

Biblical Hermeneutics Part 1

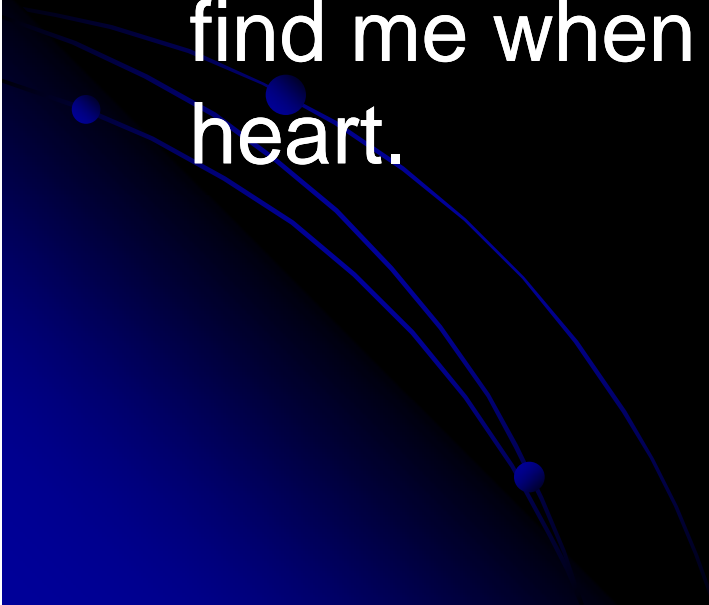
Family Camp 2008



2 Questions:

- 1) Do we believe that though written thousands of years ago, it speaks to us today?
- 2) Do we generally interpret Scripture as literally as possible?

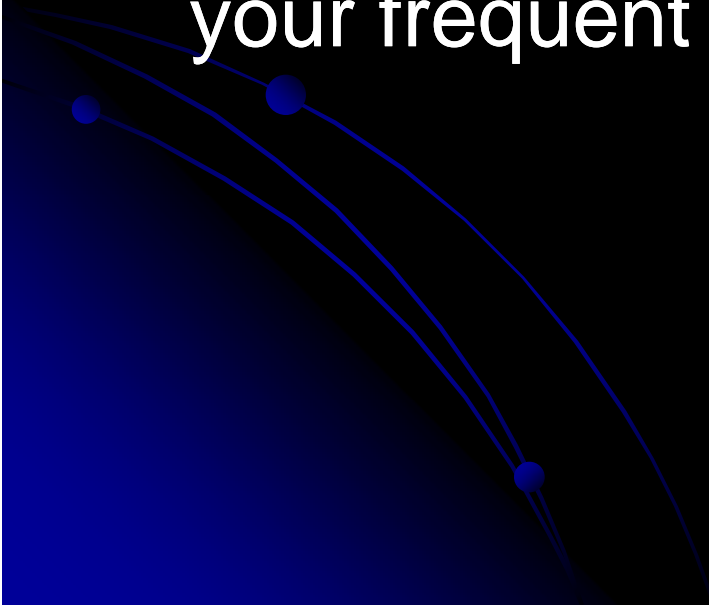
- Jer 29:11-14

- 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
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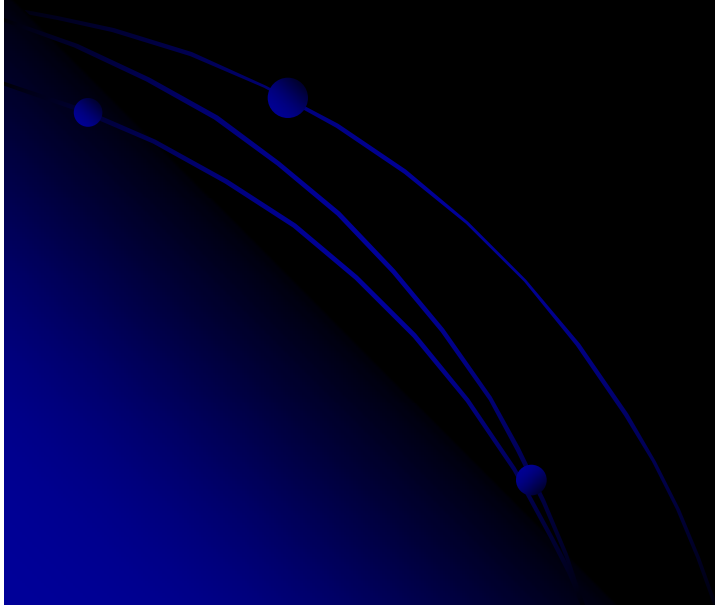
- Ezek 4:1-7
- 4:1 "Now, son of man, take a clay tablet, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. 2 Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it...
- 4 "Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself... So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel.
- 6 "After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.

