

Men *of the* Word

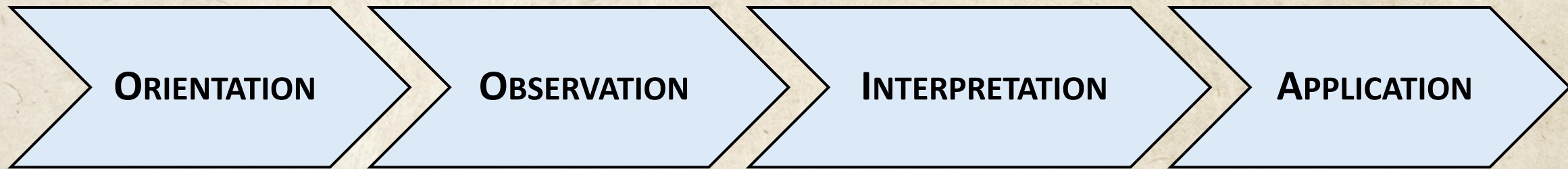
SESSION 13:

**The Practice
of Bible Study, Pt 1**

IT IS WRITTEN

THE PRACTICE OF BIBLE STUDY

- Where do I start, and where do I go from there?
- A four-stage process of study that will take you from the text to life:



- I. **ORIENTATION** – *surveying the text's surroundings.*
- II. **OBSERVATION** – *examining the text's contents.*
- III. **INTERPRETATION** – *understanding the text's meaning.*
- IV. **APPLICATION** – *obeying the text's message.*

The Need for Orientation—*Context*

- “**Context**” – the world *into which* a text is *woven*; all biblical texts are *woven* into: (a) an *historical context*, and (b) a *literary context*.
- To read language naturally means to read it according to the norms of the author and his audience, made evident through *context*.
- The more you interpret apart from this two-dimensional context, the more you interpret according your *convenience*.
- Context and language are the true guardrails for accurate interpretation.



The Need for Orientation

A

13

C

12

13

14

- Context determines whether you read the middle character as a “B” or as “13.”

“Disregarding the context is one of the greatest problems
in Bible interpretation.”

—*Roy Zuck*

“Every basic cult is built on ignoring the context.”

