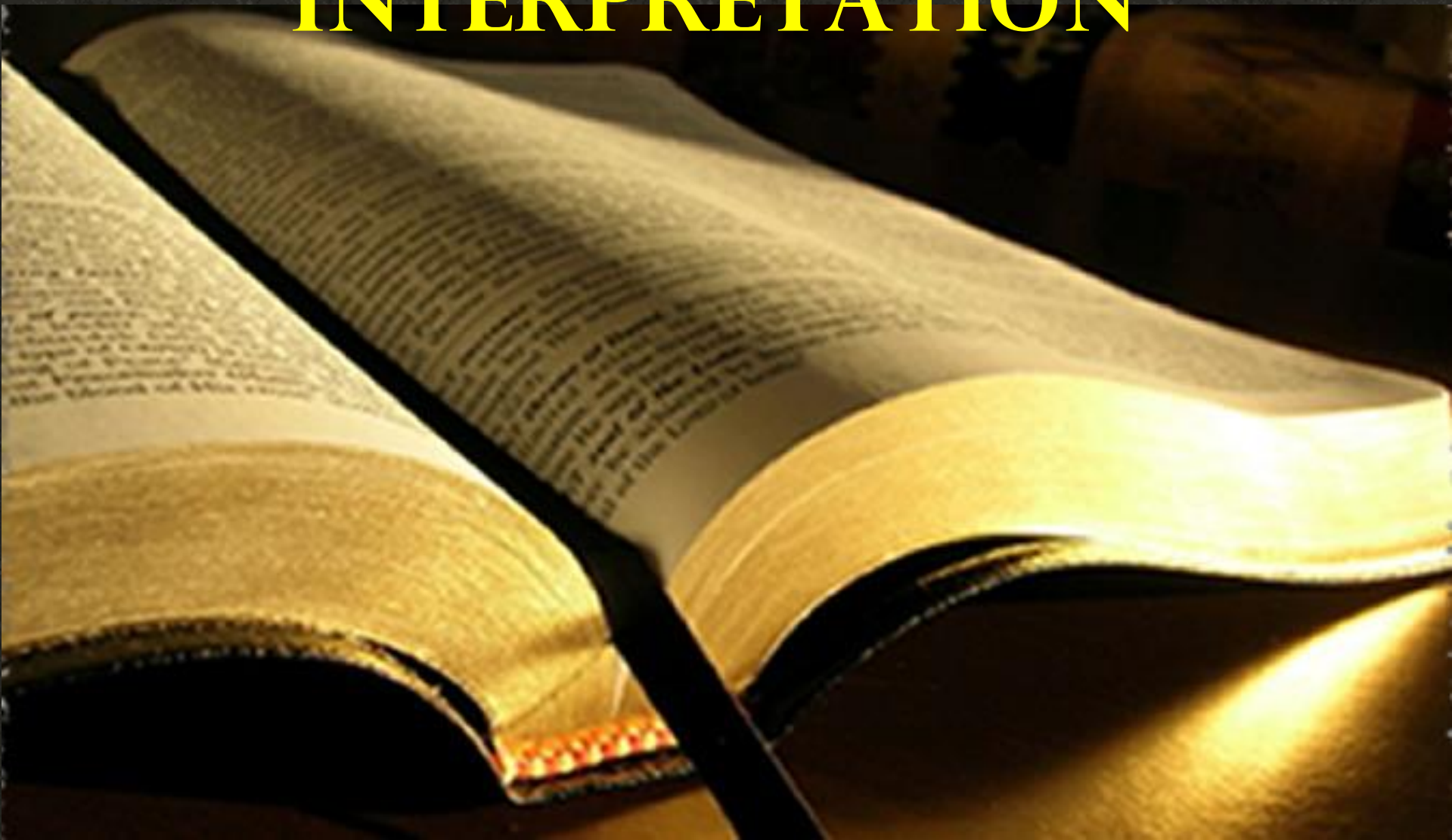
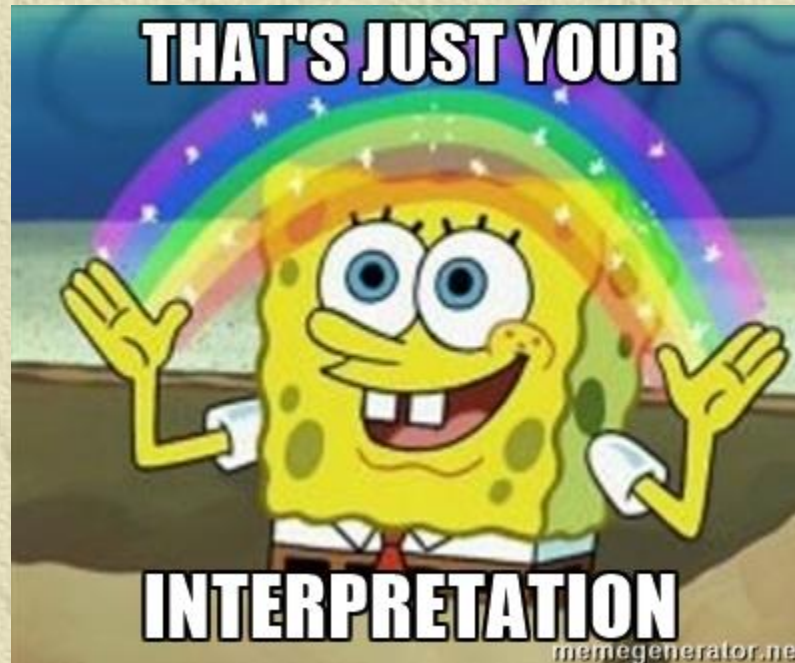


# PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION



# Things We Sometimes Hear

✧ *“Well, that’s just your interpretation.”*



✧ *“The Bible can be made to say anything you want.”*



# Things We Sometimes Hear

✠ *“The Bible can be made to say anything you want.”*



# Things We Sometimes Hear



✦ *"You can't really understand the Bible. It is full of contradictions."*



# Things We Sometimes Hear

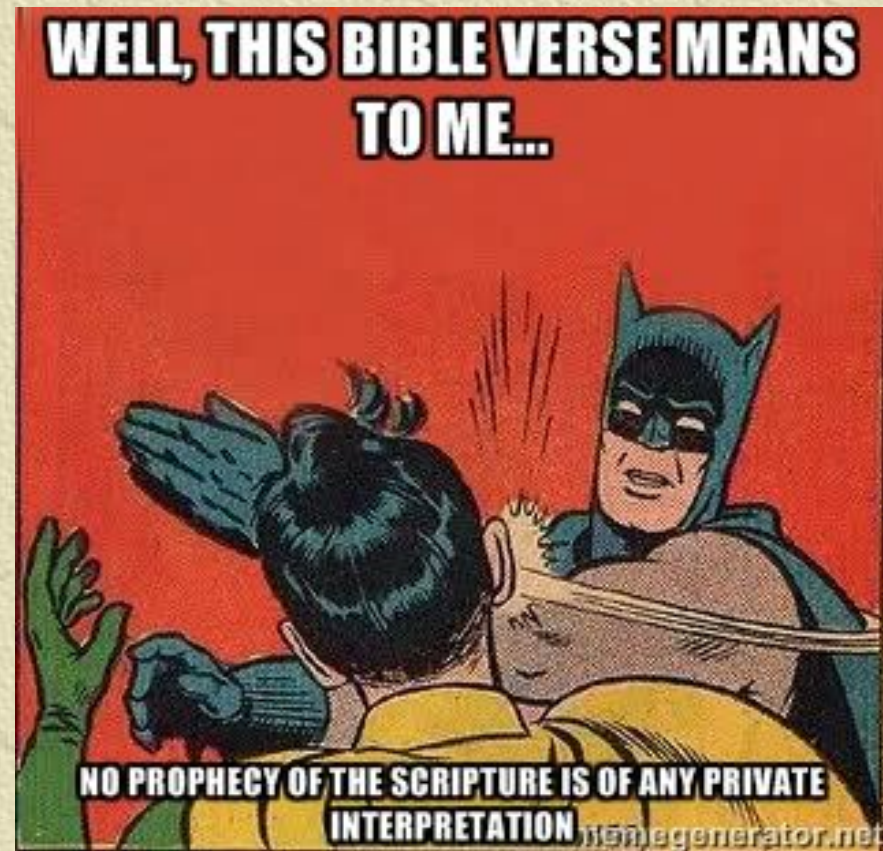
✦ *“No one can understand the true meaning of anything anyone says.”*



# Things We Sometimes Hear

*“This is what this Bible verse means to me.”*

All of these are about principles of biblical interpretation also called in theological jargon *hermeneutics*







**Hermes**

# **The Messenger of the Olympian Gods in Greek Mythology**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**From this name is  
derived the term  
that concerns our  
subject today →**



