussed other sources of parallels (Philo, Josephus, the Targums) in chapter three, I will not cover these here but will summarize this section with a general discussion of criteria. (1) We must be certain that the evidence comes from the same period as the passage being studied; shoddy use of period data (third-century gnostic practices read into first-century Christian concepts) has led many to false theories. (2) We must ascertain the reliability of the evidence; often Talmudic parallels have been casually introduced as background to New Testament events like the trial of Jesus without ascertaining their reliability for first-century Judaism. (3) We dare not be selective in the evidence gathered; if we do not search widely enough we may miss the true parallel, such as Graeco-Roman customs as well as Jewish in the passages on slavery. (4) Work not only on the current situation but on the historical development behind it; often the factors that led to a state of affairs are as important as the predicament itself. For instance, the development of the oral tradition in Judaism is crucial for understanding many of the conflict situations between Jesus and Judaism. (5) Remember that the biblical accounts also provide historical data. Scholars often neglect the text itself and assume all the data must come from outside sources. This is often unnecessary, for the explanation is present either in the passage being studied or in parallel passages.

Sociology as a Tool for Interpreting Scripture

It has become increasingly popular to employ modern sociological methods in order to study more deeply the influence of society and customs on the biblical text. This has resulted in part from a feeling that the historical-critical method has produced a vacuum in actually understanding Scripture. Many have declared the labor of the last forty years "bankrupt," stating that as a result "the biblical-theological study of the Church seems to have stood still" (Edwards 1983:431). Scholars are searching for a new perspective that will enable the Bible to come alive in its original setting, that will re-create the dynamic of biblical texts for the original hearers. The feeling is that the dry academic exegesis of the past has stiltified the true power of the text. As T. F. Best says, form (and redaction) criticism, even with an emphasis on the "life-setting" of texts, failed to describe the historical or social situation behind the literary and theological dimension; "even Paul, who springs virtually to life in his letters, was reduced inexorably to a propagator of ideas" (1983:182). The desire is to reproduce not just the thoughts but the thought-world of the biblical text.

Sociology as a discipline studies the human relationships and the social changes that shape a society. As Gager has said, most would differentiate between "social description" and "sociological interpretation" (1982:259).[3] The former deals with the "what" of the

text, trying to uncover background that will help us to identify the social factors, laws and so forth behind a particular statement. For instance, we could study first-century customs regarding proper hairstyle behind the "headcovering" in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (see Hurley 1981). Richter names three types of descriptive studies (1984:78-81). The most frequent is the study of the social environment within which Israel or the church developed, such as Jeremias's monumental portrayal of the economic, social and racial background behind first-century Jerusalem (1967). Also important is the delineation of the social history of a group in terms of movements and events, such as Malherbe's work on the social environment behind Paul's Epistles and the house church movement (1983). Finally, analytical studies trace the sociohistorical development of a class or sect, such as the debate over the social level of the early Christians, whether they penetrated society from the top down (the wealthy, so Judge and Malherbe) or the bottom up (the poor, so Gager and Theissen).

"Sociological interpretation" studies the "why" behind the text and uses current sociological theory not just to understand the meaning of a text but to re-create the social dynamics that led to the production of the text. Sociological study most frequently employs current sociological theories to explain aspects of Jewish or Christian history. For instance, Gottwald uses a "peasant-revolt" model taken somewhat from Weber but primarily from Marx to argue that the conquest of Canaan took place not via invasion from outside but rather via a revolt of the dissatisfied lower class in Canaan itself (1979). Gager's study (1975) first describes the early church as a millenarian movement by comparing it to Melanesian cargo cults (which also had charismatic leaders and a following from the outcast groups). Gager then uses the theory of "cognitive dissonance" (L. Festinger) to explain how Christianity as a millenarian movement survived. According to this theory the church adapted to the failure of its prophetic expectations by reworking its eschatology and instituting the universal mission. In both these cases various theories and anthropological models are applied to biblical history in order to determine "what really happened."