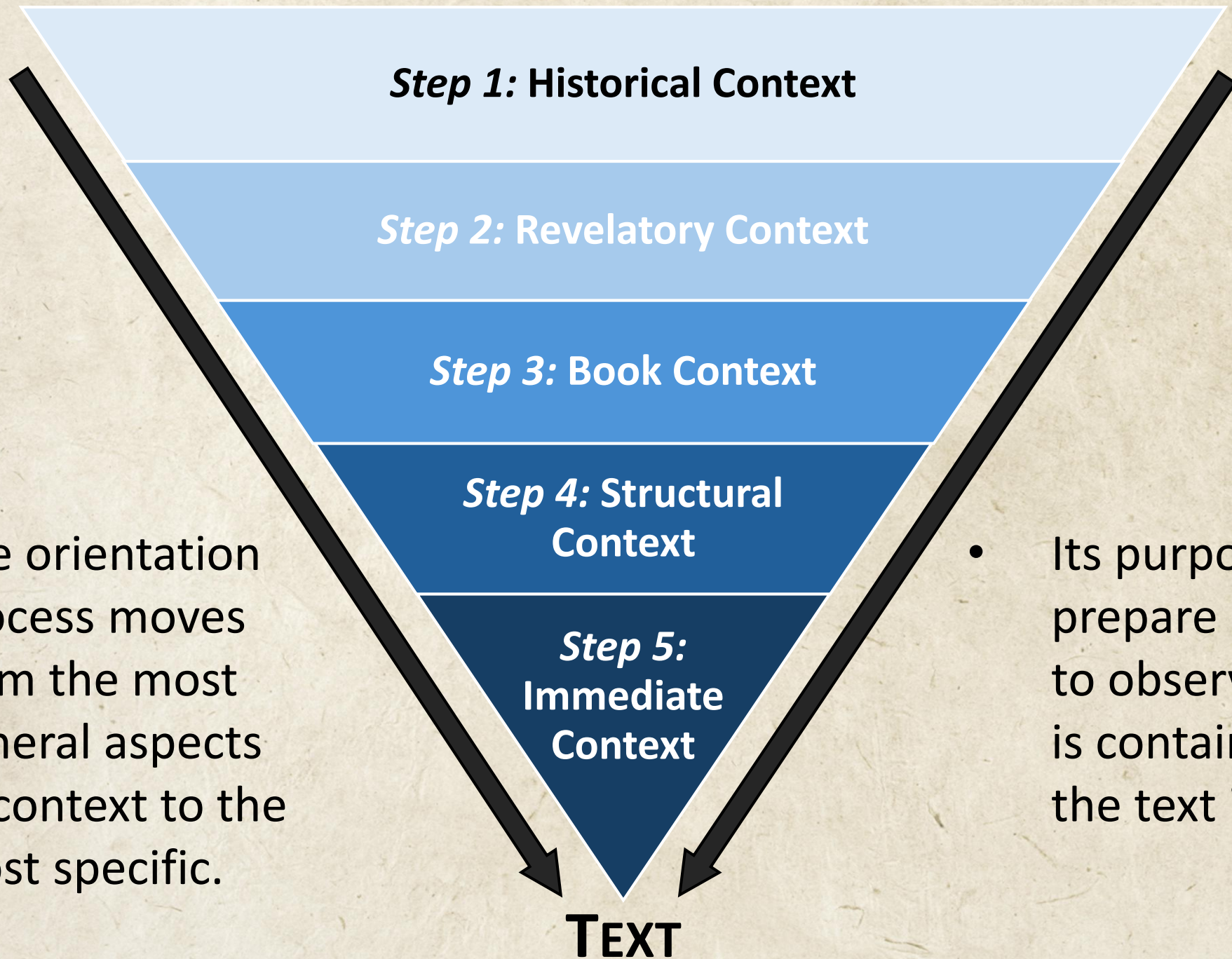
—*Howard Hendricks*

- Problem: Many Christians “have been trained to be Bible *quoters*, not Bible *readers*.”

“They have the capacity to recall a relevant biblical text in support of a particular doctrinal point, or in opposition to a hot spot in the cultural wars, or in hope of emotional support when times get tough. They approach the Bible as a sort of reference book, a collection of useful God-quotes that can be looked up as one would locate a word in a dictionary or an entry in an encyclopedia. What they are not trained to do is to read a biblical book from beginning to end, to trace its narrative arc, to discern its main themes Indeed, oftentimes these students find themselves dismayed when they read a beloved Bible quote in its actual literary context and discover that it does not seem to bear the meaning they thought it did when they quoted the verse in isolation.”

—David Nienhuis, *A Concise Guide to Reading the New Testament*, 4

The Process of Orientation

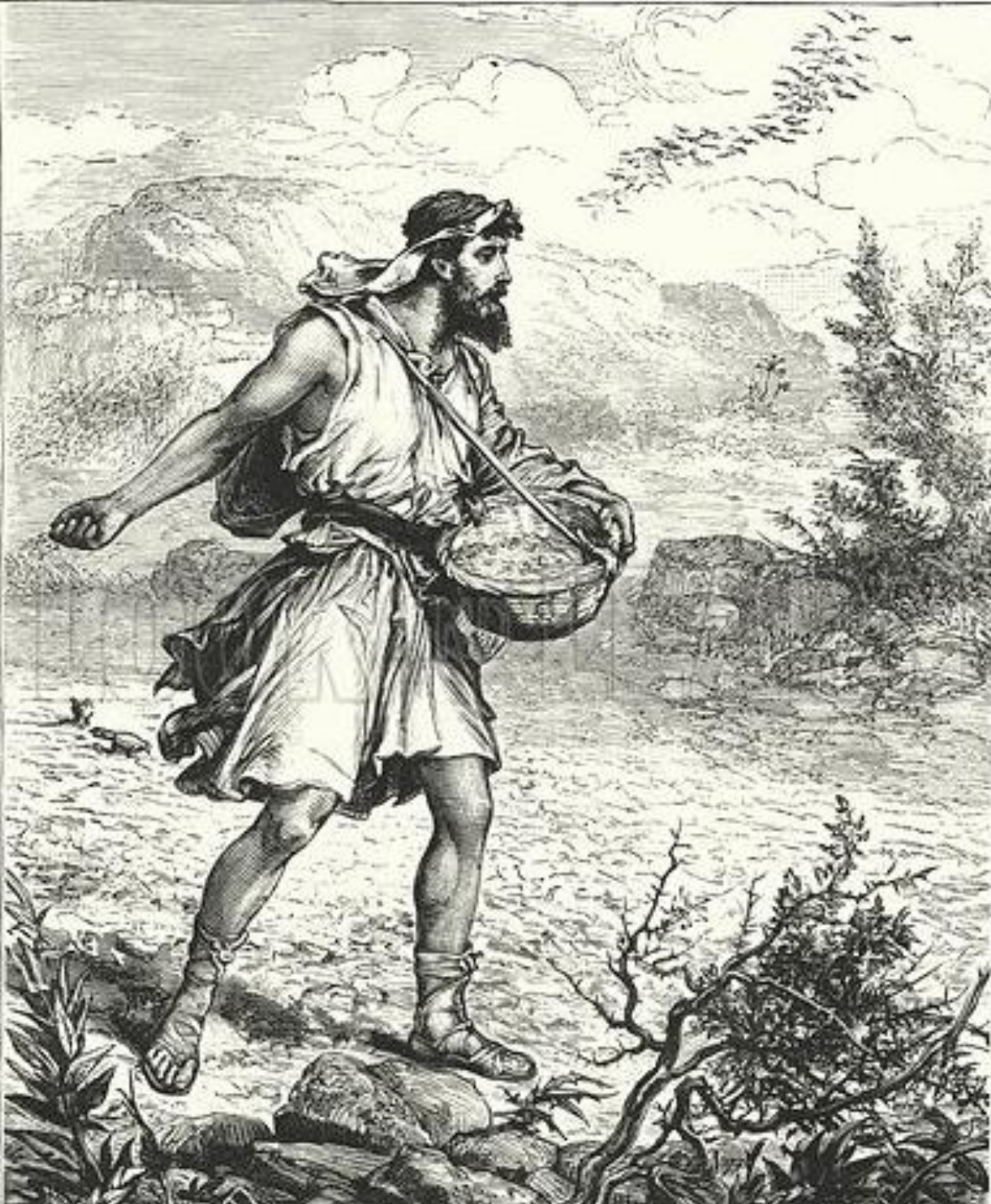


- The orientation process moves from the most general aspects of context to the most specific.

