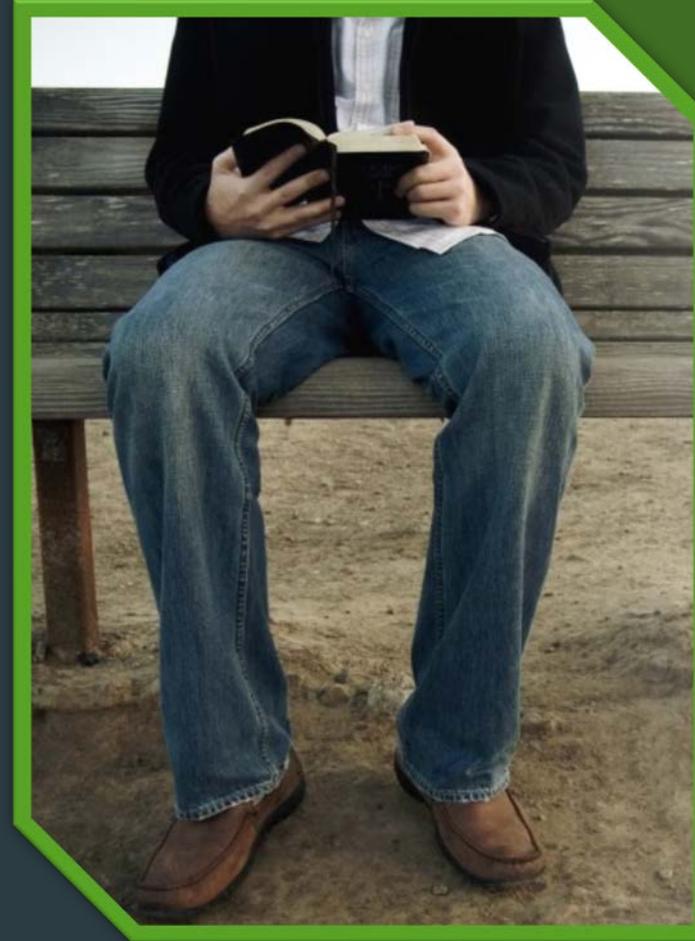


# How To Study the Bible

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Without falling asleep or  
becoming a heretic