The modern movement of sociological analysis had its precursor in the University of Chicago school, particularly in the work of Shailer Matthews *(The Social Teachings of Jesus,* 1897) and Shirley Jackson Case *(The Social Origins of Christianity,* 1923). The theoretical basis, however, was not strong and the school was short-lived. More important is the continuing interest in social backgrounds expressed by such scholars as Deissmann and Troeltsch as well as by proponents of the History of Religions school. The modern movement began in the 1970s with such Old Testament scholars as Gottwald and such New Testament scholars as Gager and Theissen. Interest is growing to this day, and the school is rapidly taking a place in the forefront of biblical scholarship.

Just as important for us is the history of modern sociological theory. As Yamauchi explains, the "father of sociology" was Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who pioneered a "scientific" study of societal development from simple to complex forms (1984:176). Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied Darwin's evolutionary theories to societal change, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) wedded Hegel's dialectical theory to Feuerbach's materialism in centering upon economics as the primary cause of societal disruption. Max Weber

(1864-1920) introduced the modern era; he theorized that value systems rather than economics provide the grist for the mill of sociological development. In his study of Israel (1952) Weber theorized that its concept of the covenant led Israel to unity, and the charismatic leaders during the time of the Judges molded it into a cohesive force. The second major figure was Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who was the first to see society as an organic whole containing many interrelated parts. This functional view had a lasting impact upon sociological method. In recent decades this functional approach has been quite influential, especially in biblical studies.

Malina describes three major models (1982:233-37). The structuralist-functional approach believes that society consists of certain expected patterns of interaction (structures) that are controlled by shared purposes or concerns (functions). In contrast to form criticism, which isolates competing traditions in Israel or the church, functionalism views both as integrated wholes and seeks to determine the larger factors that generated those movements. As also seen in literary criticism, this tendency to recognize the unity of the biblical text is a valuable corrective to historical-critical excesses. The second is the conflict model, which studies society in terms of the disagreements and power politics between the various interest groups that are represented in the larger structure. The tracing of the changes that these pressures force upon a society is the task of this approach. Finally, the symbolic model studies society in terms of its deeper value system, what persons, things and events mean within the societal structure. The shared aspirations and expectations of a society determine its structure.

With respect to the church, for instance, the first approach would study how its component parts (apostles, elders, local churches, men and women as individuals) related both within the Christian society and within the larger Jewish and Graeco-Roman societies surrounding the church. The conflict model would note tensions in the church (Jewish vs. Hellenistic, tradition vs. false teaching and others) and in the larger realm (Christian vs. Jew vs. Greek) and use these to understand the development of the church. The symbolic model would research particular symbols like power or authority (Holmberg 1978) or ritual purity (Malina 1981) as keys for understanding the early church.

Problems in the Sociological Approach

Many criticisms can be leveled against the validity of this new school of research, and I will summarize them briefly here.

1. Misuse of the Models. It is easy to read historical situations in the light of modern theories without asking whether or not these current models actually fit the ancient data. The old "Life of Jesus" scholars recast him in the mold of the then-current liberal teacher. Many sociological researchers are doing the same with Israel or the church. Gager, for instance, has been accused of ignoring aspects of early Christianity that did not fit his millenarian model. This problem is noted often in academic circles, and it is not different among proponents of this method. Scholars often choose only those groups which fit the model they wish to impose on the data and then select those aspects from Israel or the church which fit their theory. They then studiously omit aspects in both the external

model and the biblical material that are not parallel. Best labels this "the problem of personal bias" and calls for "a fundamental stock-taking by those who want to employ" later models to demonstrate biblical theories (1983:189).

In many cases sociology is an ideological tool for proving a thesis rather than an instrument for studying a movement. Gottwald (1979) is often accused of forcing his liberation theory upon the data. He theorizes that egalitarianism rather than monotheism was primary in Israel's "socio-economic revolution" against the Canaanites. Yahweh was the symbol of the revolution, not the reason for it. Therefore, the conquest of Canaan was socioeconomic rather than religious at the core. As Long states, "The model for contemporary analysis is an ancient revolutionary society of which religious expression was but a part. Biblical theology seems to have become a kind of liberation socio-theology" (1982:255). In a more negative vein, Yamauchi says, "Despite his massive erudition, Gottwald reads into the OT his ideological biases in his imaginative reconstruction that disregards both the Biblical and the archeological data" (1984:183).