**Hermes**

# **Biblical Hermeneutics**

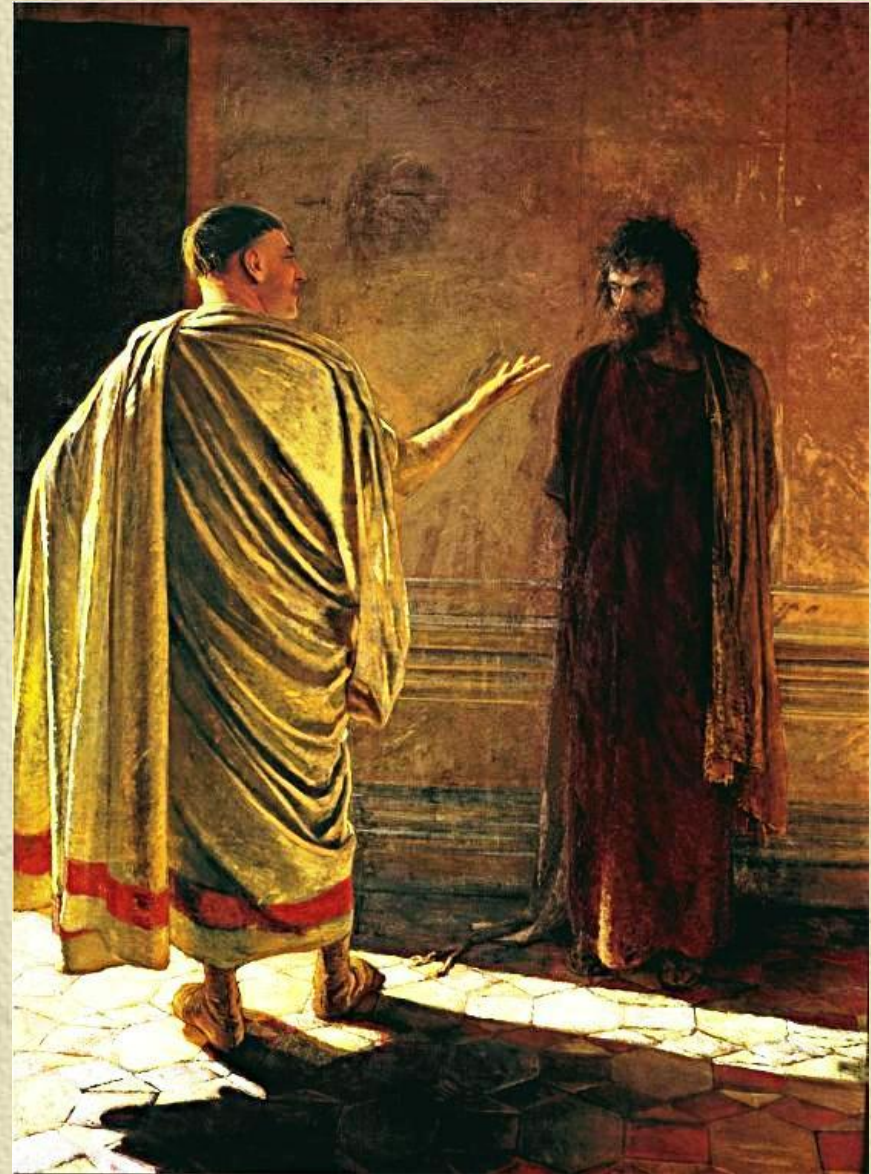
**The Science of  
Interpretation**



# Welcome to Our Post-Modern World

PILATE'S QUESTION  
LIVES ON:

“What is truth?”



# Tonight

- ✦ Divine inspiration and human authorship affects on biblical interpretation
- ✦ Texts and their meaning
- ✦ General principles of interpretation
- ✦ Specific principles of interpretation



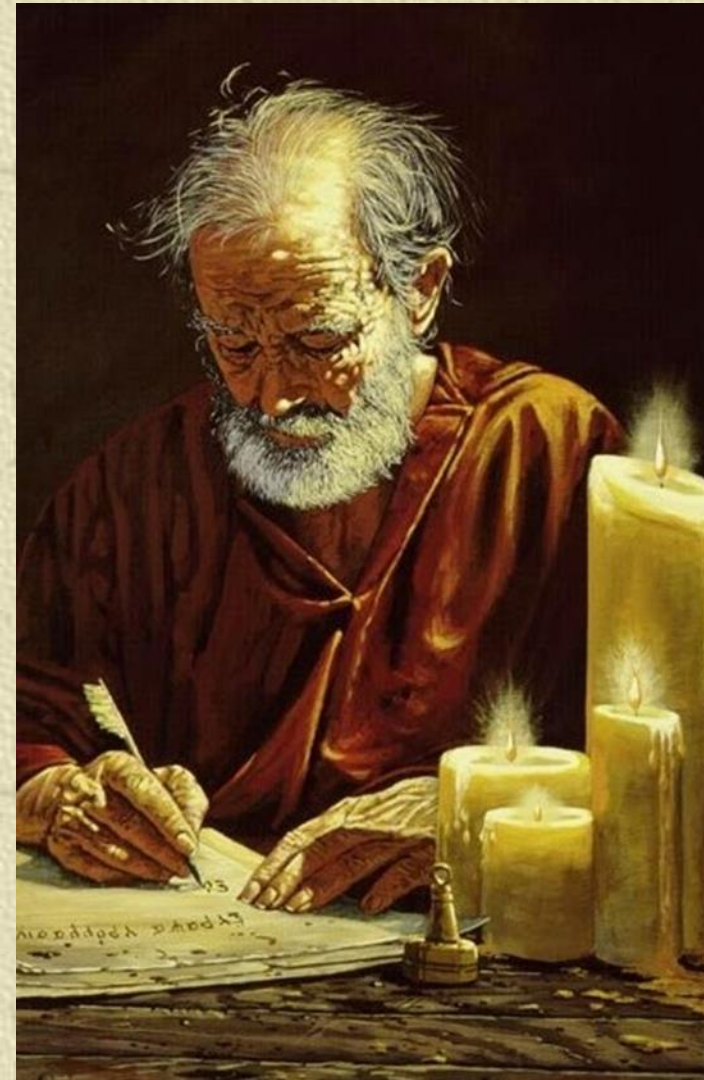
# What Does a Text Mean?

✠ The Bible is both a *human* book and a *divine* book.



# Implications for Bible Interpretation

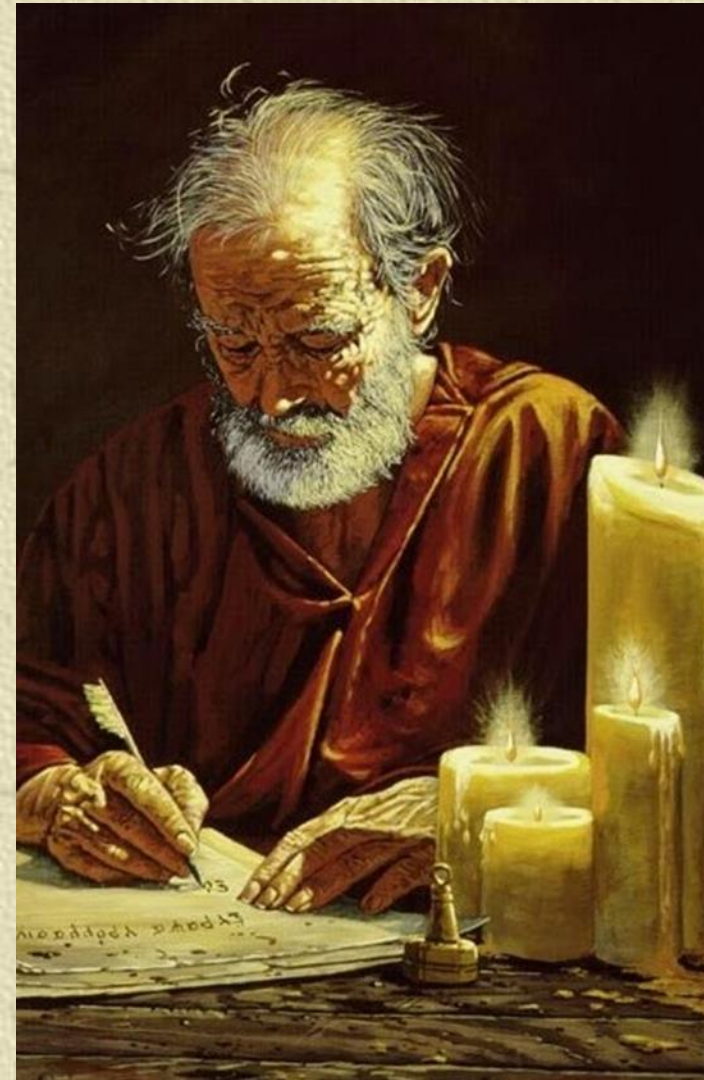
- ✠ Human authors had a specific historical audience, context and purpose