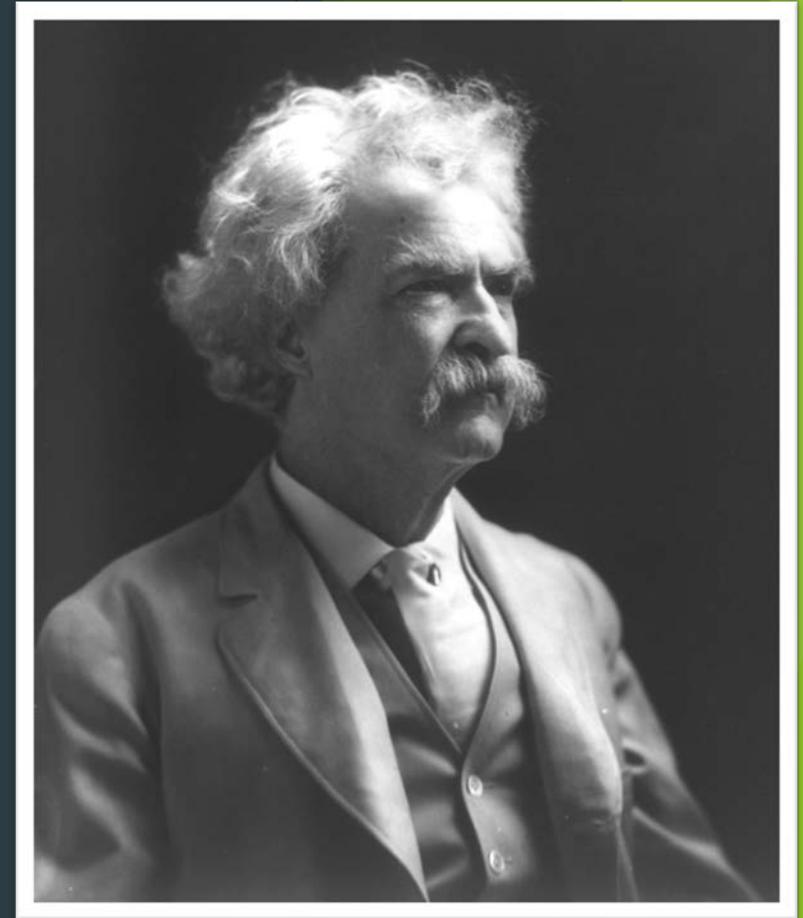


Module 1  
The Great Divide:  
Interpreting the Bible

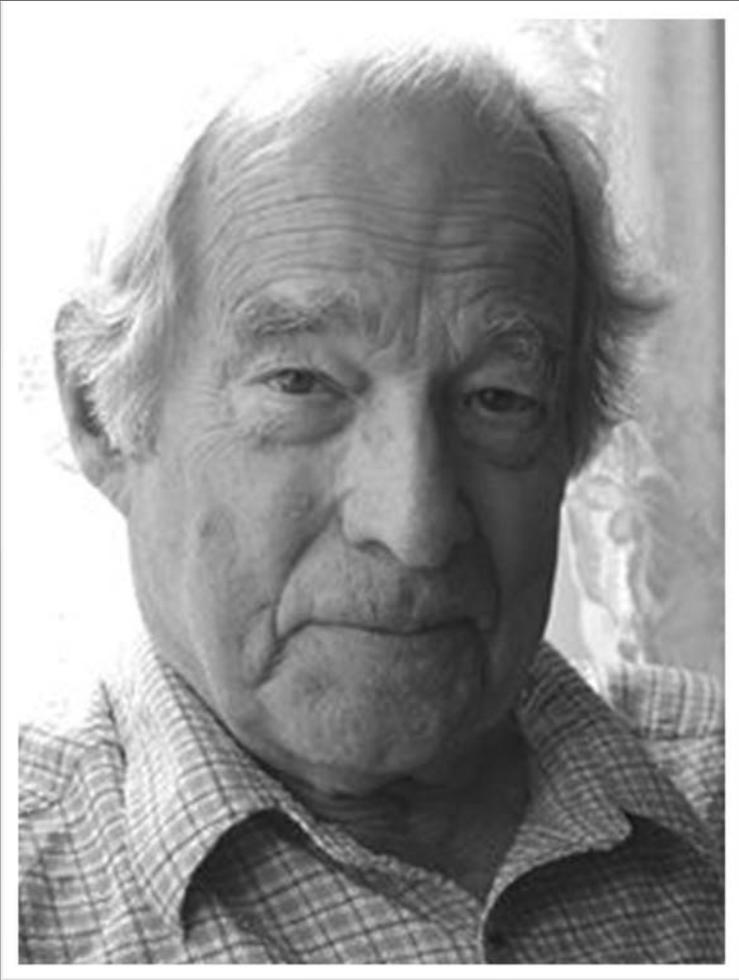


# Mark Twain ~

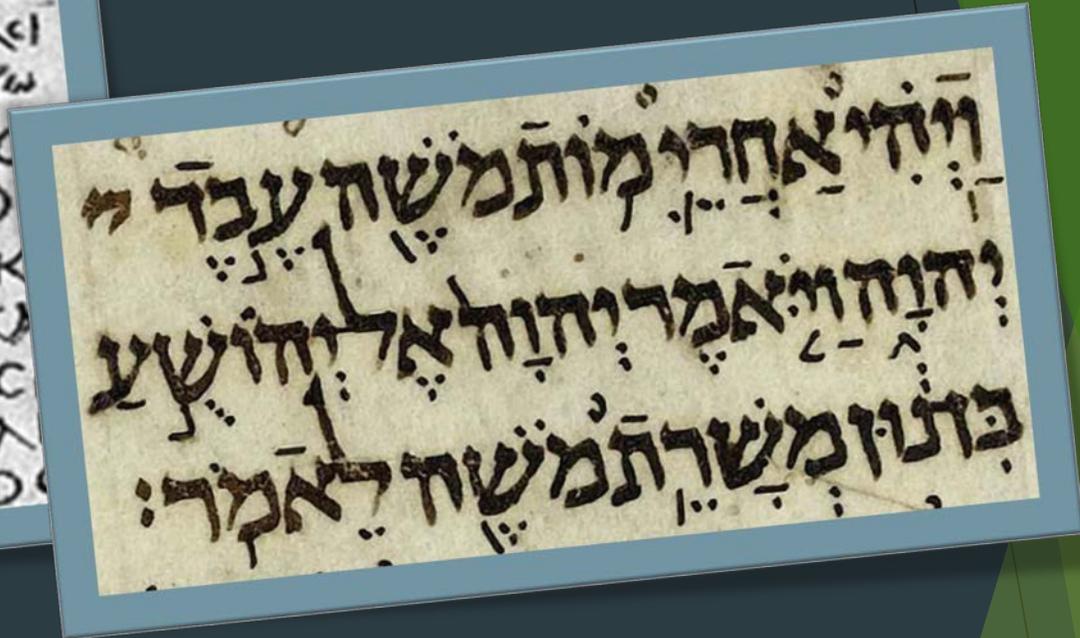
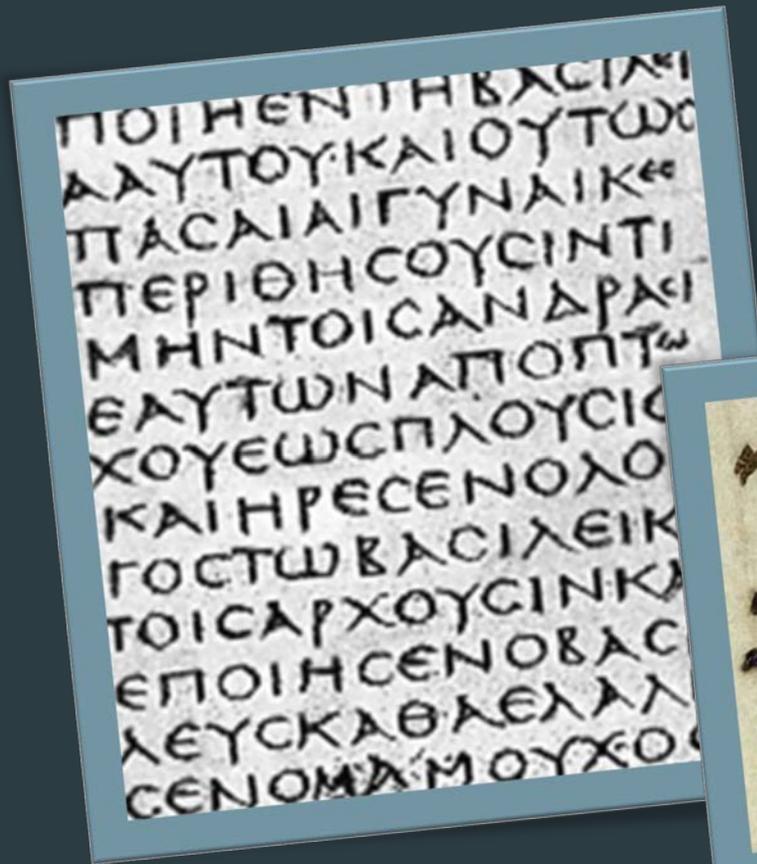
Most people are  
bothered by those  
passages of  
Scripture they do  
not understand, but  
the passages that  
bother me are those  
I *do* understand.



# William Sloane Coffin ~



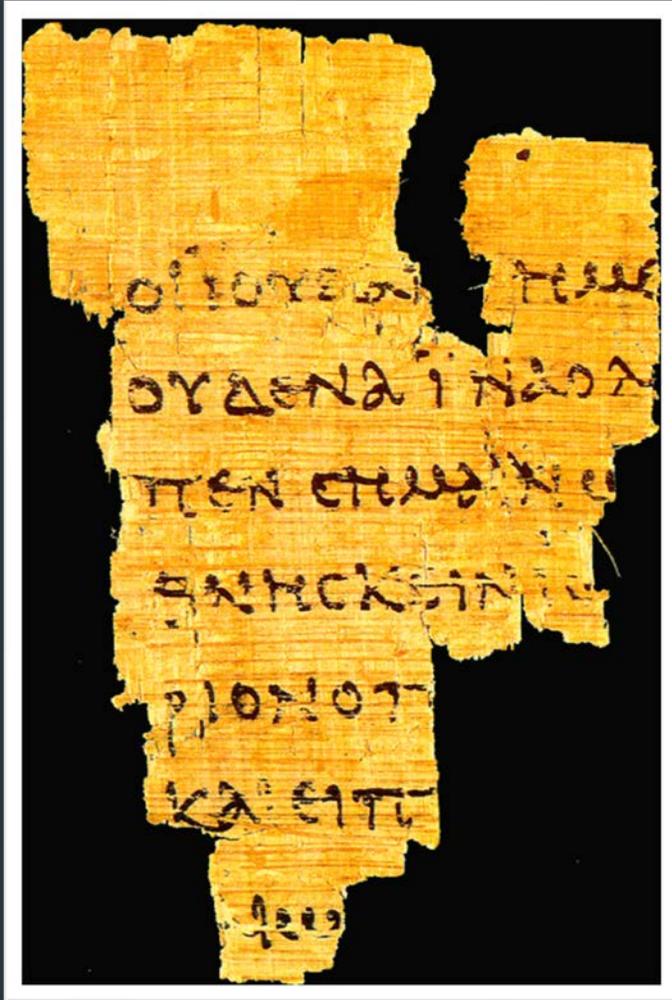
It is a mistake to look to the Bible to close a discussion; the Bible seeks to open one.



