ABIDE 101 · LESSON 6

# The Contextual Guardrail

*Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.*



SECTION 1 · WHAT CONTEXT IS

# One Word, Four Meanings

*“the Bible is literature based in history that communicates a theological message.”*

Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*

SECTION 1 · WHAT SURROUNDS A VERSE?

# Three layers of context

## Historical-cultural

The Bible happened in real places, to real people, in a world very different from ours. Two levels: the world of the events, and the world of the author and his first readers.

## Literary

What comes before and after a passage, from the verses around it out to the whole book.

## Theological

Where a passage sits in the whole Bible: which part of God's story it belongs to, and which of His covenants it stands under.

**The Literal guardrail asks *what kind* of words they are; the Contextual guardrail's literary layer asks *where* the words are located.**



SECTION 2 · DEUTERONOMY 4:2
ZECHARIAH 9:9

# The Two Cliffs

*“See, your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”*

Zechariah 9:9 · BSB



SECTION 3 · QUESTION 2

# The Second Question

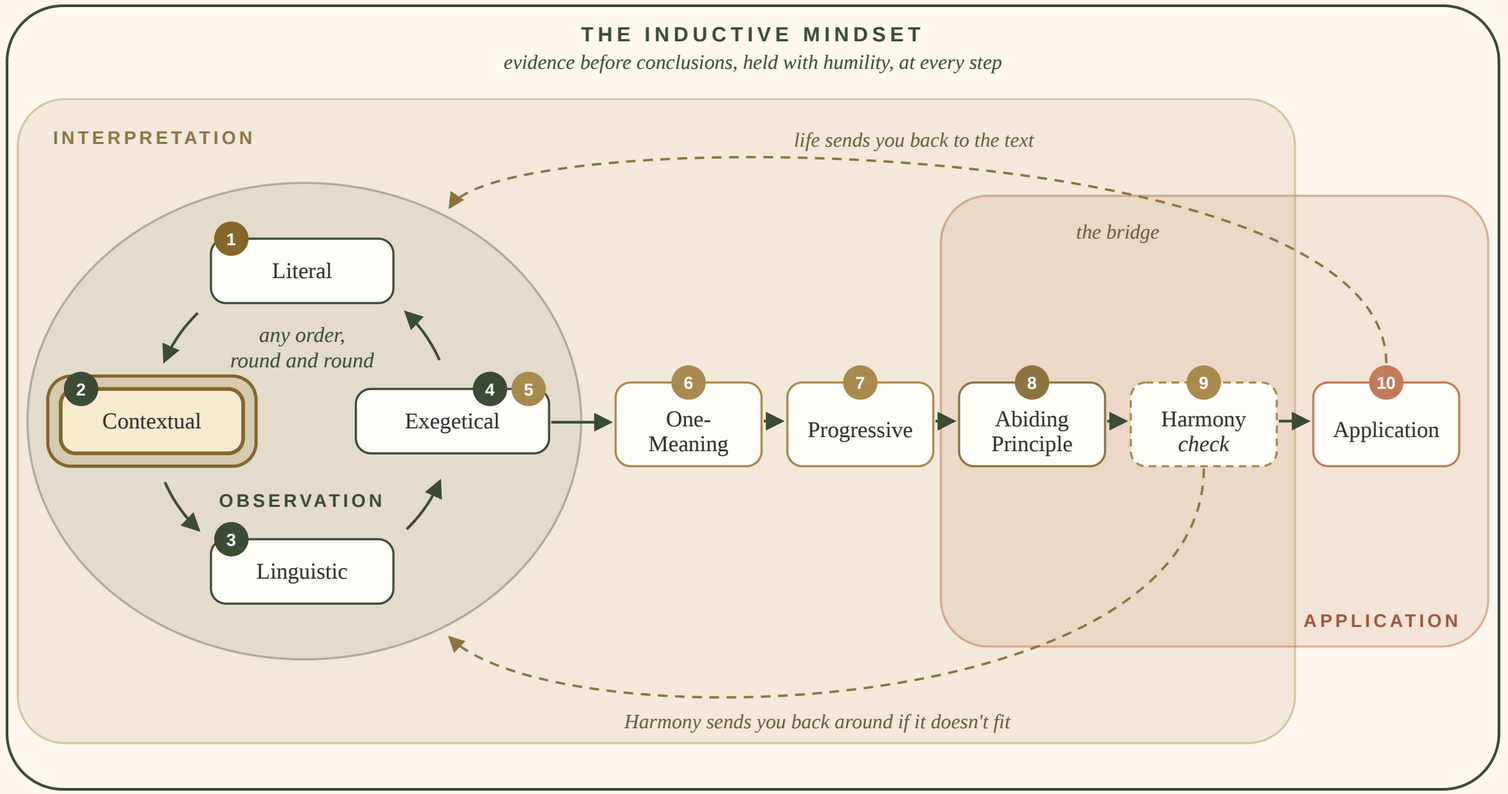
*“What surrounds it, what did the first readers know, and where does it sit in the whole story?”*