# Implications for Bible Interpretation

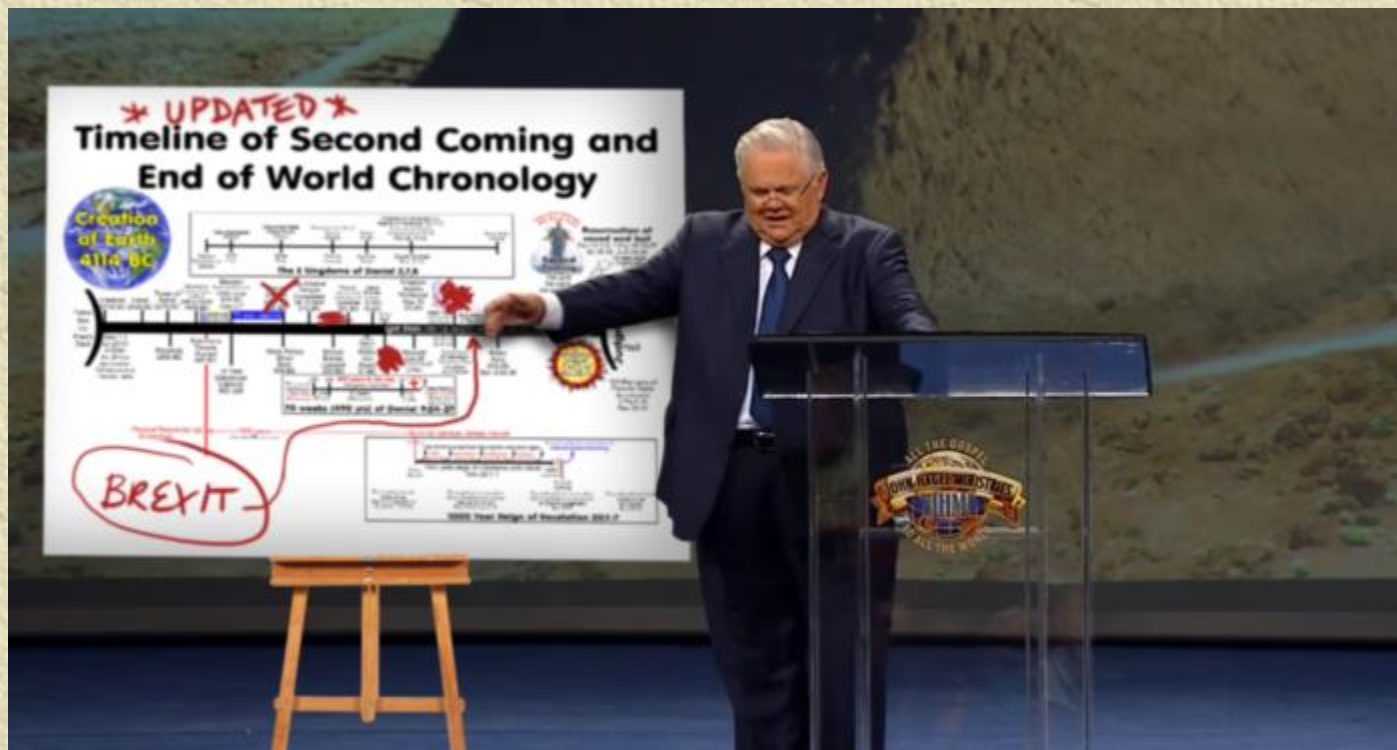
- ✠ Human authors used their own language, writing methods, style of writing and literary form of writing
- ✠ The Divine authorship of the Bible gives it its unity and the ultimate interpretation is from God.



# The Bible's rules of Bible study.

*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*

2 Peter 1:20





# The Bible's rules of Bible study.

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2 Peter 1:20

## Principals:

- A. There are no contradictions in the scriptures.
- B. Words should normally be defined with primary meanings.
- C. Scripture should be compared with scripture to understand scripture.
- D. Reference Texts must be distinguished from Proof Texts.

# A. There are no contradictions in the scriptures.

*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*

2 Peter 1:20

- i. No verse of scripture can be privately interpreted
  - “*Private*” - Withdrawn or separated from the public body
  - The “*public body*” in context is the scripture.
  - Therefore no interpretation (explanation) of a prophecy (divinely inspired utterance or discourse) of the scripture can be withdrawn or separated from the rest of the body of the scripture, for to do so would create contradictions.