# The First Set of Problems

Translating the original Greek and Hebrew Manuscripts

# It All About How We Read It



- ▶ Can't we just read it?
  1. Every english bible, from KJV to The Living Word is a translation from Greek or Hebrew
  2. English language is fluid and always changing

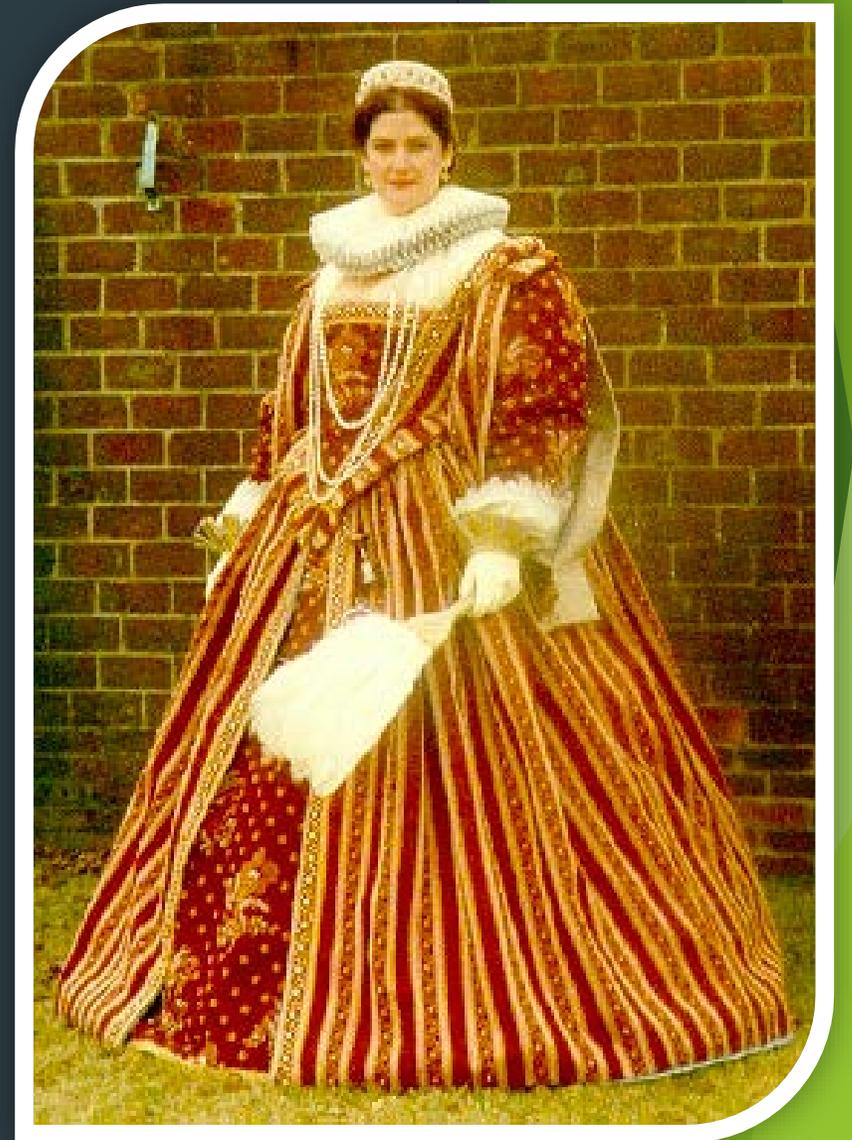
# James 2:3

- ▶ "And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool."



# So what is James trying to say?

- ▶ King James Version written in 1611, uses the same language as Shakespeare
  - ▶ Definition of "Gay":
    1. *Carefree*
    2. *Happy*
    3. *Decadent*



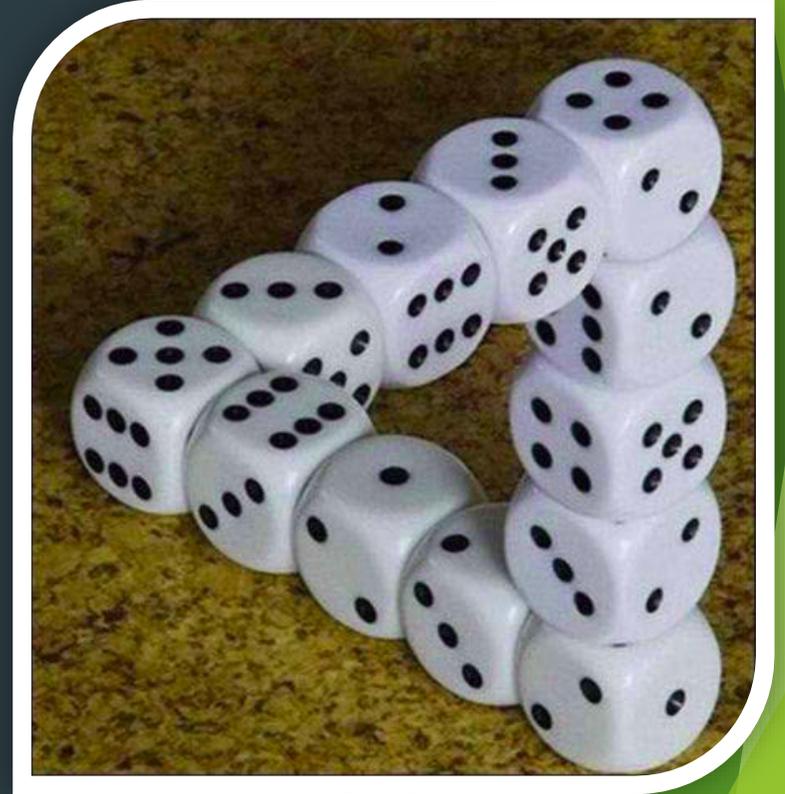


## The second set of problems

Pre-conceived ideas, bias, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century worldviews

## We All Have a Paradigm or Worldview

- ▶ We all grow up believing certain things about ourselves and the world
  - ▶ One set of grandparents
  - ▶ Cincinnati Reds are the greatest baseball team ever!
  - ▶ Racial superiority - African Americans are inferior to Caucasians