- 1 Tim 5:23

- 23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.



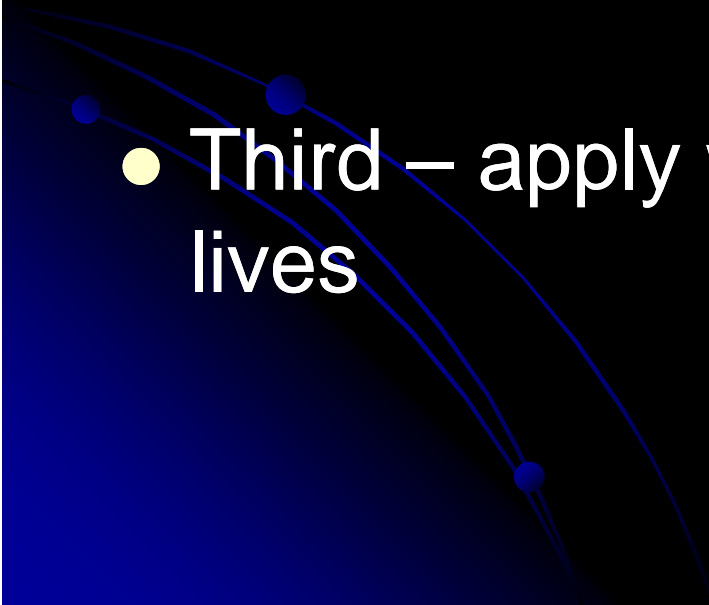
- 1 Cor 14:1
- 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.



Hermeneutics Defined

- “Hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word “(ermeneia” which means “interpretation”
- To understand the application of scripture for today, we must first bridge the gap of thousands of years, both culturally and historically Eg. That was a “wicked” church service!
- After first understanding the meaning of the text to the original audience, we then seek modern application to our lives

The Goal of Hermeneutics

- First – understand what the text meant when it was written
 - Second – understand what it means today
 - Third – apply what is applicable to our lives
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Scripture

- 2 Tim 3:16-17
- 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- 1 Cor 2:14
- 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Qualifications of the Interpreter:

- **1) A Reasoned Faith:** The essential qualification for a full understanding of the Bible as God's revelation, is to know the revealing God by being in relationship with Him
- **2. Obedience:** One must be willing to place oneself "under" the text, to submit one's will to hear the text in the way the author intended.

Qualifications of the Interpreter:

- **3. Illumination**: Once people have committed their lives to Christ by faith, the Holy Spirit performs his *regenerating work*, enabling believers to perceive and take hold of spiritual truths
- Illumination does not take the place of careful study of the Scriptures.
- Rather, it means that the Spirit enables us to understand the significance of Scripture, and its application to our lives.

Qualifications of the Interpreter:

- **4. Membership in the Church**: Individualism is exceptionally dangerous when interpreting scripture, and is foreign to most of the NT teachings to believers – the Church provides accountability
- Correct interpretations should cross all cultural and geographical boundaries, for the Church is worldwide.
- *What current, trendy, theology can think of that fails to make a worldwide application?*
- **5. Appropriate Methods**: If proper interpretation involves understanding the ancient to inform the modern, historical tools are essential; Eg. Baal; Samaritans
- *God will illuminate the significance and application; rarely the historical/cultural context*

QUESTION:

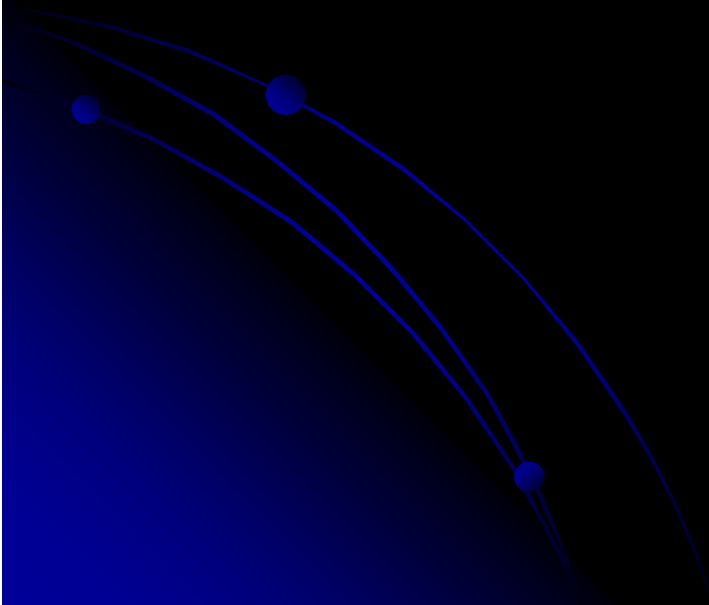
- If the Holy Spirit inspires and illuminates, why are historical and grammatical studies needed? Why not simply let the Spirit show us the true meaning?
- “It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit has revealed to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.” C.H. Spurgeon