The Contextual guardrail’s question

SECTION 3 · WHERE WE ARE ON THE MAP

# Inductive Bible Study

*A time-tested method for handling "the word of truth" accurately (2 Timothy 2:15 · BSB)*




The ten diagnostic questions in the process of biblical interpretation

*We're at question 2, the Contextual guardrail, in the Observation circle.*

SECTION 3 · WHAT SURROUNDS IT?

# Three steps for the literary layer

### 1 · Find the edges

“Determine the boundaries that comprise the unit of text being studied.” Look for a transition word, a new subject, a new time or place.

### 2 · Say the main idea

“Summarize the main idea of the unit.” Try six to eight words, and cover the whole paragraph.

### 3 · See how it connects

“Explain how (or if) this segment relates to the units surrounding it.”

Chapter and verse numbers came later: “the first step in interpretation is to ignore modern chapters and verses” (A. T. Robertson, quoted by Bernard Ramm).



SECTION 4 · JOEL 3:14 · ACTS 2:42–47
PSALM 37:4

# Three Short Cases

*“Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”*

Psalm 37:4 · BSB



SECTION 5 · DEEP CASE
GENESIS 15

# The Night God Walked Alone

*“When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the halves of the carcasses.”*

Genesis 15:17 · BSB

SECTION 5 · GENESIS 15 IN THREE LAYERS

# Abram did not walk. God did.

### Literary

Two scenes, two questions. “Lord GOD, how can I know that I will possess it?” (Genesis 15:8, BSB). Everything from verse 9 on is God’s answer.

### Historical-cultural

Covenant makers cut animals in two and walked between the pieces: if I break my word, let me be cut apart like these animals (Jeremiah 34:18).

### Theological

Only the firepot and the torch pass between the pieces. God walked alone, to be cut off for the curse that rests on man. “Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, BSB).

*Guardrails at work: Contextual leads; Literal, Progressive and Harmony help.*

SECTION 5 · CONNECTING THE DOTS

# God walked alone, to be cut off in our place

### Jeremiah 34:18 · the covenant cut

"And those who have transgressed My covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before Me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two in order to pass between its pieces."

### Daniel 9:26 · the Messiah cut off

"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing. Then the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood, and until the end there will be war; desolations have been decreed."