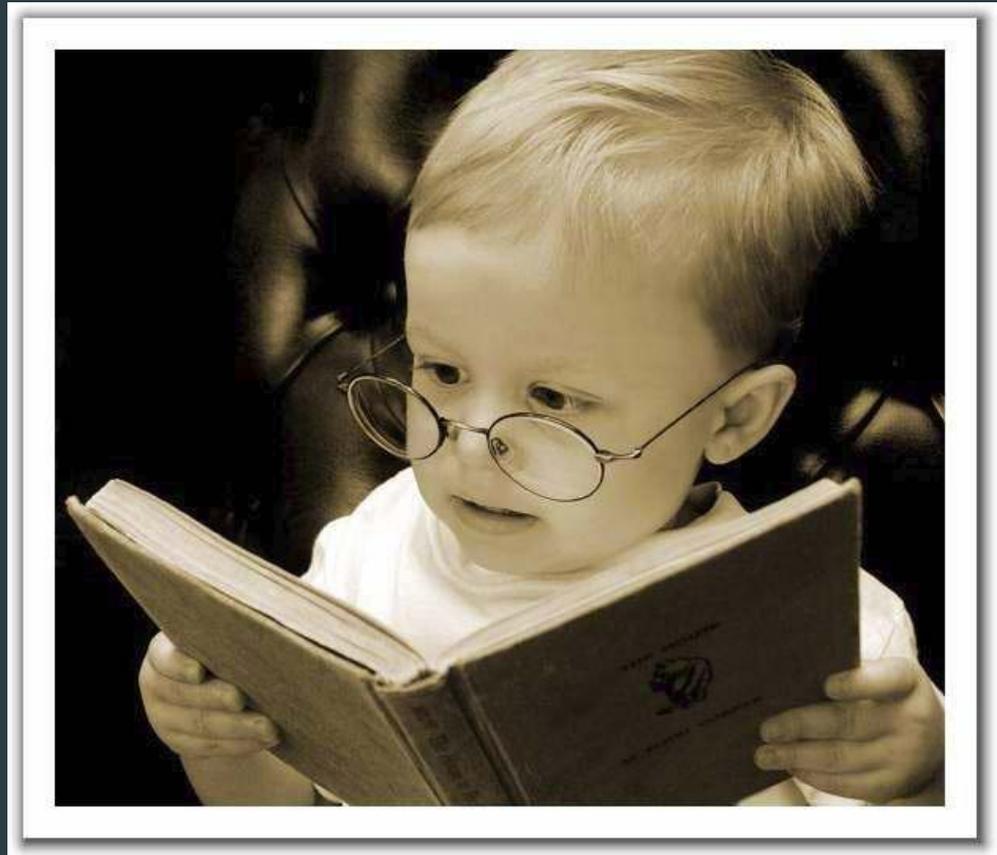


## Well, it obviously means *this!*

- ▶ Two people can read the same words, and interpret them completely differently
  - ▶ Our interpretations are often the result of our experiences, our past, or our personal bias
  - ▶ So does that mean that reading and interpreting the bible is all just personal opinion?
  - ▶ Not necessarily...



# Eise....what?



- ▶ The technical term for reading your own ideas into the text is called *eisegesis*
  - ▶ Comes from the greek
  - ▶ Eis = into, gesis = to lead
  - ▶ “to lead your own ideas into the text”
- ▶ The process of taking a preconceived belief and interpreting a biblical passage in a way that supports that belief

## Eise...what?

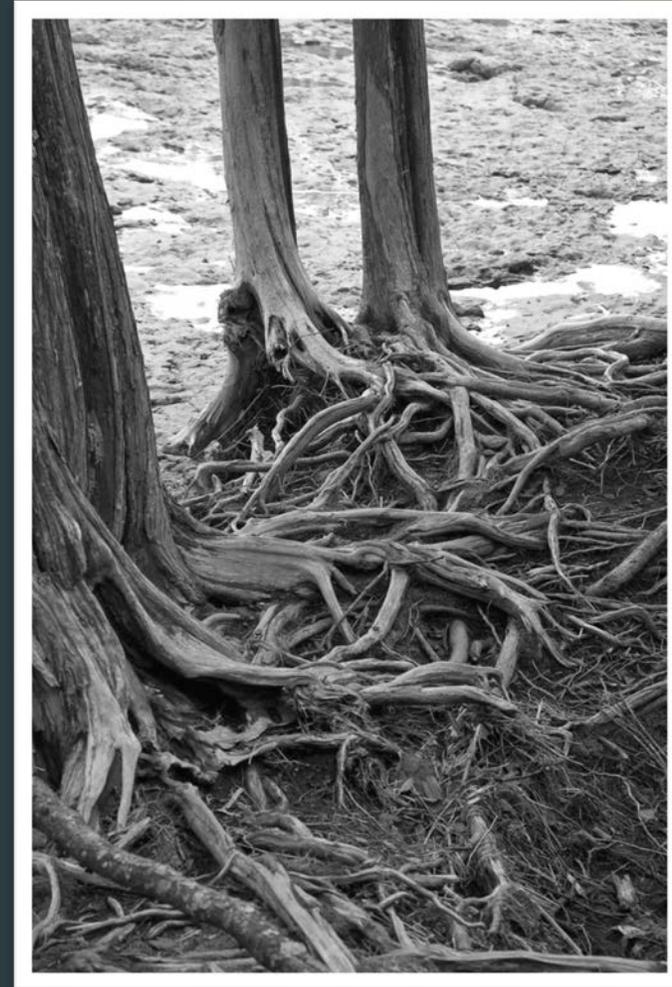
- ▶ Matthew 5:34-36 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.



- ▶ It's really hard NOT to do it, we're limited by our language and the current meaning of words we use

# Something we have to think about

- ▶ 'When a biblical text is interpreted outside of its historical context, it is often *unconsciously* interpreted in terms of the reader's own culture, time and beliefs.' ~ Paul H. Seely
- ▶ Means we need to stop and think about beliefs and interpretations, to see if that's really what the text is saying



## Is it really that big a deal?

- ▶ My feelings as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter.

## Is it really that big a deal?

- ▶ In boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison.

~ Adolf Hitler, in his speech in Munich on 12 April 1922 referring to John 2:15



## The third set of problems

Contradictions, errors and good old fashioned slip-ups

C.S. Lewis ~

“The human qualities of the [bible] show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not “the Word of God” in the sense that every passage in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It *carries* the Word of God.”

## The Divine contained in something human?



- ▶ The way the Bible is packaged doesn't make it any less divine, especially since God allowed men to package it in their own packaging: Thought-inspiration.

# Definitely Not Inerrant

- ▶ Since there is a human element, there are definitely some inconsistencies in the bible
- ▶ Depending on how closely you read, you're going to find some of the details don't always match up
  1. How many blind men did Jesus heal on his way to Jericho just before the crucifixion?
    - A. Matthew = 2, Mark = 1



# The problem isn't with the Bible... ...it's with me!

- ▶ We cannot assume that our lack of an explanation for problems is evidence that the bible is wrong, only that we haven't discovered why it looks that way
- ▶ When we see these problems, don't assume the problem is with the bible, assume it with ourselves, or our understanding of it





## Problem 4 - Devotional Ruts

A favorite New Year's Resolution that we keep making again...and again...and again...

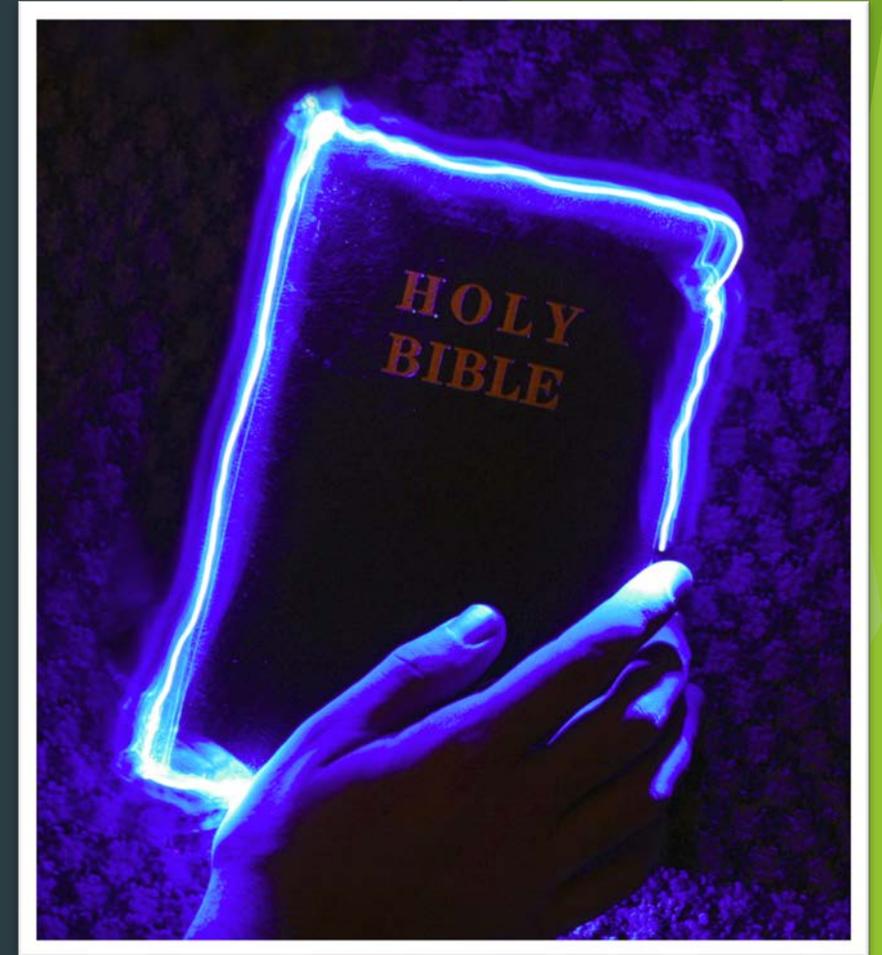


So why believe at all?