The Text, Author and Audience

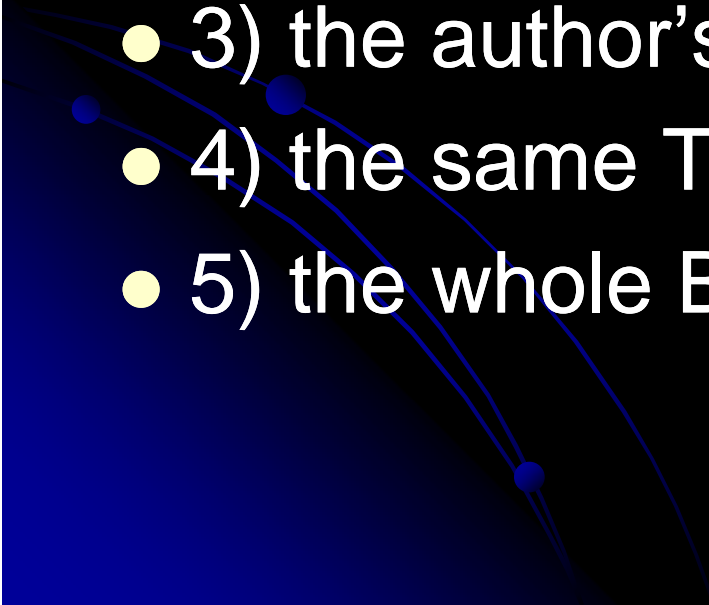
- **The Text**: It is important for us to understand the genre, style, and other literary dimensions of a passage before attempting to clearly understand it
- **Author and Audience**: It is essential that we learn as much as possible about the author's context, such as living conditions and life circumstances, and know as much as possible about the intended audience.
 - For example, how would a Jew of 1st century Palestine have reacted to the story of "The Good Samaritan"?
 - We must not assume that our life experiences parallel those of ancient Christians – and thus read our interpretations into theirs.