## **B. Words should normally be defined with primary meanings.**

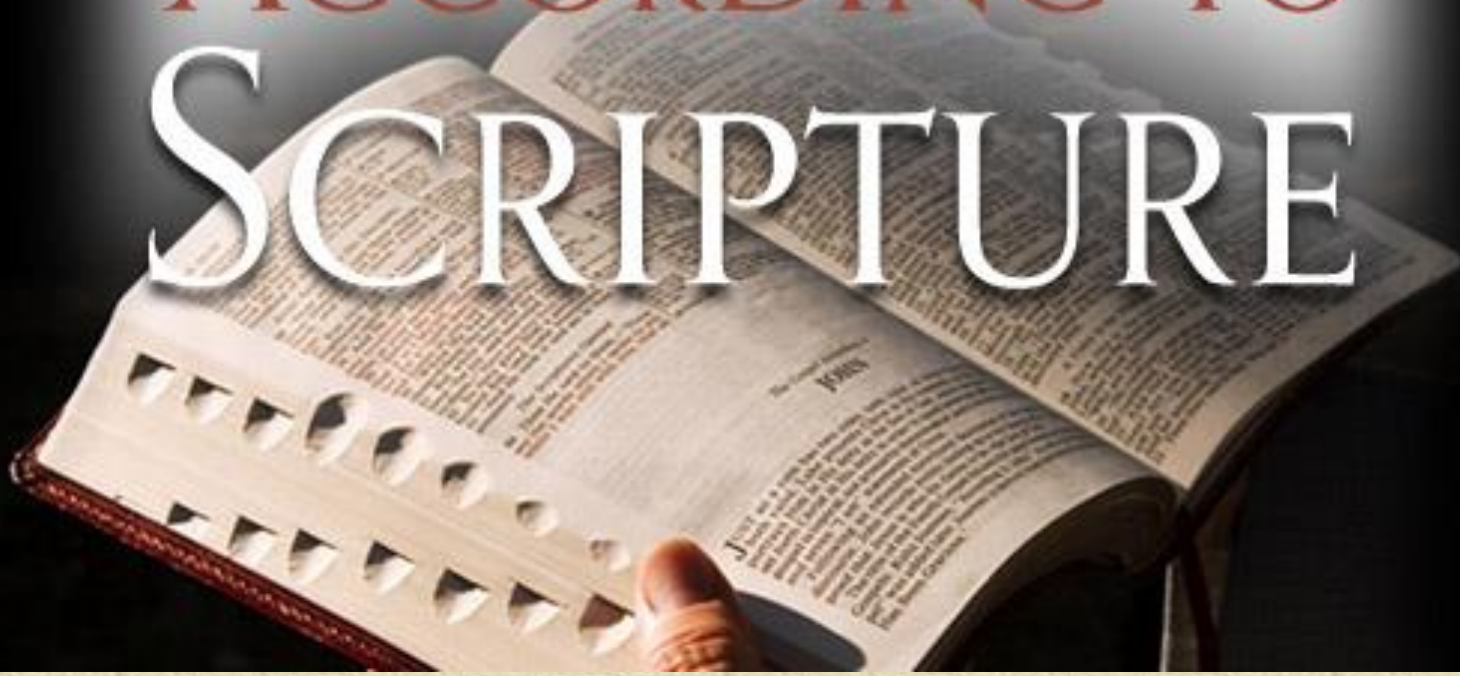
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

### **Nehemiah 8:8**

- When interpreting a verse, the words should be read distinctly and the sense (meaning) should be given.
- The primary meaning of a word should be used by default unless to do so creates a contradiction/absurdity, or the particular context of the passage makes it obvious that a secondary meaning is being used.

**C. Scripture should be compared with scripture to understand scripture.**

# INTERPETING SCRIPTURE ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE





## **C. Scripture should be compared with scripture to understand scripture.**

<sup>9</sup> Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

<sup>10</sup> For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

### **Isaiah 28:9-10**

✦ The Bible is written so that, at times, all the information on a given topic is scattered "here a little, and there a little" all through the scriptures

## **C. Scripture should be compared with scripture to understand scripture.**

<sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

<sup>13</sup> Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-13**

✠ This is how the Holy Ghost teaches and so ought we



## **D. *Reference* Texts must be distinguished from *Proof* Texts.**

✦ A *proof* text expressly states a point of doctrine.

✦ A *reference* text refers to a point of doctrine but does not expressly define it. The point must be proved elsewhere.

## **D. Reference Texts must be distinguished from Proof Texts.**

✠ A proof text example:

✠ John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.



## D. Reference Texts must be distinguished from Proof Texts.

✠ A reference text example:

✠ **Romans 10:13** For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.



The question then needs to be asked, "Saved from what?"  
The text doesn't say what type of salvation is being spoken of, it merely **refers** to a salvation and would need compared with other texts to define what it is.

Question:  
What does a text mean?



**Answer:**

**A text means what the author  
intended it to mean!**



# Personal Letter Illustration

✦ If you wrote a letter what does it mean?  
What *your* interpretation is or how the  
*recipients* interpret it?





## *Other Principles Biblical interpretation:*

- ✧ **Principle 1: Authorial Intent:** Interpretation must be based on the author's intention of meaning and not the reader.
  
- ✧ This means we must get into the author's **context**
  - ◆ Historically,
  - ◆ Grammatically,
  - ◆ Culturally
  - ◆ And the literary forms and conventions the author was working in.

# Other Principles Biblical interpretation:

What does the following mean? “It was a ball?”

- ◆ The baseball umpire saw the pitch drift to the outside and said, “it was a ball.”
- ◆ We went to the dance last night in fact it was so formal “it was a ball.”
- ◆ As I was walking along the golf course I spotted something small and white in the tall grass, “it was a ball.”
- ◆ I had so much fun at the game night. “It was a ball.”



CONTEXT  
DETERMINES  
MEANING!!!