Couldn't God have just made things a little clearer?

# Different Opinions, One Text

- ▶ So, again is it all just personal opinion?
- ▶ How is anyone supposed to sit down and understand what the bible is trying to say?
- ▶ Can we really know what the original writer's meant when they were writing 1000's of years ago?



## Different Opinions, One Text

“Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence...”



# Different Opinions, One Text

...God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe; but he who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things which he cannot make plain to his finite understanding will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith."



Module 2 -

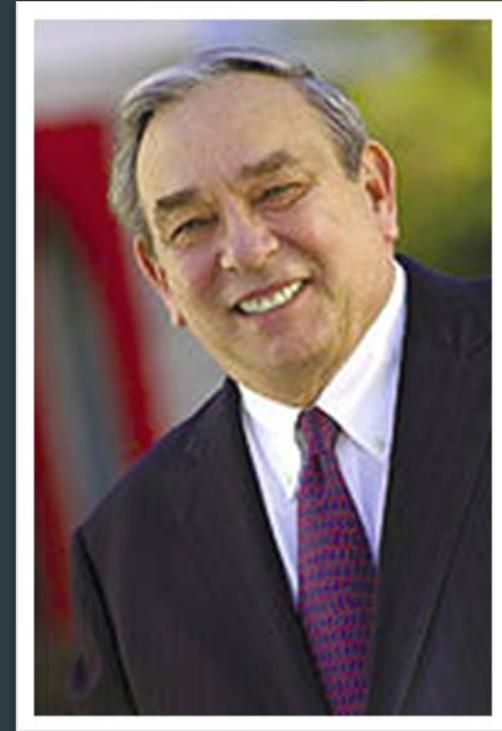
# Searching for the Elusive Truth



Because "The Truth" calls to both our Head  
and our Heart

## R.C. Sproul

Here, then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy. --R. C. Sproul





## A One-Two-Three Punch

The three ideas that have impacted me the most

# A one-two-three punch

1. Historical Context
2. Principles and Applications
3. Thought  
inspiration  
vs.  
Word-for-word  
inspiration



# #1 Historical Context

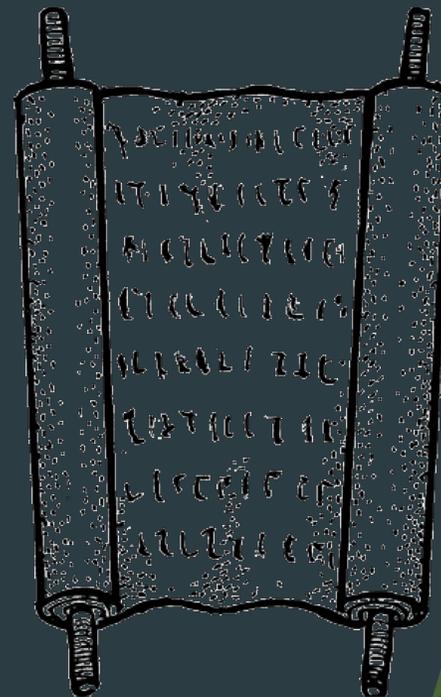
- ▶ The biggest question we have to ask:

“What did this passage mean when it was written?”



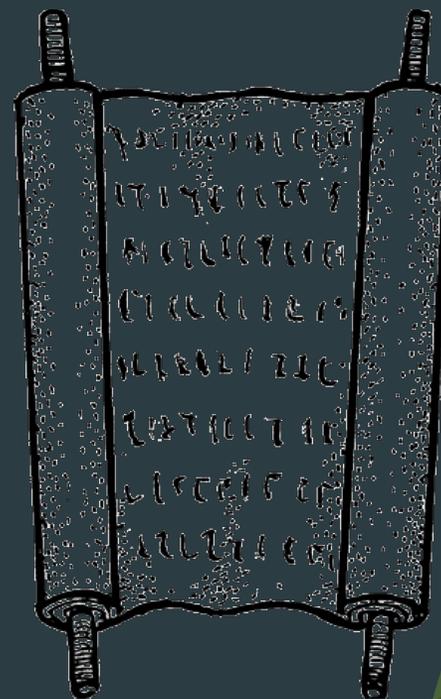
# #1 Historical Context

- ▶ Romans 1:17 -For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.
- ▶ When we read this, we have to think about who wrote it



# #1 Historical Context

- ▶ Written by the Apostle Paul, to Christians living in Rome
  - ▶ A Jewish Pharisee, equivalent of a PhD
  - ▶ Expert in the Old Testament
- ▶ What does “faith” mean to a Pharisee?
- ▶ Does “as it is written” mean the phrase is found somewhere else, and if so where?



# How To Study the Bible – Rule #1



- ▶ When reading a text or passage first ask:
  1. “What did this passage mean when it was written?”
- ▶ Next ask the following:
  1. Who is writing this, and who is the audience?
  2. What are they writing about?
  3. When was it written?
  4. Where was it written?
  5. Why was he/she writing it?

## #2 - Principles and Applications

- ▶ A PRINCIPLE is a timeless, unchanging truth or core value (Love, Honesty, Freedom, etc)
- ▶ An APPLICATION is how we apply that truth to our daily lives, taking into account our culture, times, & circumstances



# Principles and Applications

- ▶ Principles never change! They stay the same throughout all time.
  - ▶ Love, Honesty, Freedom - these things are always right. They are the general principles behind much of the instruction in the Bible
  - ▶ 10 Commandments: Principles!



## #2 - Principles and Applications



- ▶ Applications are constantly changing!
- ▶ Every culture and people must continuously wrestle with the best ways to show love, the best ways to promote freedom, etc.
- ▶ Sermon on the Mount: Applications!