- Its purpose is to prepare us well to observe what is contained in the text itself.

STEP 1: Survey the text's historical context.

- **PRINCIPLE:** Good orientation begins by acquainting oneself with the historical world of the writer and his original audience.
- From its beginning, Scripture was *situational* in nature—each of its books was written in response to an historical *need*.
- This “world” involves five areas of consideration:
 - a) Authorship – *Who wrote the book?*
 - b) Date – *When did he write?*
 - c) Location – *From where did he write?*
 - d) Recipient(s) – *To whom did he write?*
 - e) Circumstance – *What motivated him to write?*



“Cultural matters are not niceties we may search out if we have the time but which we may ignore under the pressure of time and circumstances. They are indispensable for an accurate understanding of Holy Scripture.”

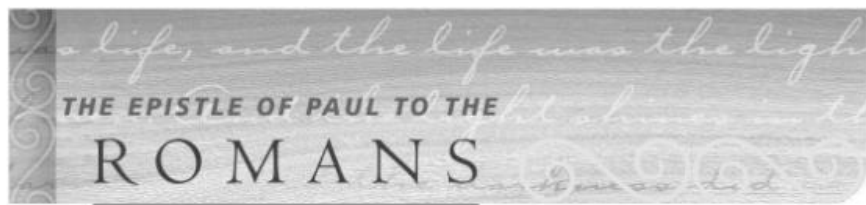
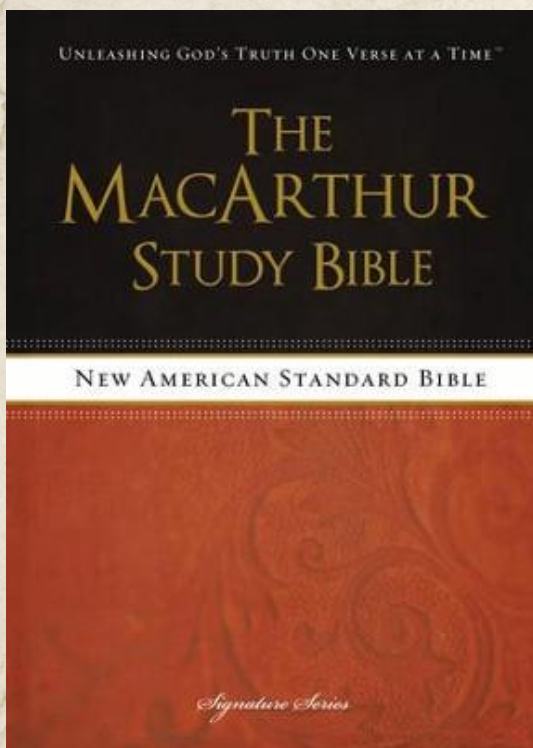
—Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 80

Men of the Word

- Begin by reading through the biblical book in which your text is found, paying special attention to the historical details it provides.



- Consult the “Introduction” section in a Study Bible.



TITLE

This epistle's name comes from its original recipients: the members of the church in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire (1:7).

AUTHOR AND DATE

No one disputes that the apostle Paul wrote Romans. Like his namesake, Israel's first king (Saul was Paul's Hebrew name; Paul his Greek name), Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin (Php 3:5). He was also a Roman citizen (Ac 16:37; 22:25). Paul was born about the time of Christ's birth, in Tarsus (Ac 9:11), an important city (Ac 21:39) in the Roman province of Cilicia, located in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). He spent much of his early life in Jerusalem as a student of the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel (Ac 22:3). Like his father before him, Paul was a Pharisee (Ac 23:6), a member of the strictest Jewish sect (cf. Php 3:5).

Miraculously converted while on his way to Damascus (ca. A.D. 33–34) to arrest Christians in that city, Paul immediately began proclaiming the gospel message (Ac 9:20). After narrowly escaping from Damascus with his life (Ac 9:23–25; 2Co 11:32,33), Paul spent 3 years in Nabatean Arabia, south and east of the Dead Sea (Gal 1:17,18). During that time, he received much of his doctrine as direct revelation from the Lord (Gal 1:11,12).

More than any other individual, Paul was responsible for the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. He made 3 missionary journeys through much of the Mediterranean world, tirelessly preaching the gospel he had once sought to destroy (Ac 26:9). After he returned to Jerusalem bearing an offering for the needy in the church there, he was falsely accused by some Jews (Ac 21:27–29), savagely beaten by an angry mob (Ac 21:30,31), and arrested by the Romans. Though two Roman governors, Felix and Festus, as well as Herod Agrippa, did not find him guilty of any crime, pressure from the Jewish leaders kept Paul in Roman custody. After two years, the apostle exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed his case to Caesar. After a harrowing trip (Ac 27,28), including a violent, two-week storm at sea that culminated in a shipwreck, Paul reached Rome. Eventually released for a brief period of ministry, he was arrested again and suffered martyrdom at Rome in ca. A.D. 65–67 (cf. 2Ti 4:6).

Though physically unimpressive (cf. 2Co 10:10; Gal 4:14), Paul possessed an inner strength granted him through the Holy Spirit's power (Php 4:13). The grace of God proved sufficient to provide for his every need (2Co 12:9,10), enabling this noble servant of Christ to successfully finish his spiritual race (2Ti 4:7).