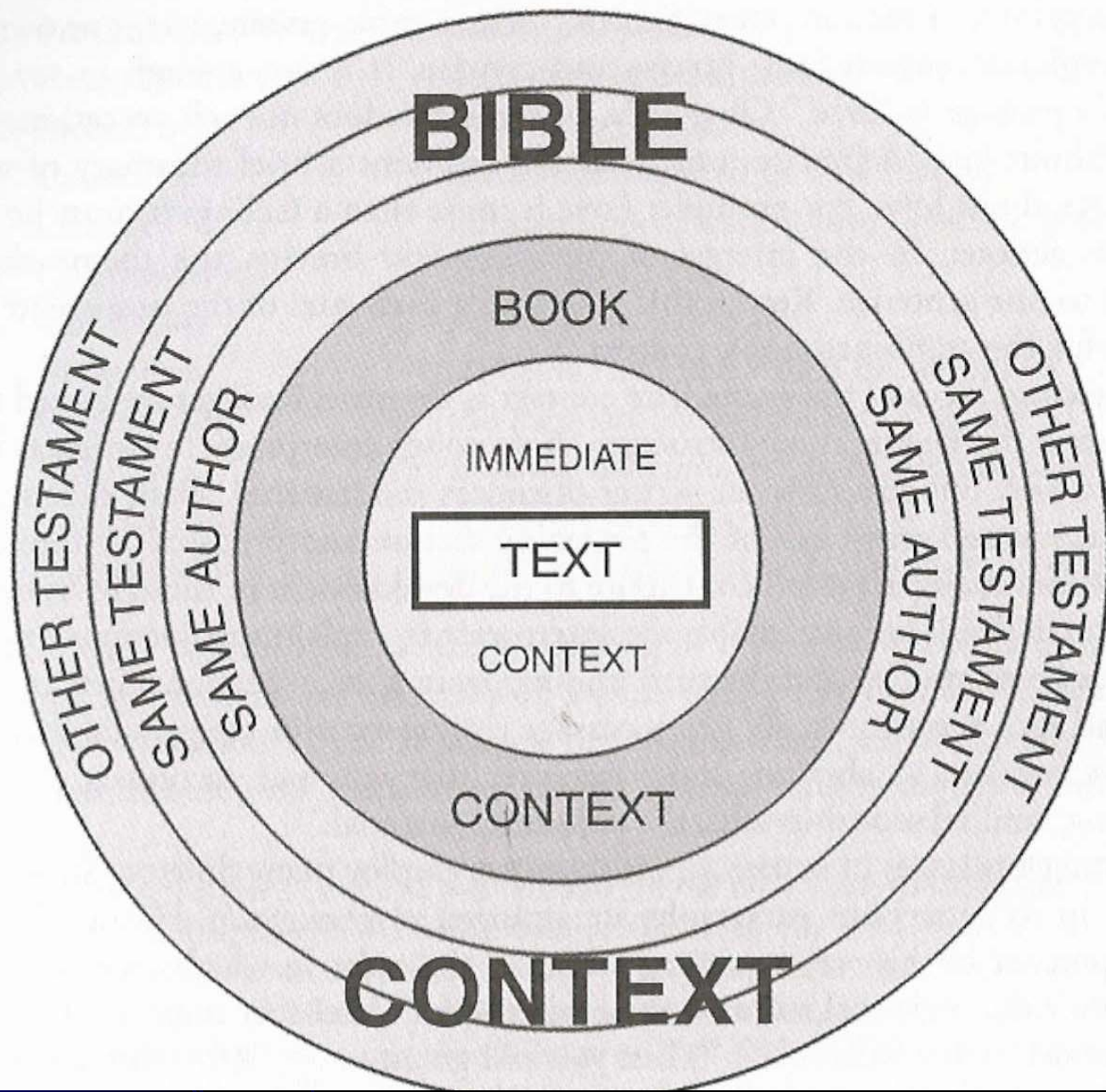
3 components of accurate interpretation:

- 1) Literary Context
- 2) Historical/Cultural background
- 3) Literary genre



1) Literary Context

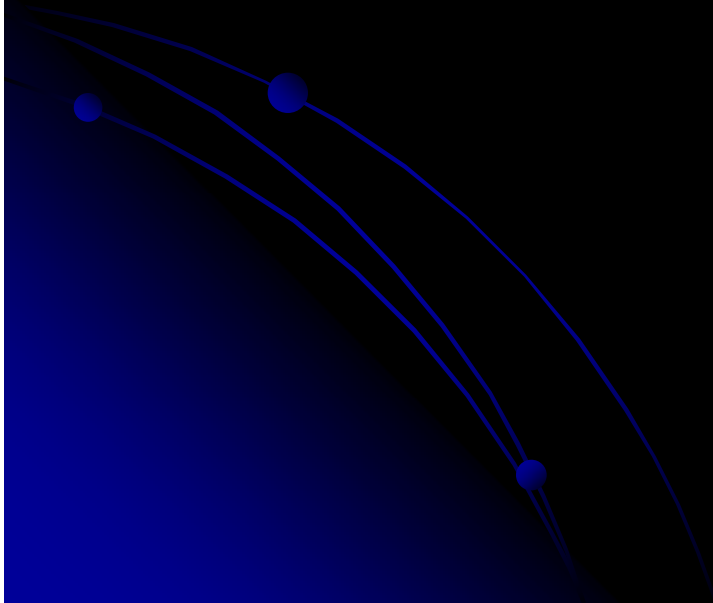
- To interpret a passage contextually, one must examine different domains:
 - 1) the immediate context
 - 2) the book as a whole
 - 3) the author's corpus of writing
 - 4) the same Testament
 - 5) the whole Bible
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2) Exploring the Historical-Cultural Factors of a Specific Passage

- We must know:
 - 1) the situation of the writer, why he/she wrote the passage
 - 2) the situation of the recipients
 - 3) the relationship between author and audience
 - 4) the cultural or historical features mentioned in the text