Context of 1<sup>st</sup>  
century

**Author then Bible**

**Book**

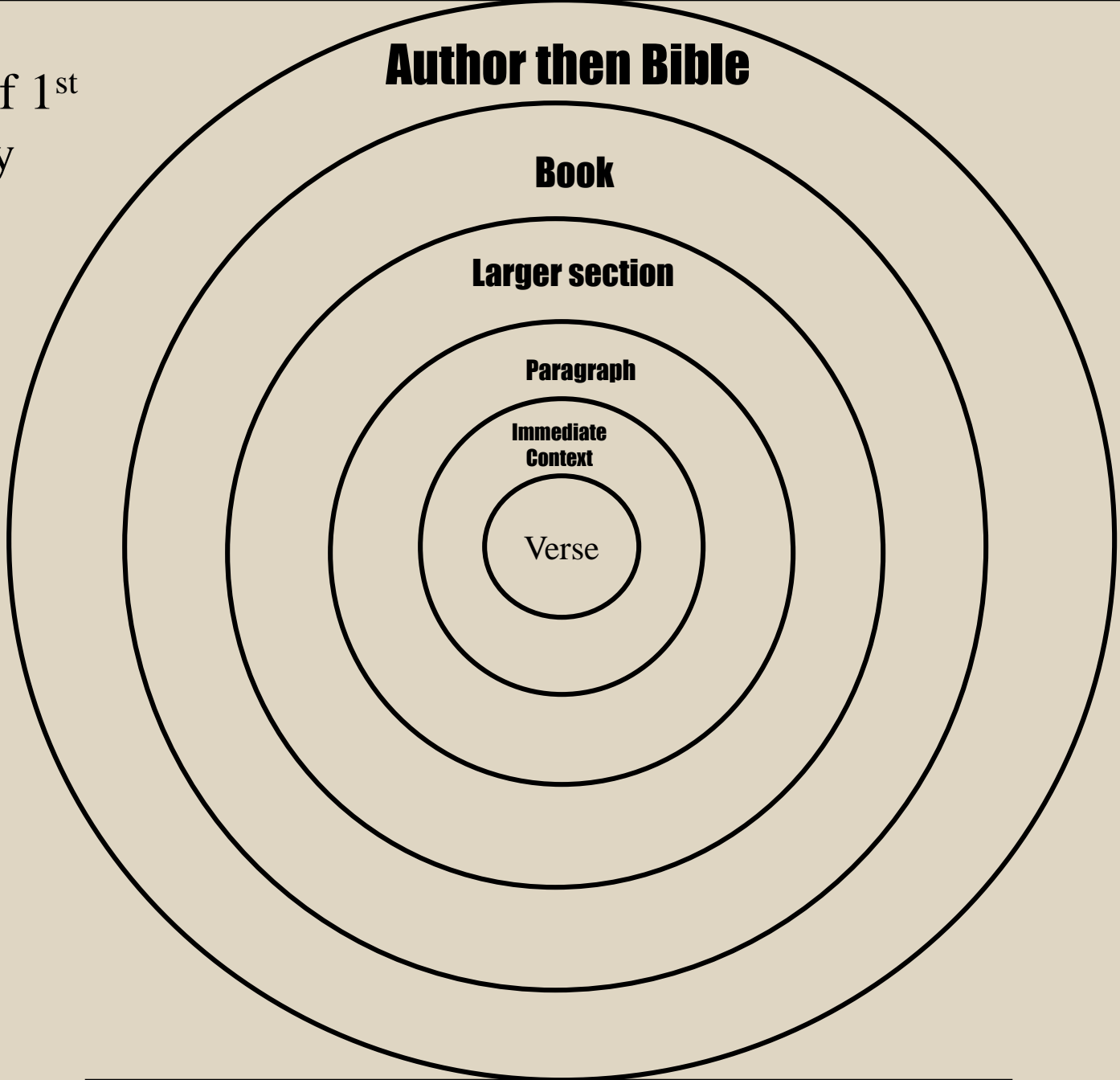
**Larger section**

**Paragraph**

**Immediate  
Context**

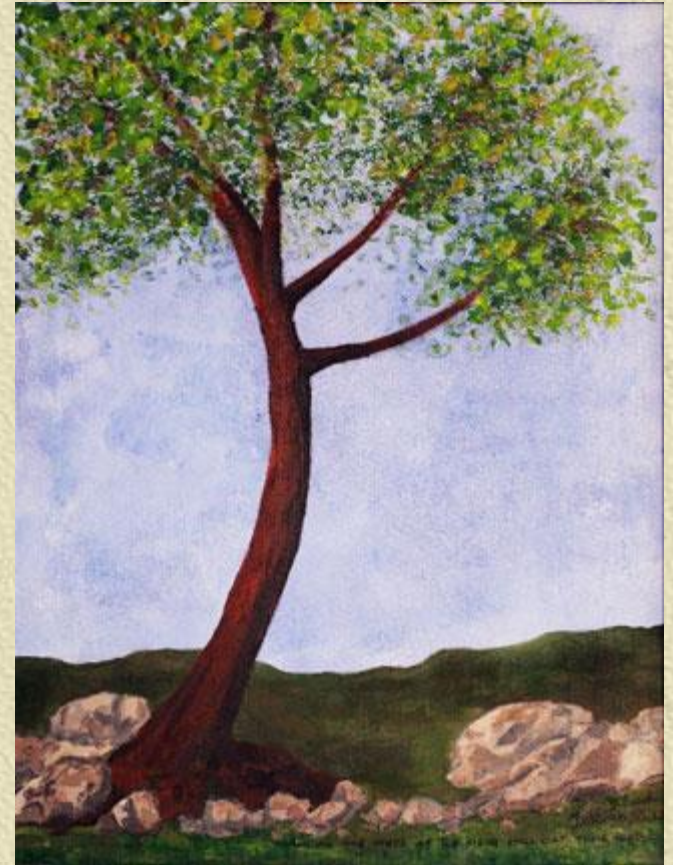
Verse

**Circles of Literary Context**



# Other Principles Biblical Interpretation:

✦ **Principle:** Interpret the Bible literally allowing for use of normal figurative language. When the literal does not make sense (e.g., trees clapping their hands) you may have a figure of speech.