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, as the references to Phoebe (Ro 16:1, Cenchrea was Corinth's port), Gaius (Ro 16:23), and Erastus (Ro 16:23)—all of whom were associated with Corinth—indicate. The apostle wrote the letter toward the close of his third missionary journey (most likely in A.D. 56), as he prepared to leave for Palestine with an offering for the poor believers in the Jerusalem church (Ro 15:25). Phoebe was given the great responsibility of delivering this letter to the Roman believers (16:1,2).

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

Rome was the capital and most important city of the Roman Empire. It was founded in 753 B.C., but is not mentioned in Scripture until NT times. Rome is located along the banks of the Tiber River, about 15 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. Until an artificial harbor was built at nearby Ostia, Rome's main harbor was Puteoli, some 150 miles away (see note on Ac 28:13). In Paul's day, the city had a population of over one million people, many of whom were slaves. Rome boasted magnificent buildings, such as the Emperor's palace, the Circus Maximus, and the Forum, but its beauty was marred by the slums in which so many lived. According to tradition, Paul was martyred outside Rome on the Ostian Way during Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68).

Some of those converted on the Day of Pentecost probably founded the church at Rome (cf. Ac 2:10). Paul had long sought to visit the Roman church, but had been prevented from doing so (1:13). In God's providence, Paul's inability to visit Rome gave the world this inspired masterpiece of gospel doctrine.

Paul's primary purpose in writing Romans was to teach the great truths of the gospel of grace to believers who had never received apostolic instruction. The letter also introduced him to a church where he was personally unknown, but hoped to visit soon for several important reasons: to edify the believers (1:11); to preach the gospel (1:15); and to get to know the Roman Christians, so they could encourage him (1:12; 15:32), better pray for him (15:30), and help him with his planned ministry in Spain (15:28).



Unlike some of Paul's other epistles (e.g., 1, 2Co, Gal), his purpose for writing was not to correct aberrant theology or rebuke ungodly living. The Roman church was doctrinally sound, but, like all churches, it was in need of the rich doctrinal and practical instruction this letter provides.

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Since Romans is primarily a work of doctrine, it contains little historical material. Paul does use such familiar OT figures as Abraham (chap. 4), David (4:6–8), Adam (5:12–21), Sarah (9:9), Rebekah (9:10), Jacob and Esau (9:10–13), and Pharaoh (9:17) as illustrations. He also recounts some of Israel's history (chaps. 9–11). Chapter 16 provides insightful glimpses into the nature and character of the first-century church and its members.

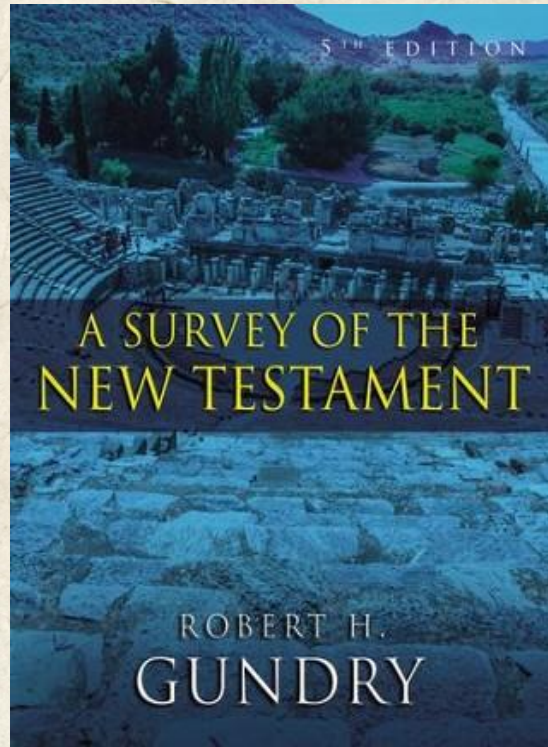
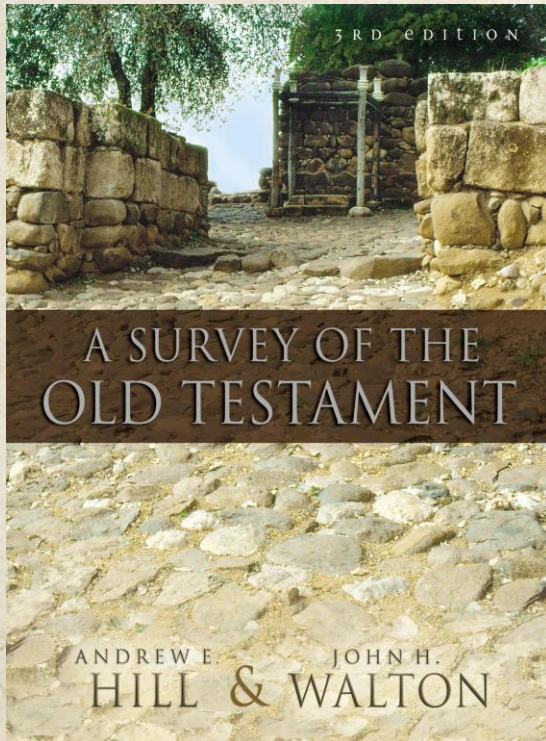
The overarching theme of Romans is the righteousness that comes from God: the glorious truth that God justifies guilty, condemned sinners by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Chapters 1–11 present the theological truths of that doctrine, while chaps. 12–16 detail its practical outworking in the lives of individual believers and the life of the whole church. Some specific theological topics include principles of spiritual leadership (1:8–15); God's wrath against sinful mankind (1:18–32); principles of divine judgment (2:1–16); the universality of sin (3:9–20); an exposition and defense of justification by faith alone (3:21–4:25); the security of salvation (5:1–11); the transference of Adam's sin (5:12–21); sanctification (chaps. 6–8); sovereign election (chap. 9); God's plan for Israel (chap. 11); spiritual gifts and practical godliness (chap. 12); the believer's responsibility to human government (chap. 13); and principles of Christian liberty (14:1–15:12).