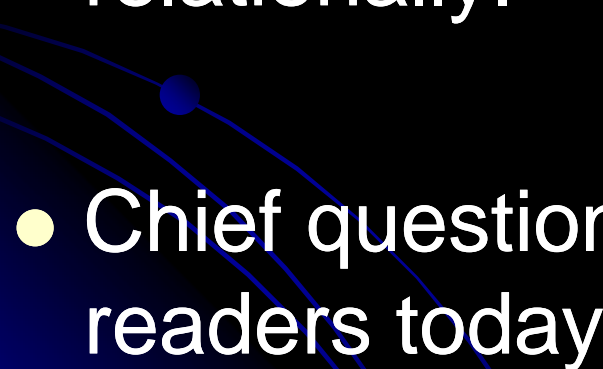
3) Genres of Scripture



Principles of Interpretation – O.T. Narratives and Prophet Stories

- 1. The main character: how does his/her life model a relationship with God and others; What aspects of the readers worldview does it seek to critique?
- 2. What are the larger themes involved?
- *Sample Text: 1 Kings 17-19*

Principles of Interpretation - Law

- OT Law is best understood in a covenantal relationship and presents the personal demands of a gracious God. Readers must interpret the OT Law in this light – relationally.
 - Chief question: how does the Law apply to readers today?
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- 1. Some laws retain literal validity for Christians – to love one's neighbour.
- 2. In some cases, the NT actually makes the OT Law more strict – from actual adultery to lusting = adultery
- 3. Some laws no longer have literal validity because of NT teachings – sacrificial teaching
- 4. Laws that no longer apply literally still teach important timeless truths – sacrificial system shows significance of sin in God's eyes

Principles of Interpretation: Poetry


- Key point: Poems originated as complete units, so interpretation should proceed this way also
- For interpretation, each Psalm serves as its own context.



Principles of Interpretation: Proverbs

- By nature, proverbs are not absolute promises from God that guarantee the promised outcome if one follows them. Rather, they point out patterns of conduct that, if followed, give one the best chance of success, all things being equal.
- Eg. Prov 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
- Prov 21:9 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Principles of Interpretation: Prophecy

- “They have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them and see what they are getting at.” *Martin Luther*
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Principles of Interpretation: Prophecy

- 1. Read the whole prophetic book at one time to become familiar with the flow of the entire book.
- 2. Recognize that OT prophets spoke of the “present age” and “the age to come” without always distinguishing between the two
- 3. Recognize that OT prophets provide a telescopic view of the future; while they see peaks of history closely together, in reality they may be centuries apart. Isa.9:6-7
- 4. OT prophecy may have two fulfillments; one near the prophet’s lifetime, and one long past it. We know this because the NT applies long-fulfilled prophecy to events yet to come. Eg. Jesus in Matt 24.
- 5. Many prophecies are conditional: Jeremiah 18:7-10
- 6. With highly symbolic, apocalyptic texts, one should try and find the key theme; what is the purpose of the prophecy as a whole?


Principles of Interpretation: The Gospels

- The arrival of the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' teaching
- Jesus gathers a group of followers around Him who will live out the principles of God's Kingdom
- In essence, Jesus' Kingdom is "now, but not yet"; the kingdom is begun and is put in place, but is not fully realized until the Second Coming

The Gospels

- a) Parables: interpret parables in terms of the key point taught
- b) Miracle stories: Most miracles were intended to: 1) demonstrate who Jesus was; 2) corroborate his claims that the kingdom of God was breaking into human history; 3) Reveal God's willingness to intervene on behalf of humanity
- c) Sayings of Jesus: We should focus on the climatic saying, avoid turning it into a timeless truth, and recognize its radical challenge to the religious status quo.

Principles of Interpretation: Acts

- Luke's purpose in writing was to record the Acts of the Holy Spirit as He birthed the Church
 - Historical/Cultural research are important
 - Ask: What is Luke trying to teach in his stories? How is it applicable for today?
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Principles of Interpretation: the Epistles

- Typically, Epistles are letters in which the author intended to teach theology and offer ethical instruction.
- Though one would expect the task of interpretation to be easier, the occasional nature of many epistles dictates otherwise.
- Why do we follow the commands concerning Christians with prostitutes in 1 Cor.6, and ignore those concerning head coverings in chapter 11?
- Historical context is KEY for the Epistles

Principles of Interpretation: Apocalyptic / Revelation

- 1. Set a modest goal: rather than trying to understand everything, try simply to grasp as much as possible
- 2. Take the symbolism and numbers seriously, but not literally. For example, it is significant that Daniel sees four *beasts* arising, rather than four *grapes* – it tells us something of how he thinks and feels about what is coming up out of the sea.
- 3. We must discover what we can about OT symbolism and the symbols from the culture that John may have used. Eg. A Bear extending an olive branch to an Eagle in 1989
- 4. Move beyond the details to determine what the text as a whole is trying to communicate.