INTRODUCTION TO

Biblical Hermeneutics

The art and science of understanding what Scripture communicates



Hermeneutics asks one clear question

What did the author intend the original audience to understand?

HERMENEUTICS

The art and science of biblical interpretation.

The goal is discovery—not inventing a private meaning.

Think like a careful reader: context first, meaning second, application third.

You already interpret every day

“Fine.”

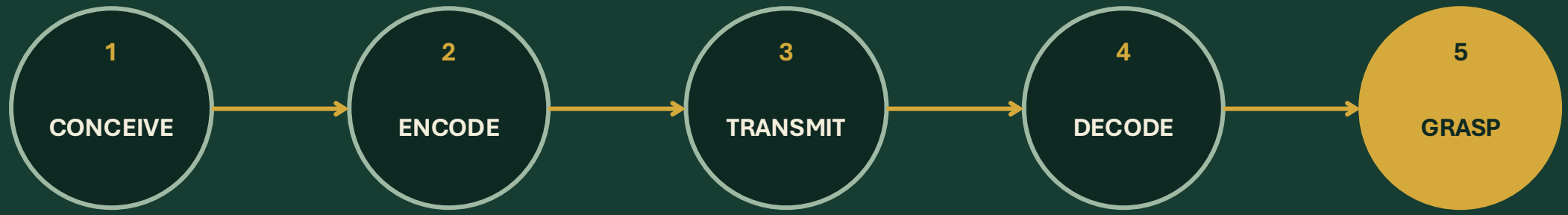
Same word. Different meanings.



Context turns symbols back into meaning.

Biblical interpretation uses the same ordinary habits—carefully and across a much greater distance.

Meaning travels through five stages



Form an idea

Put it in words

Send the message

Turn words back

Understand

STATIC CAN ENTER ANYWHERE

Unclear thinking • language differences • poor translation • missing context

Ancient literature compounds the problem across thousands of years.

Ancient texts add four kinds of distance

01

TIME

2,000–3,000 years of changed assumptions

02

LANGUAGE

Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek

MODERN READER

03

GEOGRAPHY

Terrain, water, climate, and place

04

CULTURE

Customs, roles, greetings, and service

Time changes what feels obvious

2,000–3,000

years between ancient authors and today's readers

The task: notice our assumptions before they become the author's assumptions.



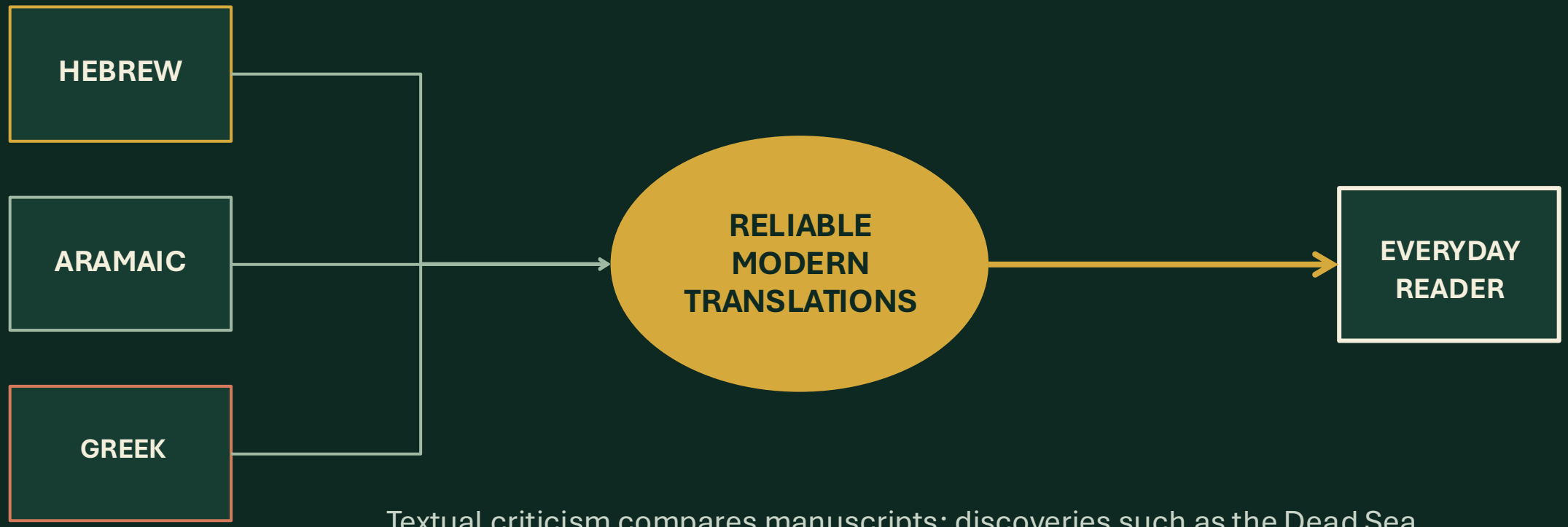
ANCIENT WORLDVIEW

Original customs, politics, geography, and shared assumptions

OUR WORLDVIEW

Modern habits can feel natural—even when the ancient author never shared them

Language is a bridge, not a barrier



Textual criticism compares manuscripts; discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947) add evidence.