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES

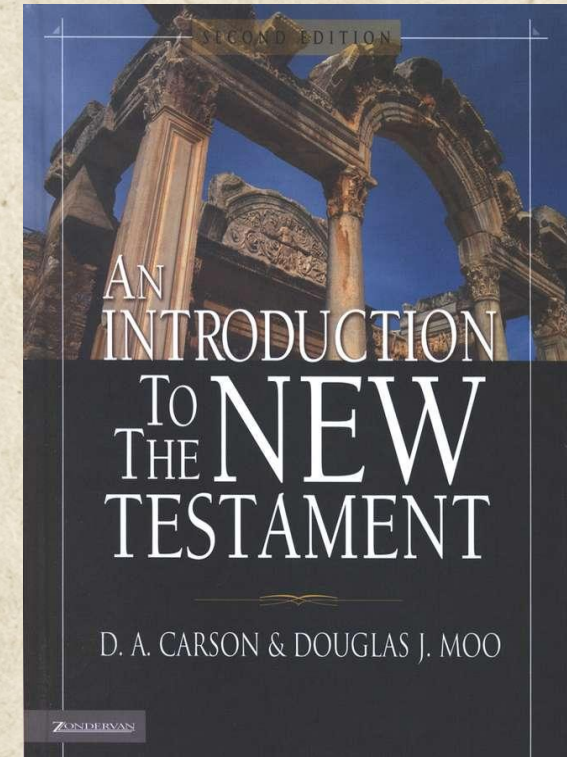
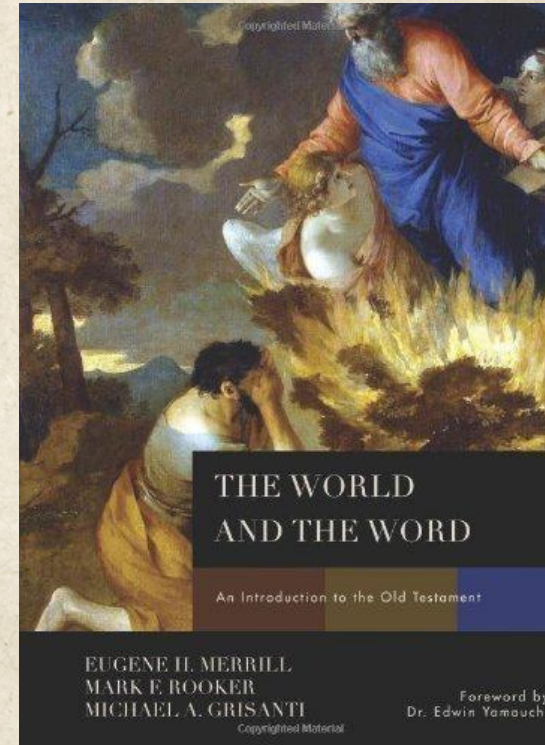
As the preeminent doctrinal work in the NT, Romans naturally contains a number of difficult passages. Paul's discussion of the perpetuation of Adam's sin (5:12–21) is one of the deepest, most profound theological passages in all of Scripture. The nature of mankind's union with Adam, and how his sin was transferred to the human race has always been the subject of intense debate. Bible students also disagree on whether 7:7–25 describes Paul's experience as a believer or unbeliever, or is a literary device not intended to be autobiographical at all. The closely related doctrines of election (8:28–30) and the sovereignty of God (9:6–29) have confused many believers. Others question whether chaps. 9–11 teach that God has a future plan for the nation of Israel. Some have ignored Paul's teaching on the believer's obedience to human government (13:1–7) in the name of Christian activism, while others have used it to defend slavish obedience to totalitarian regimes.