### John 1:14 · God came to us

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

### Galatians 3:13–14 · the curse He bore

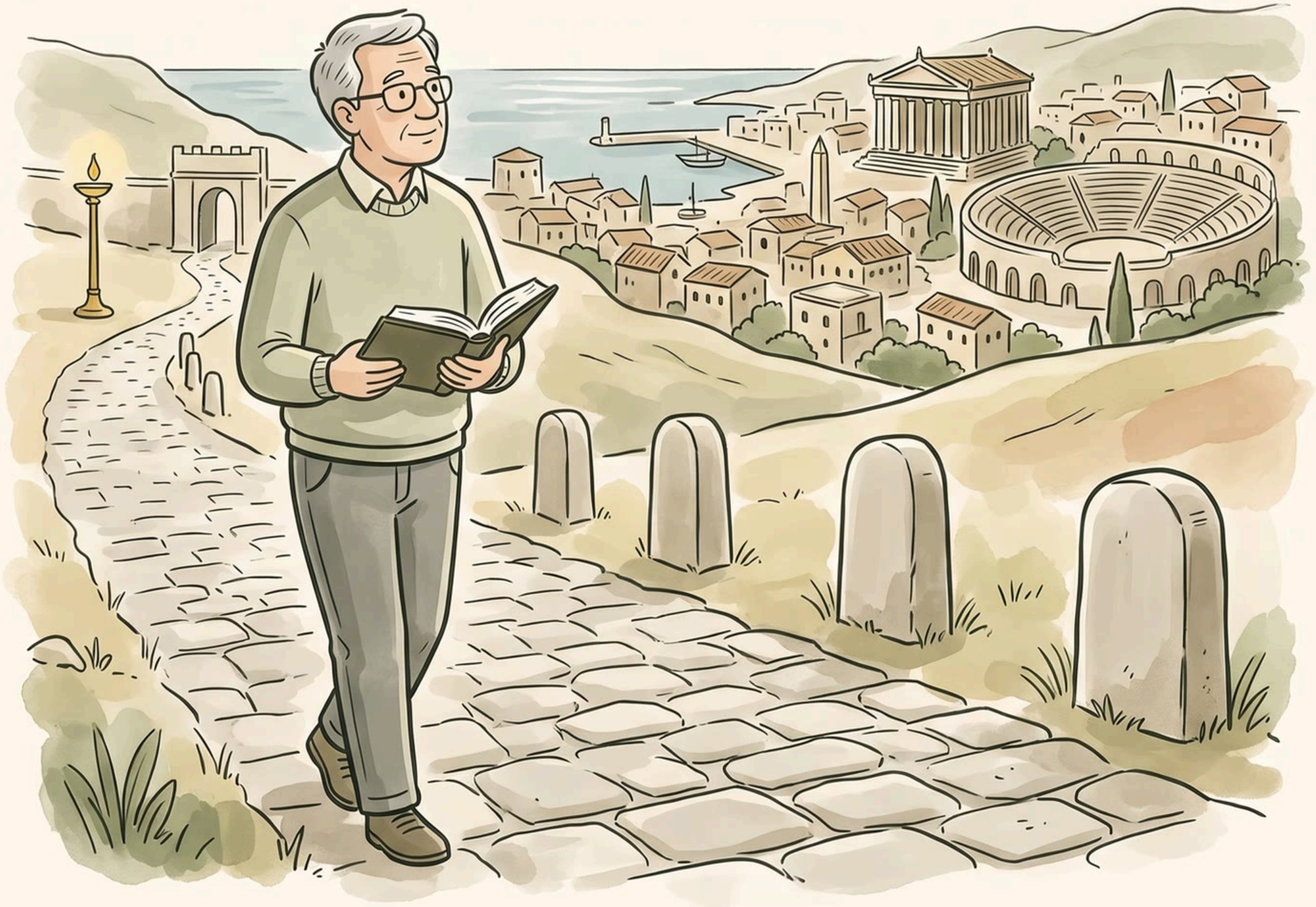
"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

### Philippians 2:6–8 · how far He went

"Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross."

*In Genesis 15 God bound Himself to His promise and walked the line alone. In Christ He emptied Himself and walked it all the way to the cross.*

"Cut" in Genesis 15:18 and Jeremiah 34:18 and "cut off" in Daniel 9:26 are one Hebrew verb, *karath*: "to cut off, cut down" (Park, from the BDB lexicon). All quotations BSB.