2. Revisionism. Critical scholars often seem to have a preconceived notion that the biblical history is wrong as it stands and needs to be revised. This is not a problem with the sociological method per se, since by nature this approach tends to take the biblical data more seriously than previous schools. However, many work with the results of the historical-critical method and assume the validity of those conclusions. This is the case with Gottwald. Theissen discusses the problem of history for sociological research (1982:175-79). The historian is "entirely dependent on chance sources which have survived" (p. 175), and none of those documents are framed as sociographic statements. All too often theological assertions are treated as social statements. The problem of affirming the reliability of hypotheses is immense. How does one test a case that is built on such obscure evidence? My answer is to treat the biblical text seriously as a historical record in its own right.

3. Tendency to Generalize. The problem with the structuralist-functional model is that it centers upon a cross-section of society and has no place for individual contributions. Theissen lumps together Jesus and the apostles as "wandering charismatics" and gives little place to differences between them (1978). The creative genius of Jesus and Paul are replaced by social forces that shaped their contributions. This makes little sense, for true genius (Galileo, Shakespeare, Newton, Einstein) transcends the society in which it appears. By failing to take account of individual contributions and by overstating the place of social pressures, one's results are usually skewed. Best decries the "tendency in sociological theory to regularize the data in favor of interpretive theories" in light of "the extraordinary diversity of social structures" in the church (1983:192). We dare not force unity upon diversity.

4. The Paucity of the Data. Modern sociological conclusions are not made without extensive data collected over long periods of time. In comparison the biblical data is sparse indeed and that which we have is not couched in sociological language. It is erroneous to read theological statements as sociological evidence, and we must exercise

great caution in trying to do so. For instance, Elliott has to argue that "stranger" and "alien" (in 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:1) are used as technical terms for the dispossessed rather than as theological metaphors for the Christian as an "alien" in the world (1981:24-48). I am not convinced that he is correct exegetically and for all the sociological depth of the book it founders at this crucial point.

Malina responds that the task of modern study is predictive and so needs a large data base (1982:238). Since the use of the social sciences in Scripture "is oriented toward efficient causality" (reproducing the past), the amount of evidence needed is not so great. However, this is disputable because modern sociology is descriptive as well as predictive. Scroggs says that "the researcher must work with the utmost caution and strictness, with adequate guard against overenthusiasm" (1983:340).

5. Tendency to Debunk the Systems. Sociologists claim that theirs is an objective or value-neutral discipline, but this is in reality a façade. Yamauchi points to Peter Berger as especially stressing this aspect (1984:181, 189-90). Yet it is inherent in such an empirical system as sociology to place religious phenomena in the end within the human sphere. The spiritual experience surrounding Israel and the church is read as the product of internal factors (such as societal) rather than external (such as supernatural). As Berger himself states *(The Sacred Canopy,* p. 180), "Sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection."

6. Reductionism. The tendency to explain all given aspects on the basis of societal factors is reductionist at the core. To be sure, many argue that modern approaches have surmounted this obstacle. Malina (1982:237) claims that the use of models to explain sets of data is not reductionist, but he does not quite explain how to avoid subsuming broad aspects of Israel and the church under general models, whether or not the data actually fits. The more sophisticated do avoid this error to a large extent. However, it is quite common to fail here. For instance, Edwards (1983:444) critiques Elliott (1981) for his assumption that all the inhabitants of Asia Minor can be assigned the status of resident alien or that Asia Minor was primarily a rural area. Elliott has overly simplified the evidence and overstated his case. As one general observation on the more complex situation behind 1 Peter, Elliott provides very useful material. However, on the broader plane he has failed to prove his hypothesis. Even Theissen, although he avoids reductionism in his study of Corinth (1982), falls into this pitfall in his study of the disciples (1978). Theissen has artificially elevated the class of "wandering charismatic" missionaries and given the settled leaders of churches (such as Philip, Timothy, Titus) a secondary and subsidiary role. As Richter says, "Theissen never really gets beyond marshalling the relevant data. He fails to offer any adequate models that begin to explain the data satisfactorily" (1984:80).