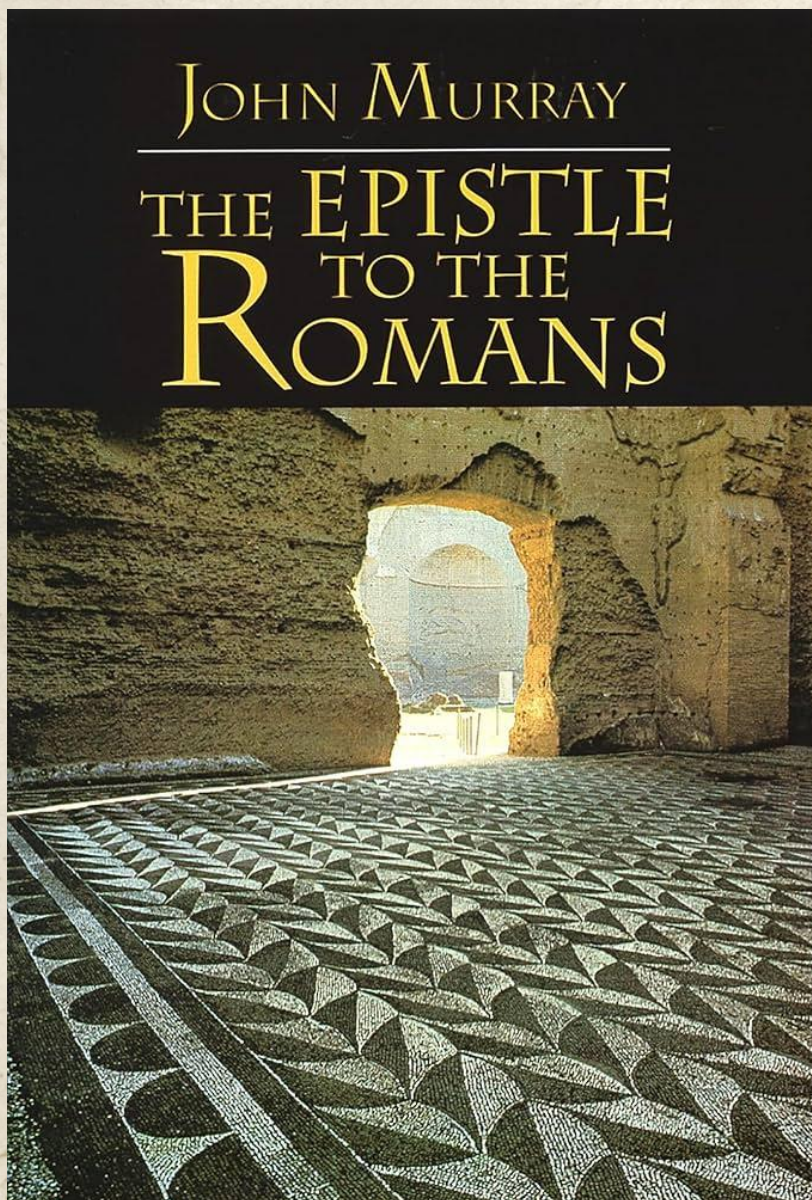
All of these and more interpretive challenges are addressed in the notes to the respective passages.

- Beginner: Read the related section in a Bible Survey.



- Advanced: Read the related section in a Bible Introduction.



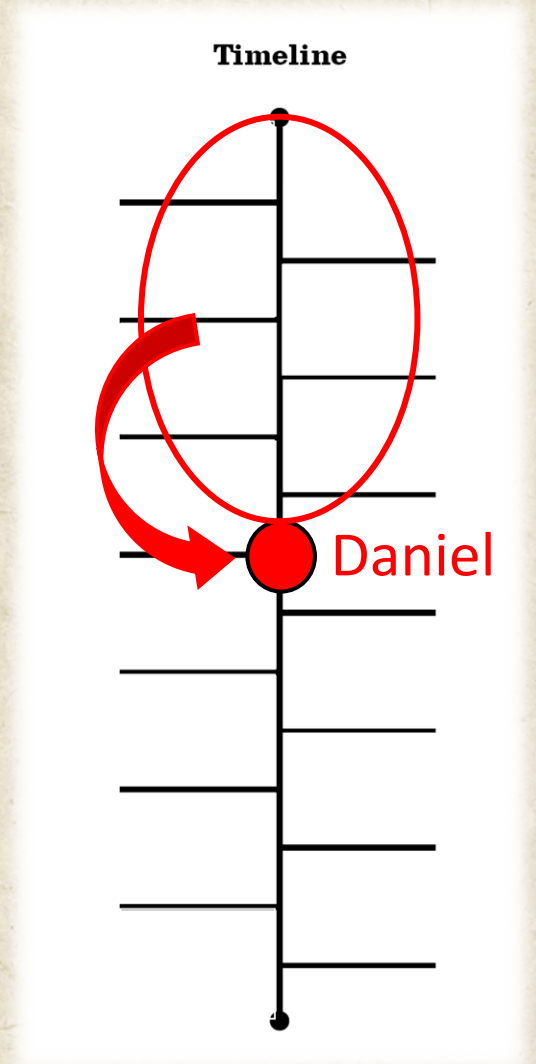


- Read the “Introduction” section in a good commentary.

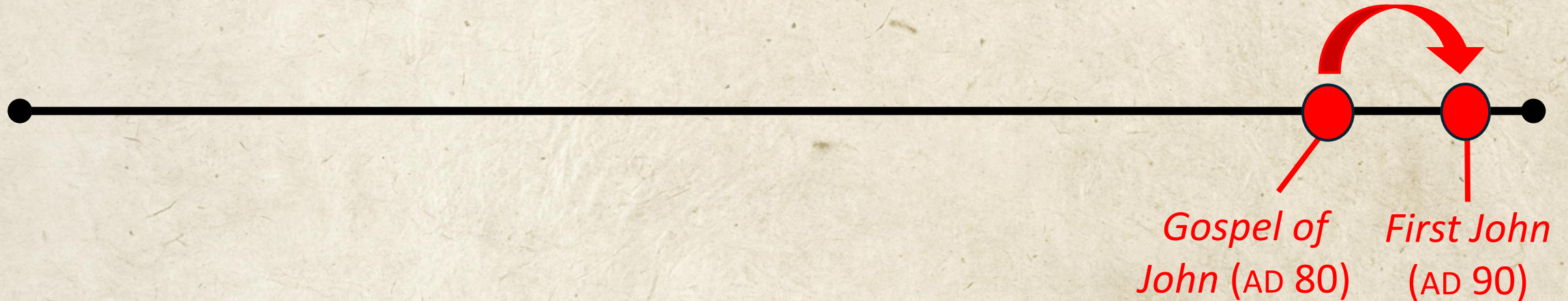
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STEP 2: Determine the text's revelatory context.