SECTION 6 · REVELATION 2:1–7

# The Road to Ephesus

*“But I have this against you: You have abandoned your first love.”*

Revelation 2:4 · BSB



SECTION 7 · THE CENTRAL CASE
EPHESIANS 1:15–2:10

# All Ten Questions

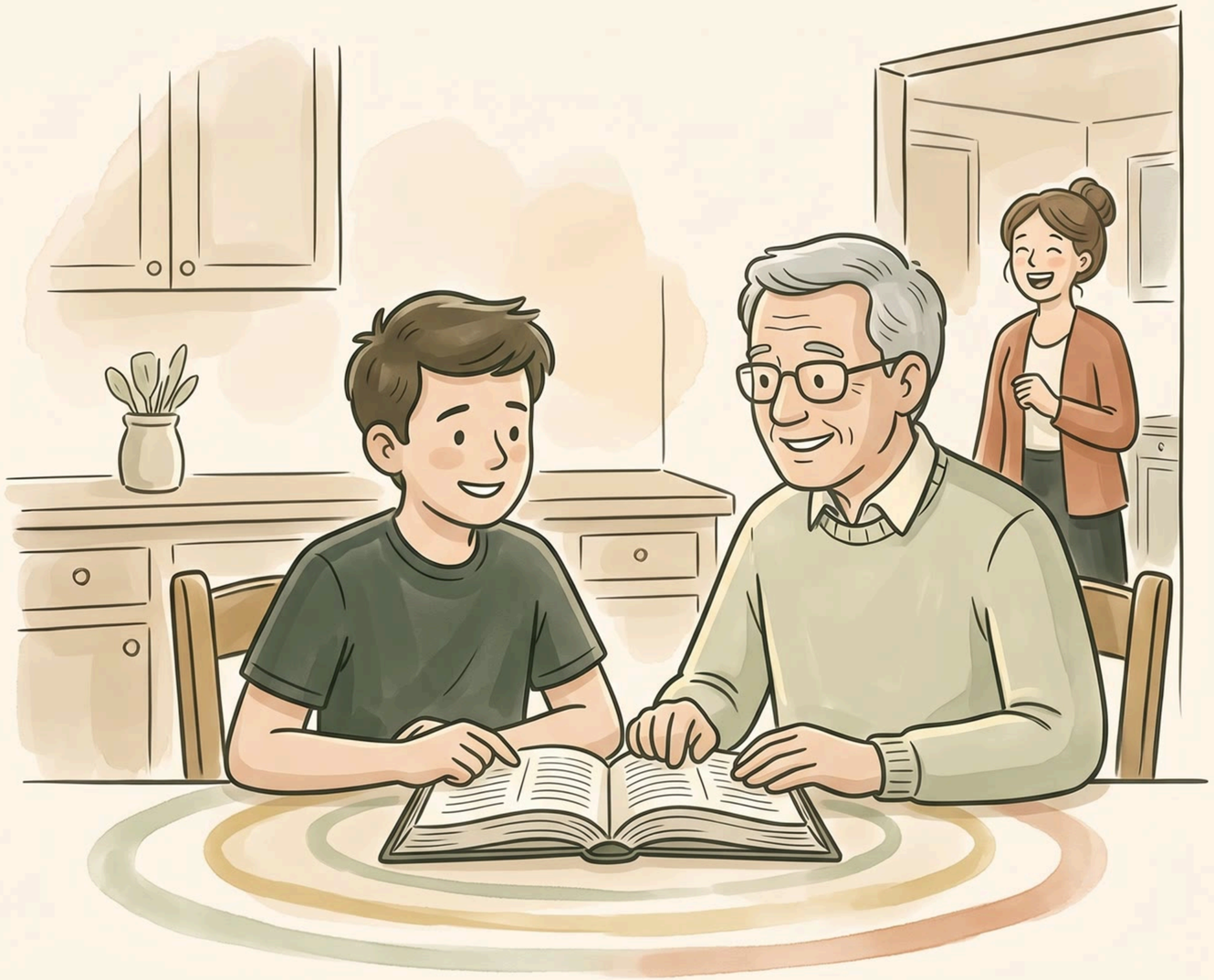
*“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!”*

Ephesians 2:4–5 · BSB

SECTION 7 · QUESTION 2: WHAT SURROUNDS IT?

# Praise, prayer, proof

| Look at | What we find |
| --- | --- |
| **The edges** | 1:15 opens with “For this reason” (BSB), pointing back to 1:3–14. Chapter 2 begins with “And.” The edges are 1:15 and 2:10: a chapter break sits in the middle of one movement of thought. |
| **Praise · 1:3–14** | Look at everything God has given you in Christ. |
| **Prayer · 1:15–23** | May you know it, especially “the surpassing greatness of His power to us who believe” (1:19, BSB). |
| **Proof · 2:1–10** | You were dead, and God “made us alive with Christ” (2:5, BSB). |
| **The echo** | Raised, seated, in the heavenly realms: in 1:20 for Jesus, and in 2:5–6 for us. |



SECTION 8 · GENESIS 15:6
EPHESIANS 2:8

# Context Is King

*“Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

Genesis 15:6 · BSB

*“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith”*

Ephesians 2:8 · BSB

ASK IT EVERY TIME YOU OPEN YOUR BIBLE

# What surrounds it, what did the first readers know, and where does it sit in the whole story?

*Read every passage in its surroundings, with all three layers in view. Stay off the lonely-verse cliff and the skipped-layer cliff, and let the background serve the text. Context is king.*

Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.