## #3 - Thought Inspiration

- ▶ There are two opposing views of how God gave us the Bible
  1. Dictated every word to the writers, either personally or through angels
  2. Inspired the writers with thoughts, which were then expressed with the writer's own words and culture



# Word-for-word Inspiration

- ▶ I like the sound of this at first
  - ▶ Sense of security
  - ▶ Confidence
  - ▶ Ease of interpretation
- ▶ Some problems
  - ▶ What do we do with errors?
    - ▶ Statistics and figures are sometimes wrong
    - ▶ Peter quotes something from the wrong source
    - ▶ Scientific errors
  - ▶ Strange proclamations
    - ▶ Can't wear color red (Deuteronomy)
    - ▶ Must keep Old Testament festivals



## #3 - Thought Inspiration



- ▶ Writer's of the bible, "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20
- ▶ Means that heavenly thoughts are expressed in human terms.
- ▶ Means that the writer's understanding of the world, culture, his language is reflected in how he wrote out his inspired thoughts

# #3 - Thought Inspiration - Implications



- ▶ If the words themselves are man-made then errors in statistics/figures are acceptable
- ▶ Even scientific errors are understandable
- ▶ God still controlled the primary message, and what comes through the inspired writings is exactly what he intended, in spite of human errors

# #3 - Thought Inspiration - Implications

- ▶ Cultural issues can be seen as just that; cultural
  - ▶ Women sold between families like cattle
  - ▶ Slavery acceptable
  - ▶ Insistence on certain ritualistic forms like not wearing the color red
  - ▶ Polygamy an accepted practice



## #3 - Thought Inspiration

- ▶ “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity...The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His Pen...It is not the *words* of the Bible that are inspired, but the *men* who were inspired.



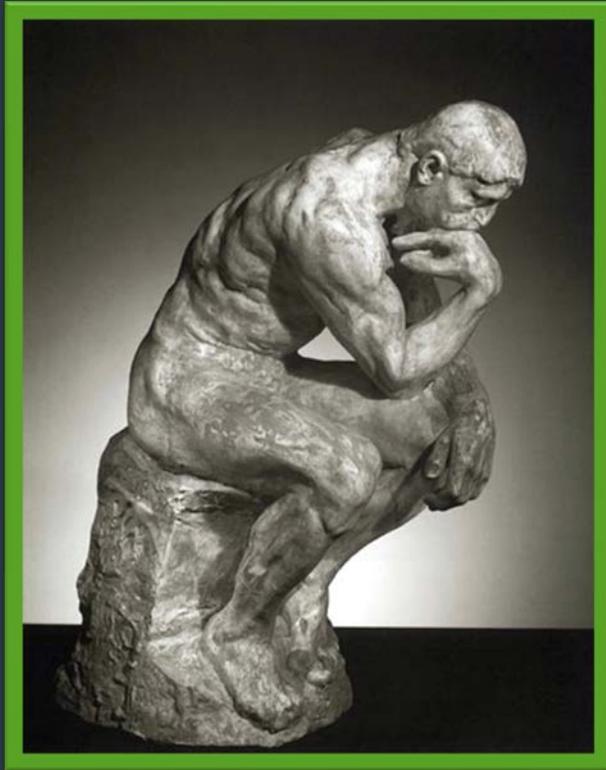
## #3 - Thought Inspiration

“Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the **man himself**, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is [infused] with thoughts...The Divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; *thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.*”

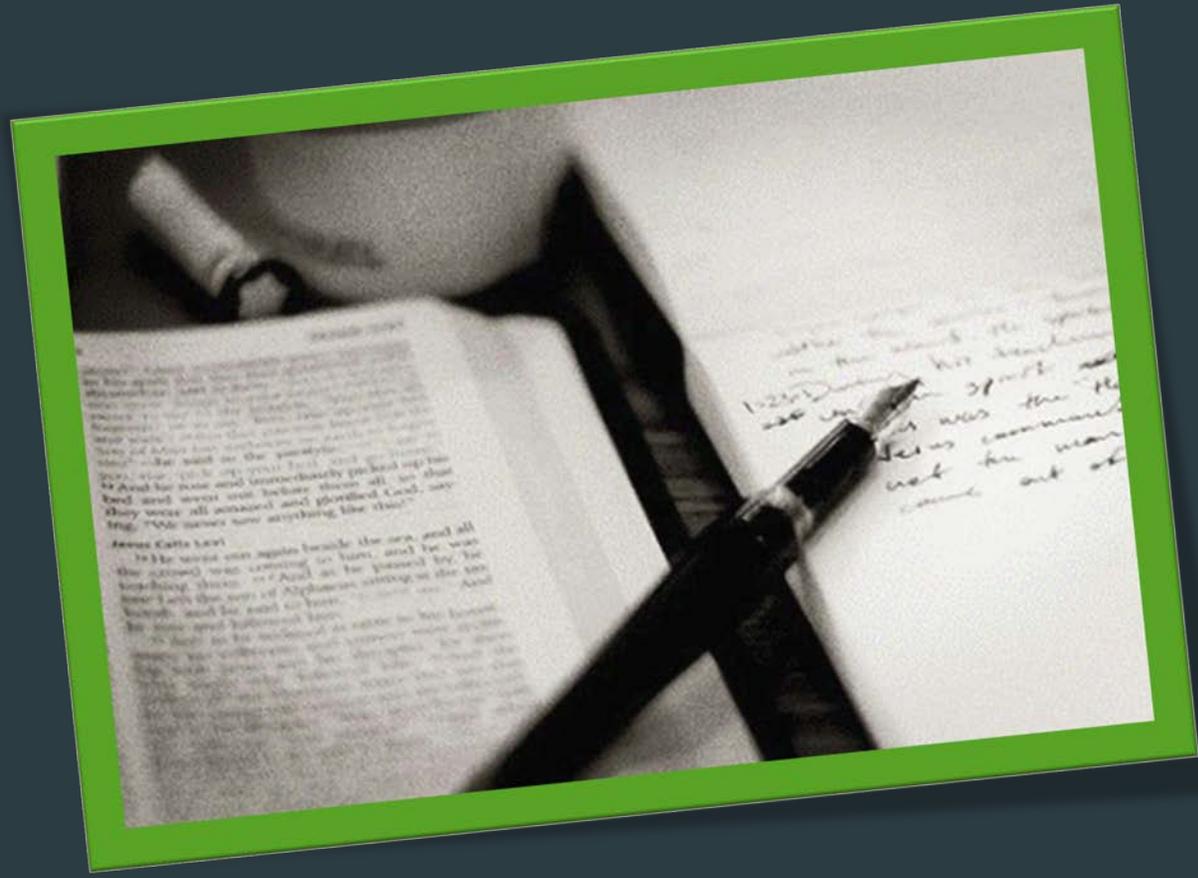
~ Ellen White SM1, 21



# How To Study the Bible – Rule #3



- ▶ When studying out a passage, ask the following:
  1. Is this passage referring to a literal, and universal command or idea?
  2. Does the passage contain cultural ideas that need to be seen as an application of some greater principle?
  3. If the passage contains some sort of minor error, what was the larger message of the passage?