You do not have to master every ancient language to begin reading well.

Geography can unlock a difficult image

LAODICEA • REVELATION 3:15–16

“lukewarm”

COMMON MODERN ASSUMPTION

Spiritual apathy—half in, half out.

GEOGRAPHICAL REALITY

Aqueduct water arrived mineral-heavy, lukewarm, and unpleasant.

CRITIQUE

Their unfaithfulness was pictured as something that made God sick.

Physical terrain, water systems, and local conditions can carry meaning that modern readers no longer see.

Separate the cultural form from the lasting principle

ANCIENT FORM		TIMELESS PRINCIPLE		MODERN EXPRESSION
Holy kiss	→	Warm, affectionate fellowship	→	Handshake or embrace
Foot washing	→	Humble servant leadership	→	Serve in practical, low-status ways

The expression can change while the principle remains.

The Bible is a library—not one kind of book

66

books

Different genres use language differently.

~60%

NARRATIVE

Events and people

Genesis • Acts

VISION

APOCALYPSE

Visions and symbols

Revelation

CONTEXT

LETTERS

Specific communities

Romans • Corinthians

RETURN

PROPHECY

Truth and covenant call

Isaiah • Amos

First ask: What kind of literature am I reading?

Genre tells you how language is working

MORE DIRECT

MORE SYMBOLIC



Historical narrative

Ask what happened, to whom, and in what sequence.

Genesis • Acts

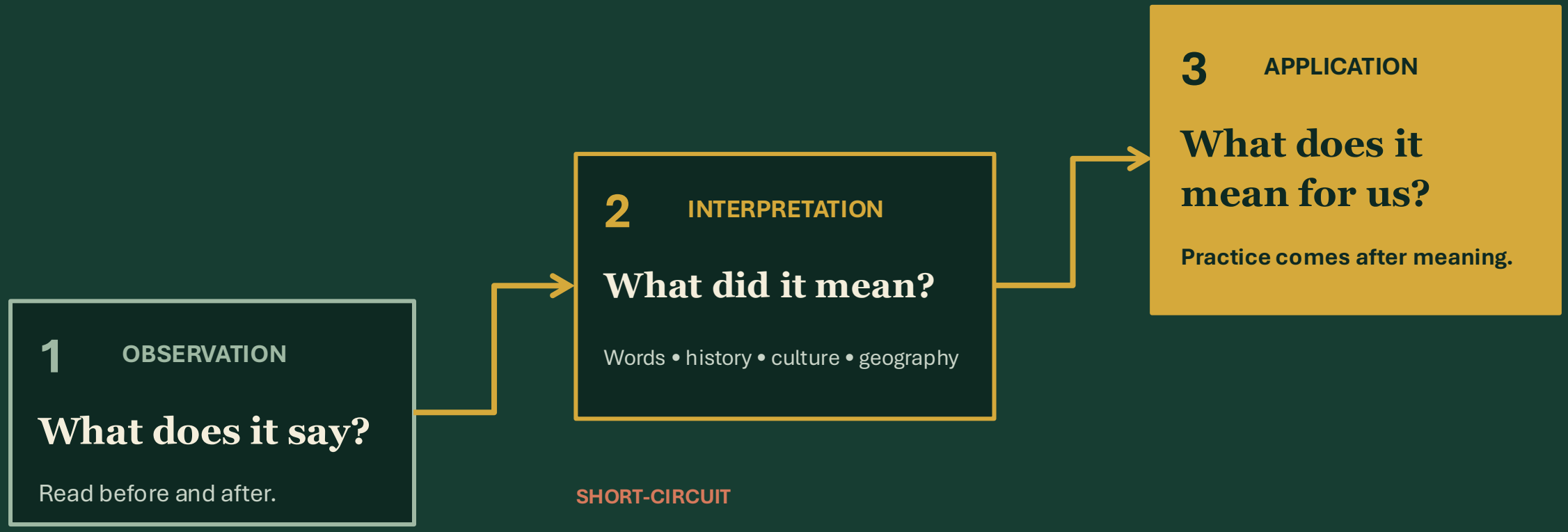
Apocalyptic literature

Ask what the images communicate about strength, judgment, victory, and sovereignty.

Revelation

Do not force every genre through the same literalistic rule.

Interpretation follows a three-step order



SHORT-CIRCUIT

Jumping straight to application produces flawed conclusions.

Discover meaning before creating meaning

DISCOVER

Authorial intent

Meaning is what the original author communicated to the original audience.

Hermeneutics and exegesis uncover that communication.

CREATE

Reader-response

Meaning is centered on the reader's reaction rather than the author's communication.

This was a subjective theory emerging in the 19th century.

Reader response matters—but it comes after understanding the text.

Read well: a beginner's checklist

1 GENRE

What kind of writing is this?

2 CONTEXT

What comes before and after?

3 GAPS

What do time, language, place, and culture add?

4 MEANING

What did the author communicate then?

5 APPLICATION

What faithful principle carries forward?

TRY IT

HOLY KISS

Name the form, principle, and modern equivalent.

REVELATION + ROMANS

Compare how genre changes the questions you ask.

DISCUSS

Why is reader-response so attractive—and what can it miss?