7. Theoretical Disarray. There are a tremendous number of sociological theories, some more valid than others, but the practitioners often fail to recognize the difficulties in applying them to biblical material. As Yamauchi points out, this is generally true of the

whole field of academic sociology (1984:179-80). He quotes Gareth Steadman Jones (from *British Journal of Sociology* 27 [1976]: 300):

> The vague and shifting character of its object, the inconstancy of its definitions, the non-cumulative character of much of its knowledge, its proneness to passing theoretical fashions and the triteness of some of its "laws" suggest that its theoretical foundations are contestable and insecure.

This very lack of correlation between specific data and general theory or model is the problem at the level of application to biblical material. Practitioners are guilty of the abstraction fallacy, which tries to capture the dynamic of the ancient situations in abstract modern concepts that often remove the life and breath from the original situations. Scroggs suggests two ways of overcoming this tendency: (1) understand the methods completely and be clear of the extent to which they apply to the data; (2) be aware of the theoretical presuppositions when explicating the ancient situation (1983:339). I would add a third: allow the data to control and alter the models as the situation warrants.

8. Determinism. Since the social sciences center upon human behavior, the possibility of divine activity is almost ruled out by definition. To be sure, the biblical practitioners are very aware of this tendency and take care to leave room for the noumenal as well as the phenomenal realms. However, since the entire task involves searching out the societal factors behind the text, the divine element is still too often neglected. In the study of Paul as a charismatic leader, for instance, the social phenomenon is highlighted and the biblical emphasis upon divine commissioning at times seems replaced by the needs of the community (see Holmberg). Moreover, society gains absolute control of all human behavior, as every contingency is explained by these societal factors. This overstatement of the influence of society is deterministic, since events in Scripture that are attributed to God are placed under the aegis of society.

9. Tendency to Disjunctive Theories. To support a certain theory writers often make an "either-or" out of a "both-and." This is true of the attempts to argue that the early church centered upon the lower class (Gager, Theissen) or on the upper class (Judge, Malherbe). Gager himself points out that there were some converts from both sides, but he argues that the focus of the church was upon the disadvantaged (1982:262). However, R. H. Smith provides an interesting analysis of Matthew and his congregation that points to a middle-class background (1983:441-57). Meeks, in the most far-reaching study I have seen, proves that the strata of society reached was mixed and ambiguous, ranging from Caesar's household (Phil 4:22) and the proconsul Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7) to slaves and the disenfranchised (1983:51-73). Meeks concludes that Paul's congregations represented "a fair cross-section of urban society" (p. 73). However, I doubt Meeks's further disjunction between urban and rural society. Although Elliott overstates his thesis, he shows that the locus of 1 Peter and the first missionary journey of Paul was quite rural in its make-up.

Evaluation and Methodology

One is tempted to be as negative toward the potential of sociological research as is C. S. Rodd, who states:

> It appears to me that the difficulties posed by the nature of the evidence and the differences in culture, are greater than the exponents of sociological interpretation of biblical societies recognize, despite the qualifications which they insert into their writings . . . . I would claim that the attempt to apply sociological theories to biblical documents is not likely to be fruitful. (1981:103-4)

Rodd would use such theories only heuristically to suggest further lines of research. The theorist must rigidly control conclusions, noting that such general theories never can deal adequately with the contingencies of history. Since the researcher never can "test" his conclusions as in a living society, all results will be tentative at best.

To some extent I agree with Rodd's assessment. The problems enumerated above are indeed difficult to surmount, and most of the attempts to do so have not been particularly convincing to date. Nevertheless, we must recognize the fact that the discipline as applied to biblical studies is still in its infancy. It needs time to mature and integrate its methodology with the other tools of historical research. In particular, sociological approaches to Scripture must begin to explore the ways in which this discipline can fit into a "field" approach to hermeneutics, that is, an integration of all the tools into a comprehensive whole. To date the exponents of sociological methodology have treated it as an end in itself, resulting in overstatement and confusion of issues. I must admit that in my opinion the more important aspect is "social description," for "sociological research" (see above regarding the distinction) is too reductionistic and cavalier in its results. However, the latter does have heuristic value if the resultant models are treated as approximations rather than as established truths.