# Other Principles Biblical Interpretation:

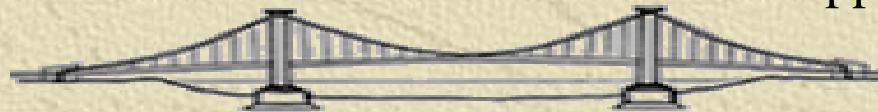
✦ **Principle:** Interpretation must be distinguished from application. While there is one interpretation that is historical there are many applications that can be carried over to our modern context.

✦ Build the “application bridge”

## Timeless Principle

Interpretation

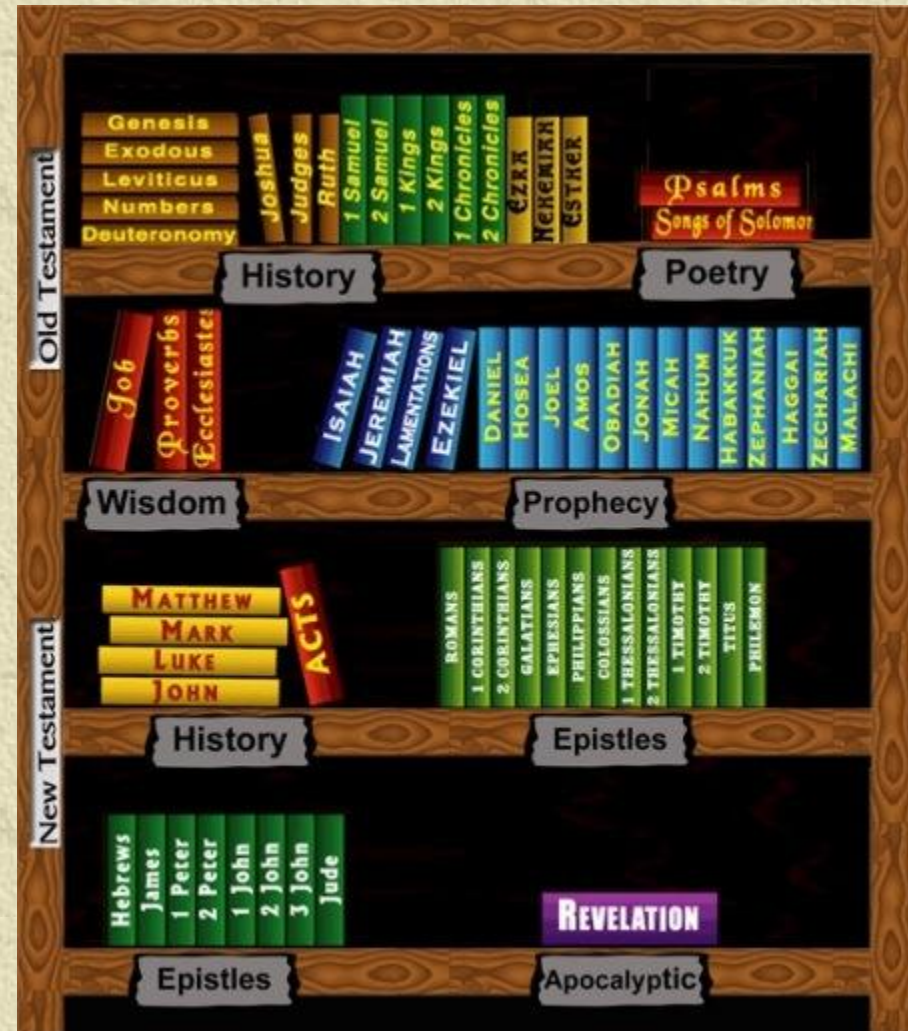
Application Now



# Other Principles Biblical Interpretation:

✠ **Principle:** Be sensitive to the type of literature you are in. For example law, wisdom, poetry, gospel, parable, epistle, apocalyptic.

✠ Each of these types of literature have specific features that must be considered





# Interpreting the Old Testament

- ✦ **Law:** Realize that Christians are not under the law as a legal system (Rom 6:14) but that we are to fulfill the principles that *stand behind the law* of loving God and loving one's neighbor (Cf Matt 22:37-40).
- ✦ Look for *the principle*. Sometimes the teaching is carried directly into the New Testament (e.g., Do not murder etc).
  - ◆ You must not muzzle your ox when it is treading grain (Deut 25:4)
  - ◆ Paul takes this verse and applies the principle of the “worker” being worthy of tangible support: Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. 5:18 For the scripture says, “***Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,***” and, “The worker deserves his pay.” (1 Tim 5:17-18, cf. 1 Cor 9:9)



# Interpreting the Old Testament

✦ **Wisdom:** Realize that much of the proverbial type of wisdom are general truths based on observations but not “absolute” truths or promises.

- ✦ A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Prov 15:1).
- ✦ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6).

# Interpreting the Old Testament

✧ **Poetry:** Realize that poetry often has figurate language and Hebrew poetry's main characteristic is parallelism.

- ✧ 1 The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
- ✧ 2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.
- ✧ 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?(Ps 24:1-3)

# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Gospels:

- ✧ Understand that Each writer has a *specific audience* for whom he is writing and selects his material for them
  - Matthew was written for a **Jewish** audience
  - Mark was written for a **Roman** audience
  - Luke was written for a **Greek** audience
  - John was written for a **Gentile** audience
- ✧ Read gospels not only vertically (what is said in each individually) but also horizontally (why one story follows another) (**See Mark 2-3:6; What do these accounts have in common?**) .
- ✧ Recognize that the gospels are in a transitional stage between Old and New Covenants (e.g., Mark 7 where Jesus declared all foods clean)



# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Parables

- ◆ Determine the context that prompted the parable
- ◆ Understand the story's *natural* meaning
- ◆ Ascertain the main point or truth the parable is trying to give
- ◆ Only interpret the details of the parables if they can be validated from the passage. Many details are there for the setting of the story only.
- ◆ E.g., The mustard seed parable?
  - 31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:
  - 32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.(Matt 13:31-32) .

