

Lesson 5 - What do we bring to the text?



What is the first context we encounter when studying the Bible?

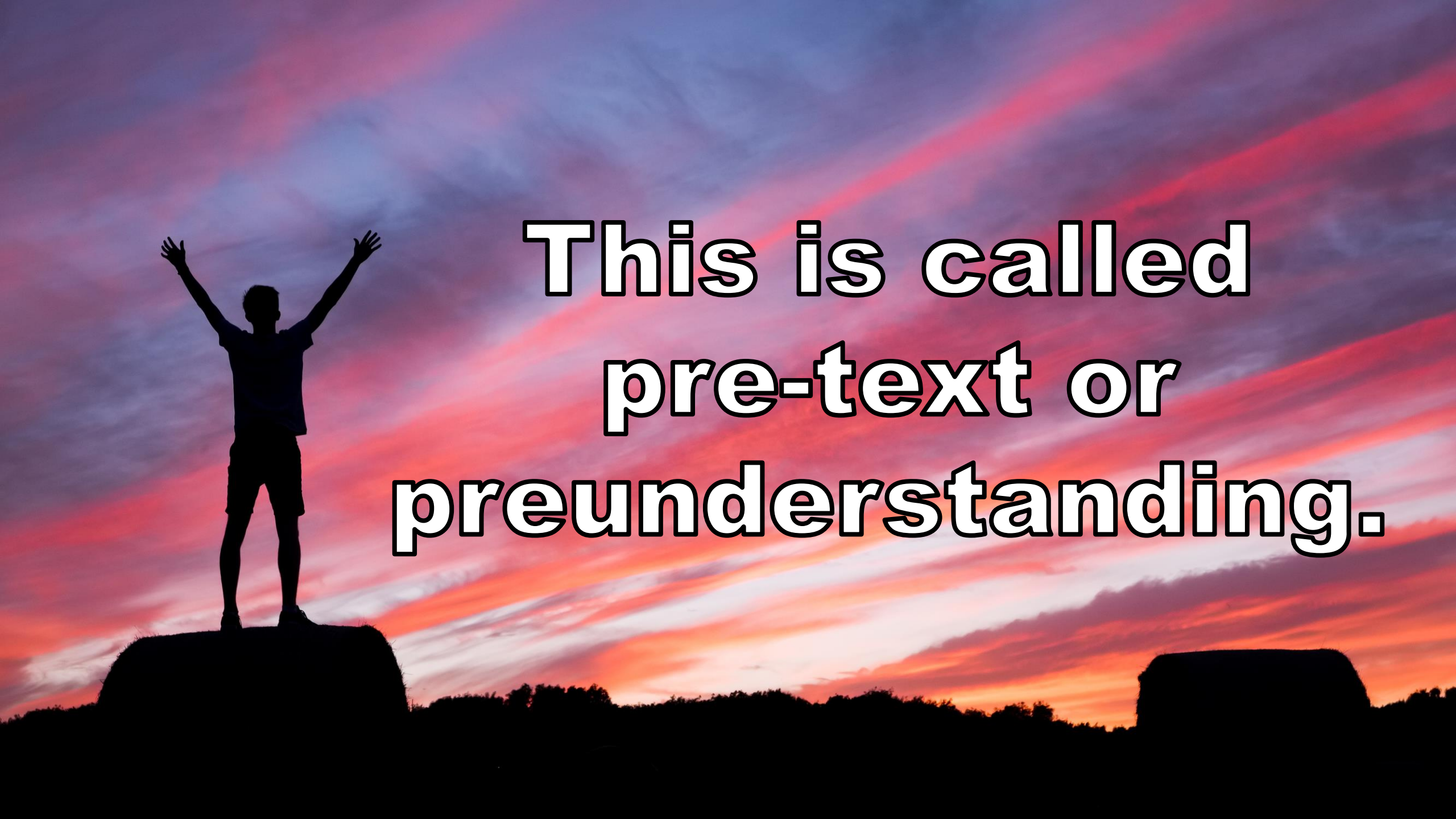
What is the first context we encounter when studying the Bible?