Therefore, I would suggest the following hermeneutical guidelines for background studies, moving from the particular (social background) to the general (sociological models). This will function as a conclusion to the whole chapter, for sociological methodology is placed within the larger context of background studies as a whole. This is the only way in which the sociological approach can have validity, when it is placed within the larger framework of the other exegetical tools as one method among many to determine the meaning of the text.

1. Make certain the passage has been studied thoroughly along grammatical-semantic-syntactical lines. The results of detailed exegesis will form the control for determining the proper background parallels to adduce in deepening the meaning of the text. For instance, I cannot decide whether Galatians or 1 Corinthians 1—3 should be paralleled by Jewish or Hellenistic background until I have studied the language and concepts Paul employed.

2. Be comprehensive in the collection of data. At times the passage itself will indicate the background material, as in the use of Old Testament quotes and allusions. In such instances one will not need to search more widely. Also, when the narrative itself builds upon Jewish customs, as in the Gospels, the source is relatively simple to define. However, many passages are ambiguous. The background to Genesis is notoriously difficult to define, and in many cases scholars despair at finding the correct parallel. For example, the ceremony of walking between the parts in Genesis 15:7-21 can have several possible

meanings (see Hasel 1981:61-78). It could signify mystical union, the transferral of life, a self-curse or self-obligation or (in Hasel's opinion) covenantal promise. In this case similar practices in the Mari letters, Assyrian treaties and vassal ceremonies all point to the covenantal aspect. This convergence of evidence is an important pointer to the meaning of the ceremony. Also, most of Paul's letters draw upon Jewish and Hellenistic sources. The interpreter must discover all possibilities in order to study the passage properly.

3. Study the contexts of the biblical and nonbiblical passages and see which converge most closely. We desire true parallels rather than seeming parallels, and only when all the possibilities have been exhausted can we decide which is the best one. Those parallels which overlap the biblical passage to the greatest extent are the most likely. If this is true with respect to social customs it is more so in the case of sociological research when one is applying models drawn from current theories. Wilson notes six guidelines (1984:28-29): (1) be thoroughly familiar with the approaches and their limits; (2) center upon the results of competent social scientists; (3) understand the theories completely in the modern context before applying them to ancient contexts; (4) survey a wide range of societies that parallel the phenomenon being studied; (5) note interpretive schemata used to study the data and avoid them unless they are actually useful; (6) allow the text itself to provide the controlling factor, so that the hypothesis will be tested by the biblical data.

4. Do not read nonbiblical parallels into the text any further than the data allows. In other words, do not force the data to fit the theory. Instead modify the theory to fit the data. Most important, rework only those aspects which are truly clarified further by the background material. Do not exaggerate the importance of the sociological aspects to the denigration of the individual or spiritual dimensions. Remember that the text must control the background data and *not* vice versa!

5. Go into the passage with a large volume of potential theories and allow the text to select the theory that best fits. Often sociologists, like biblical theologians, take a paradigm approach in which they artificially select a single model and then force the evidence to fit their theory, ignoring any disparate data. There is no reason why Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds cannot converge upon a passage or why cognitive dissonance, conflict and structuralist-functional models cannot explain different aspects of the church's development. In modern society a sociologist works from the bottom up, from the actual social situation of a group to a model that is constructed to fit rather than is forced upon the data. The same should be true of using the social sciences to understand the Bible more deeply.

6. The text is primary and not the background material. We must remember that historical-cultural exegesis is a supplement to the text and not an end in itself. Therefore, we must apply the "event" behind the text only to the extent to which it will aid in understanding the message in the text. Too many background studies end up replacing the text rather than supplementing it and deepening our understanding of it. Some passages, such as theological or credal material, will need very little. Others, such as historical narrative, will benefit greatly; however, even here we should use cultural data only to the extent that the text allows.

7. When we move from the text to the sermon, background information has a further value. By immersing the audience in the original situation behind the text we help them to place themselves into the world of the text and see how it was speaking to the original audience. At that time we can then help the hearers to discover situations parallel to the text in their own life and to contextualize the principle behind the text for their current situations.