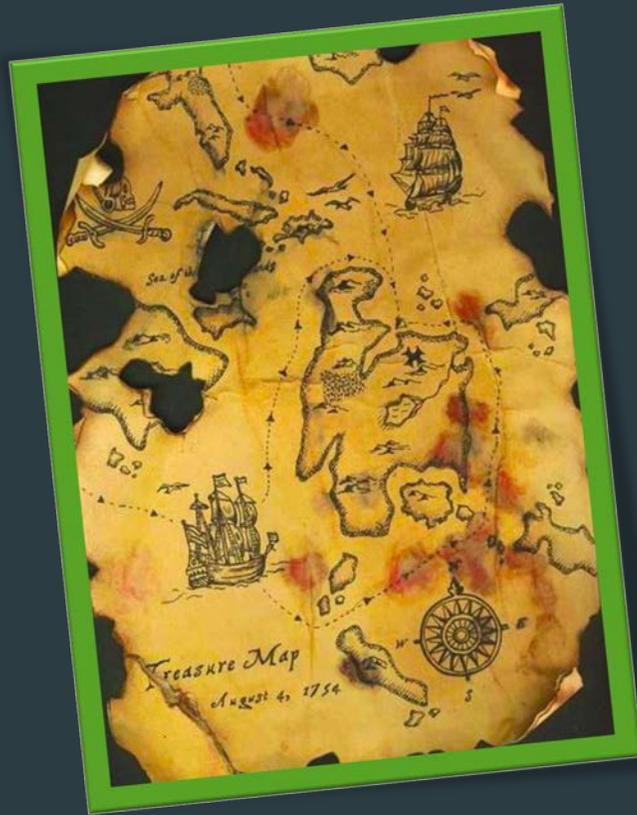
# Module 3 - Pulling meaning out of the muck

Without getting stuck in it yourself

# Ellen White

“Don't you quote Sister White. I don't want you ever to quote Sister White until you get your vantage ground and you know where you are. Quote the Bible. Talk the Bible. It is full of meat, full of fatness. Carry it right out in your life, and you will know more Bible than you know now.”





# How to Get where you're going

Some tools and principles to guide you along the way

# 1. Connecting with the Source

2 Peter 1:10 - "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation."

- ▶ Most important factor in studying is to connect with the true source - **the Holy Spirit**
- ▶ Before any serious study, pray for **guidance** and **wisdom**
- ▶ Ask for **protection from error** or misinterpretation
- ▶ Ask that the Holy Spirit show you something that **you need to see**, for you personally



## 2. Get What the Actual Text Says

- ▶ Take 3-4 verses at a time
- ▶ Don't assume 21<sup>st</sup> century definitions
- ▶ Ask basic questions like a reporter
  1. **Who** is writing/speaking?
  2. **Where** are they when they're speaking, or where does the event take place?
  3. **What's** happening that the writer is addressing?
  4. **When** does all this take place?



### 3. Look at the words



- ▶ Look for “Key” words
  - ▶ Write out a list of words that seem to need more study, or solid definition
- ▶ Once you have a list, you can start figuring out what the author meant when he used them
- ▶ Later this afternoon we’ll look at some tools for looking up these words

## 4. Compare it with the bigger picture

- ▶ Look at verses surrounding the text
  - ▶ What's happening around it?
  - ▶ Is it part of a story or larger event?
- ▶ Next look at the book it's in
  - ▶ Is this a book of prophecy?
  - ▶ Is it one of the gospels?
  - ▶ Is it part of a letter to someone?
- ▶ Then see which of the Testaments it's in, New or Old



## 5. No man's interpretation is an island

- ▶ If you come up with something new, ask around
- ▶ Don't just trust your own private interpretation
- ▶ Not all opinions are equally valid
  - ▶ A and C doctors
  - ▶ Plumbing problems – Mechanic or plumber?
  - ▶ Go to people who should know, be willing to listen if you don't "like" it



## 5. No man's interpretation is an island

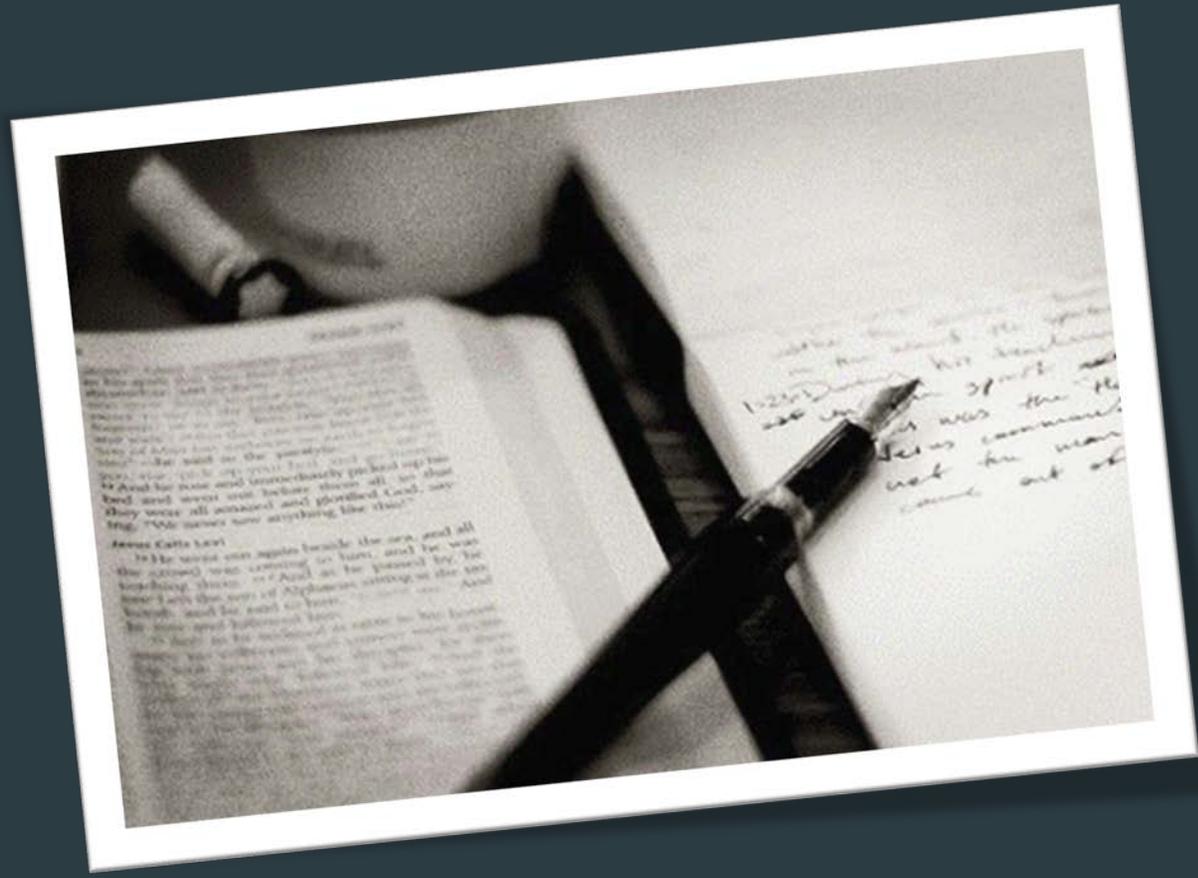
- ▶ Big difference between reading devotionally, and reading for the writer's original meaning
- ▶ Reading a poem can strike a chord, or evoke a memory
- ▶ Be sure you know if your interpretation is devotional or for original meaning and general truth



## 6. The problem is me, not the Bible

Just because the Bible says something doesn't make it truth if what you are saying from the Bible is slanted, distorted, mis-applied, or merely the letter of the word. ~ J. Preston Eby

- ▶ Even with all the tools, mistakes happen
- ▶ If something seems to go against basic Christian truth, like "God is love," then we should first doubt our ability to interpret the text rather than doubt the Bible
- ▶ Attitude should be, "The problem is in my understanding, not with the inspiration of the Bible."