# Interpreting the New Testament

✦ **Acts:** Recognize that Acts is a theologized history of the early church.

- ✦ It tells what the church is doing and what God is doing.
- ✦ 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. . . . (Acts 2:41)
- ✦ And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:47)
- ✦ Church starts in Acts 2 with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- ✦ Some events are *descriptive* of what happened not *proscriptive* of what we see in the church today.
  - Samaritan Believers not having the Holy Spirit in Acts 8 upon faith in Jesus (Waiting for Peter and John to get there).
  - Paul bitten by a viper in yet miraculously living (Acts 28:1-5)

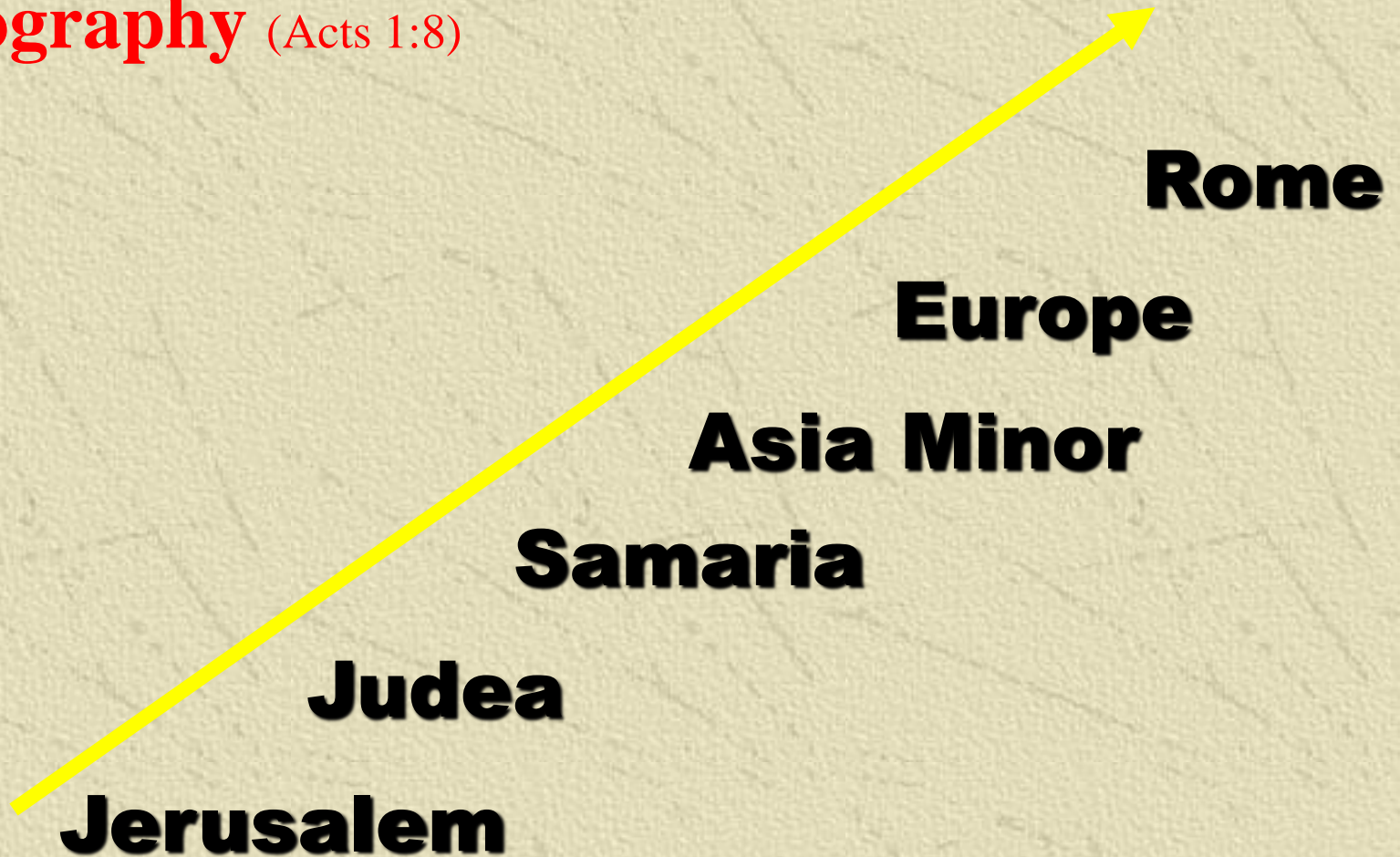
# Key Transitions in the Book of Acts





# Key Transitions in the Book of Acts

**Geography** (Acts 1:8)



# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Epistles:

- ✧ Since the Epistles are directed to churches and individuals in the church *they most directly apply to us*.
- ✧ Pay special attention to logical connectors/conjunctions to explore.

- Look for these words: “for, “wherefore”, “but” etc.

✧ 28 **Wherefore** we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29 For our God is a consuming fire.  
(Heb 12:28-29).

# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Revelation:

- ✧ Recognize that there are many Old Testament allusions in Revelation





# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Revelation:

- ✧ Recognize that there is a greater use of symbolic language here than in other parts of the Bible

### Symbols in Revelation

- Symbols from OT (Lion of Judah, Song of Moses, Tree of Life, Lamb of God)
- Symbols from NT (Word of God, Son of Man, Bride of Christ)
- Symbols unexplained (Scarlet beast, 7 thunders, mark of the beast)
- Identified Symbols (7 Lamps = 7 churches, dragon = Satan)
- Symbols depict real people, things, situations and events.



# Interpreting the New Testament

## ✧ Revelation:

- ✧ Interpret the seven churches as seven historical churches from John's day and from chapter 4 onward as primarily heavenly events from our perspective (Rev 1:18-19).





Holy Bible

READ  
ME!