- **PRINCIPLE:** Good orientation seeks to identify when the text was written in the timeline of God's special revelation.
- Key question: *Where does my text, and the book it is in, fall on the timeline of Scripture's composition?*
- This step shows an appreciation for the *progressive, accumulating nature* of revelation.
- It is crucial for identifying the potential influence of antecedent revelation on the text to be studied.



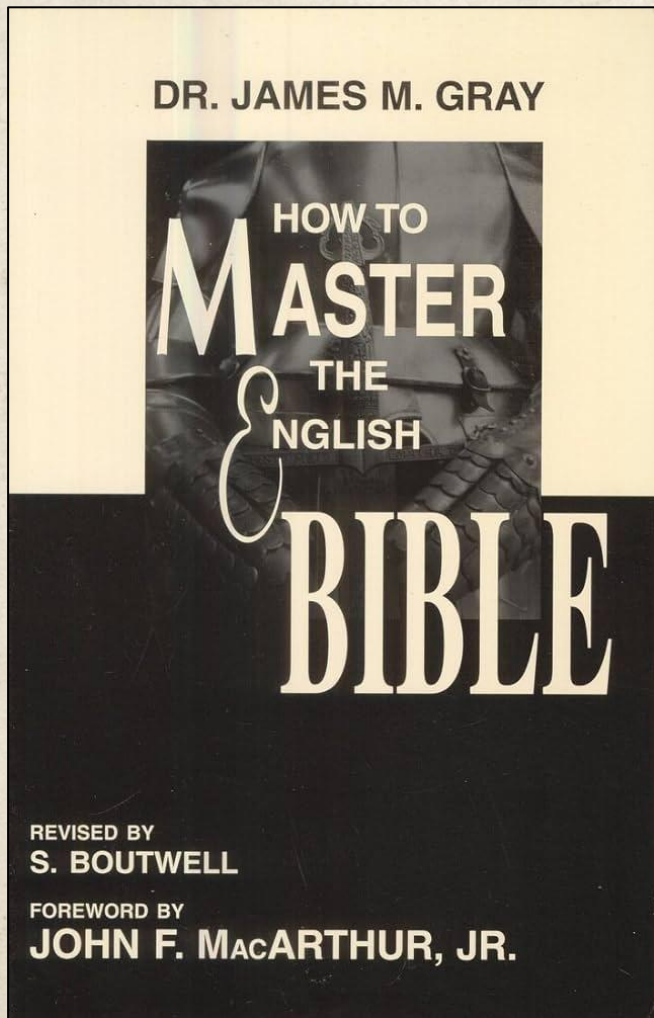
- For example, the date of the writing of 1 John is estimated to be around AD 90.



- Thus, the contents of 1 John should be read in the light of the language and themes of the Gospel of John, written around AD 80.
- In other words, to interpret 1 John well, you need to appreciate the contents and emphases of the Gospel of John.
- Once again, Study Bible Introductions, Bible Surveys, and Commentary Introductions will be helpful to gather this information.

STEP 3: Establish the text's book context.

- **PRINCIPLE:** Good orientation seeks a sound understanding of the central argument that the writer makes in the book in which the text is found.
- Key question: *Why did the writer write this book?*
- The central argument of a book can be likened to *a scarlet thread*—the main idea that connects a piece of literature from beginning to end.
- Read the book through several times, in one sitting, looking for that connecting thread. Then consult good introductions to the book.
- The goal is to state in one simple sentence, “The purpose of this book is to . . .”

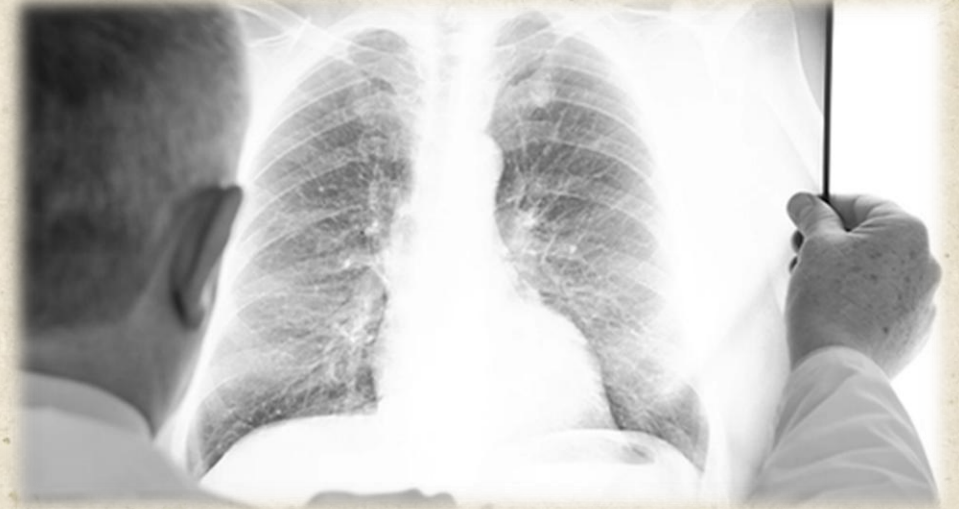


“Many of the books of the Bible have a single thread running through the whole; a pivotal idea around which all the subsidiary ones revolve, and to catch this thread, to seize upon this idea, is absolutely necessary to unravel or break up the whole in its essential parts.”