Our own personal context.



**Everything we see,
hear or read is
influenced by our
personal understanding
of the world.**



A silhouette of a person standing on a hay bale with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or joy. The background is a vibrant sunset sky with streaks of orange, red, and purple. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**This is called
pre-text or
preunderstanding.**

1. Personal experience

**2. Previous encounters
with the text**

**3. Cultural contact with
the text**

4. Hymns (or other music)



Example:

**How did Marry and Joseph
travel to Bethlehem
and deliver the baby Jesus?**

Problem:

**Some of our
preunderstanding is correct.**

**Some of our
preunderstanding is not
correct.**

Danger:

**Assuming that our
preunderstanding is
always correct.**

Vanhoozer States that this kind of pride – “Encourages us to think we have the correct meaning before we have made the appropriate effort to recover it. Pride does not listen. It knows.”

(Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge.*)

**Identifying where
we get our
preunderstanding:**



**1. Approaching the text
with our theological
agenda already
formulated.**

This is “OVER**standing” rather than
“**UNDER**standing” where
“we place ourselves over the Word
of God and determine what it
means, rather than placing
ourselves under that word, seeking
diligently to determine what God
means in the text.”**

(Scott Duvall & Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*.)

**In a practical sense this
often takes the form of
people looking for a
scripture to prove their
point.**

Example 1:

Acts 2:37-39

Many denominational people will approach this text having already decided baptism is not necessary for salvation.

This pre-text prevents them from seeing the importance of baptism.

Example 2:

Ephesians 2:8-10

Many members of the Lord's church will approach this text ready to argue the necessity of obedience to God's commands.

This pre-text prevents them from seeing the beauty of God's grace.

Example 3:

John 2:1-12

Many people approach this text having already decided to use it to approve or condemn drinking alcohol.

This pre-text prevents them from seeing the lessons in the account.

2. Familiarity with the text.

Being familiar with the text is good!

However, that familiarity can lead to the temptation to skip deeper study.

Examples:

- **Skimming instead of reading the text.**
- **Ignoring the context.**
- **Only paying attention to your favorite parts.**
- **Walking down memory lane rather than observing the text.**

3. Culture

We tend filter concepts from the Bible through our cultural bias and sensitivities.

Where do we get these cultural biases?

- Family
- Friends
- Church
- TV and Movies
- Music
- Politics
- School
- The internet
- Etcetera..

Examples of cultural bias:

A upper middle-class family in New York will view passages on poverty and how to treat the poor differently than a family living in the slums of New Delhi India.

Examples of cultural bias:

- The color of Jesus' skin**
- How many wise men visited Jesus as a child.**
- What swallowed Jonah.**
- Slavery**

**Cultural bias is also called
“interpretational reflex.”**

**Just like our physical reflexes,
much of our
interpretational reflex
is subconscious.**

Affects of interpretational reflex:

1) We may fill gaps in the text with explanations and background from our culture.

(i.e. The color of Jesus's skin, or how Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem.)

Affects of interpretational reflex:

2) Our culture may pre-form a parameter of limiting possibilities for a text before we grapple with the intended meaning. In other words, our cultural setting drives us to decide possible and impossible meanings for the text before we study them.

(i.e. Slavery or women's roles in the church)

**Example of
interpretational reflex:**

Romans 13:1-7

**What does this passage
say about the American
Revolution?**

**What we should
do about our
preunderstanding:**



1. Identify our preunderstandings

**2. Place our preunderstandings
under the text.**

**Meaning that if the Biblical text
contradicts our preunderstanding,
then we change our understanding to
conform to the Bible.**

3. This creates a new preunderstanding which we bring to the text the next time we study, which we then submit under the text again.

4. We then interact with this preunderstanding in our daily lives and allow it to mold our actions in everyday life.

5. This creates a world view that is being morphed by the Bible, and hopefully bringing us closer to being Christlike in our thinking and actions.

Are all preunderstandings bad?

No, some are correct.

But we only know they are correct when we submit them to God's word, and they prove to be accurate according to God's word.