# The Tools of the Trade

Using the right tools, at the right time

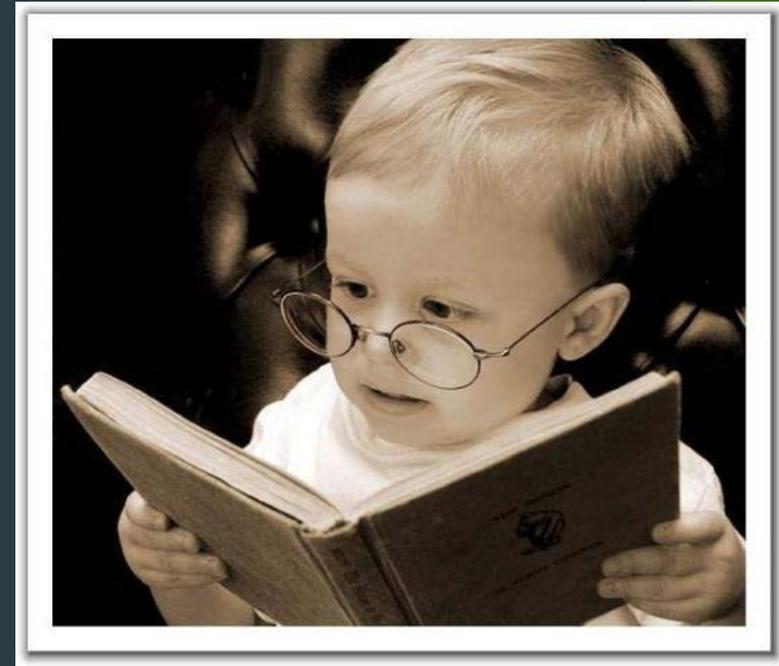
# You gotta' know the tools



- ▶ To really figure out what the bible says we have to :
  1. Be able to look at the text fairly and honestly
  2. Need to know what tools are out there to help us
  3. Need to know how to take ideas or people's interpretations and test them by the bible

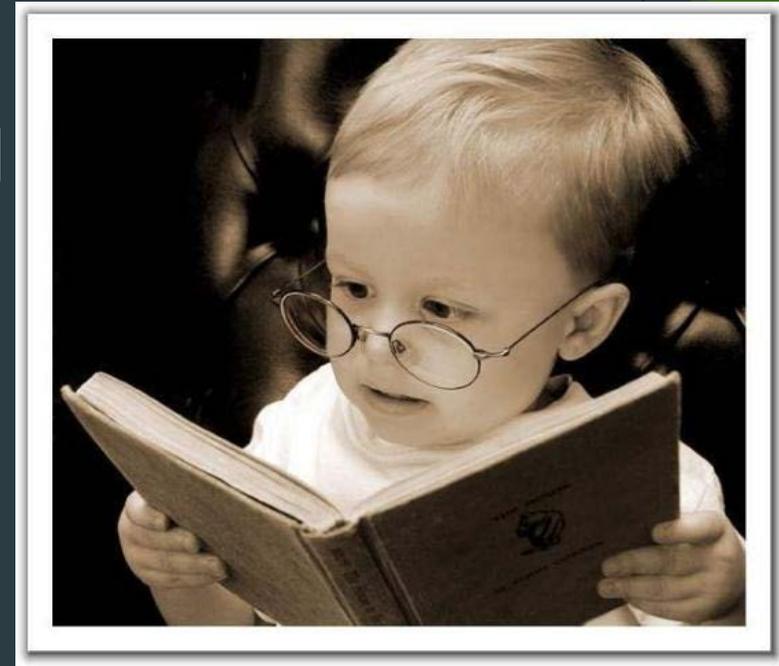
## Some of the tools

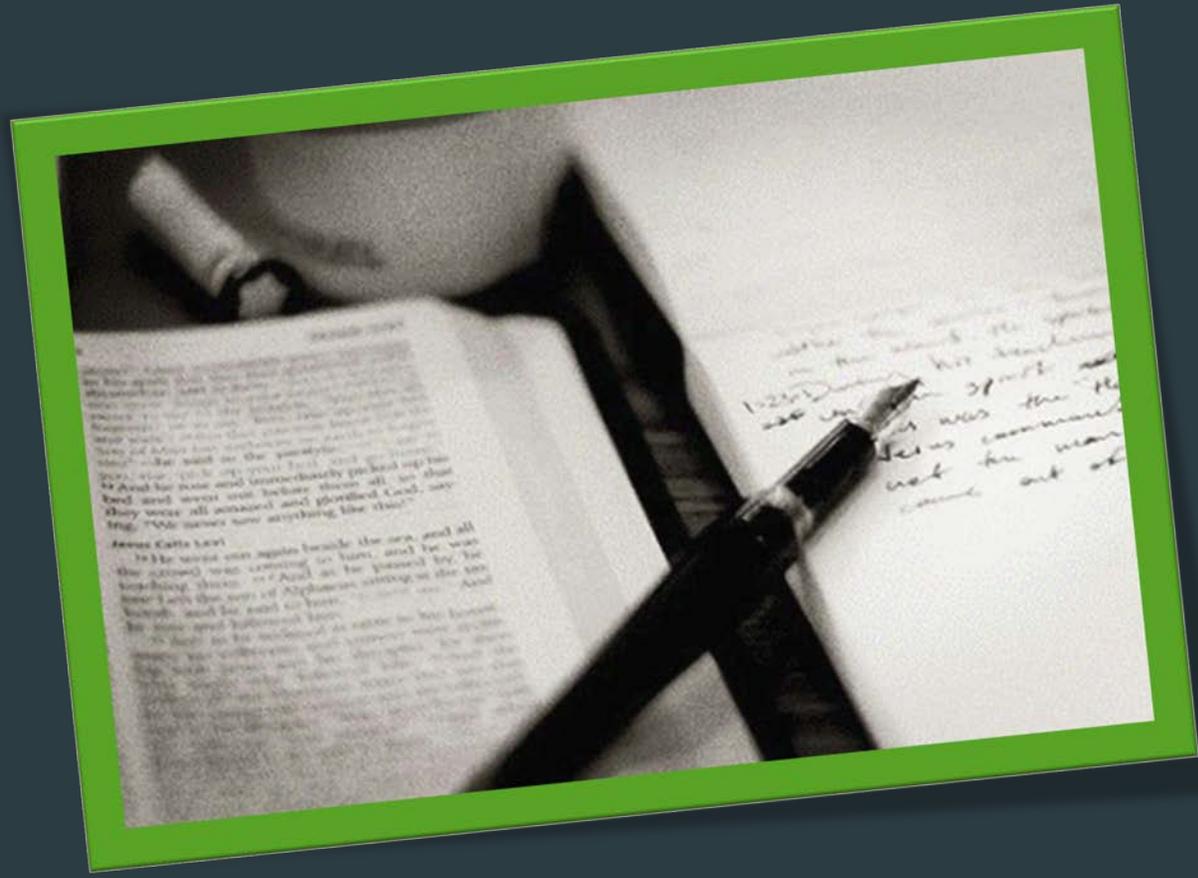
- ▶ Commentaries
- ▶ Bible Dictionaries
- ▶ Concordance  
(Strong's, and others)
- ▶ Parallel Bibles  
(Multiple translations used side by side)



## Some of the tools

- ▶ Inter-linear Bibles (An english translation, with the original word-for-word text right beneath each english word)
- ▶ Introductions to Old and New Testament
  - ▶ This gives you all the history stuff, the historical context





# Devotional Ideas

Cause not every body comes to the Bible the same way