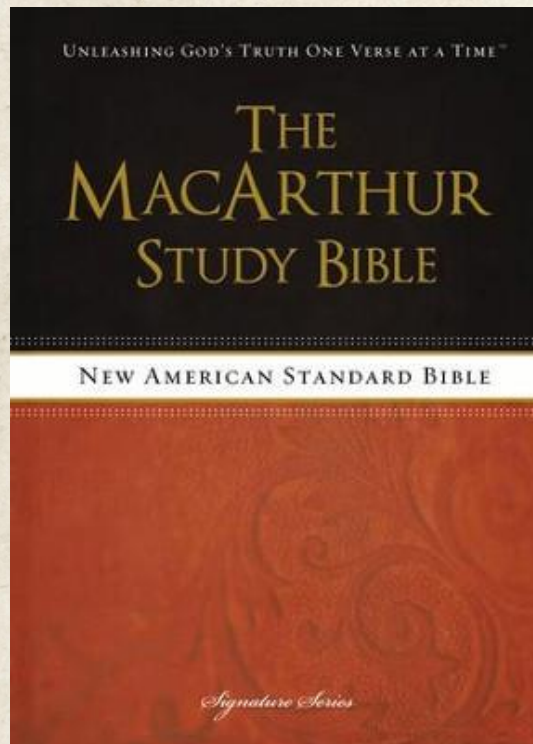
—James Gray, *How to Master the English Bible*, 34

STEP 4: Discern the text's structural context.

- **PRINCIPLE:** Good orientation requires an eye for the literary structure of the book in which the text is found.
- Key question: *What are the main parts of this writer's work?*
- The task of the student here is to construct a basic outline.
- This outline will later serve as a helpful guardrail in the interpretation of the text.



- Read through the book and look for major transitions in topics, characters, locations, or emphases.
- Again, consult the “Introduction” section in a Study Bible or commentary for the outline of the book.



1657	ROMANS
OUTLINE	
I. Greetings and Introduction (1:1-15)	
II. Theme (1:16,17)	
III. Condemnation: The Need of God's Righteousness (1:18-3:20)	
A. Unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32)	
B. Unrighteous Jews (2:1-3:8)	
C. Unrighteous Mankind (3:9-20)	
IV. Justification: The Provision of God's Righteousness (3:21-5:21)	
A. The Source of Righteousness (3:21-31)	
B. The Example of Righteousness (4:1-25)	
C. The Blessings of Righteousness (5:1-11)	
D. The Imputation of Righteousness (5:12-21)	
V. Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness (6:1-8:39)	
VI. Restoration: Israel's Reception of God's Righteousness (9:1-11:36)	
VII. Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1-15:13)	
VIII. Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction (15:14-16:27)	

- Chartbooks that display outlines of the books of the Bible are very helpful.



CHART 52 Hebrews ©2015 M. Scott Bashoor		Purpose: The author eloquently exhorts his readers to retain their confession and confidence in Christ as Supreme Lord who is worthy of their worship and suffering, even in the face of mounting persecution and the temptation to revert to the legal safety of Judaism.		Date: Perhaps c. AD 64–68 Author: An unnamed associate of Paul’s ministerial circle Recipients: Jewish Christians, perhaps in Rome							
INTRODUCTION 1:1–4		BODY OF THE EXHORTATION 1:5–12:27				CONCLUSION 12:28–13:25					
God’s Past Revelations thru the Prophets 1:1 God’s Ultimate Revelation in the Son 1:2 Celebration of the Son’s Surpassing Radiance & Sacrificial Success 1:3 Transition to the Initial Discourse 1:4		Initial Discourse: Christ’s Mediation Superior to Angels’ 1:5–2:18 <i>Introductory Texts:</i> Citation of OT Passages to Elevate the Son Above the Angels 1:5–14 <i>Exhortative Interlude:</i> The Danger of Neglecting Salvation So Great 2:1–4 <i>Concluding Argument:</i> Christ Humbled on Earth to Become Our Sacrifice & Surety of Glory 2:5–16 <i>Transition:</i> Pivot to the Historical Discourse 2:17–18		Historical Discourse: Christ’s Mediation Superior to Moses’ 3:1–4:13 <i>Introductory Argument:</i> Christ Built the House of God in Which Moses Merely Served 3:1–6 <i>Illustrative Caution:</i> Warning Against Following the Unbelief of Israel’s First Generation 3:7–19 <i>Concluding Exhortation:</i> Call to Enter into God’s Rest & Warning Against Rejection of Christ 4:1–13		The Hard Discourse: Christ’s Mediation Superior to the Aaronic System 4:14–10:18 <i>Introductory Exhortation:</i> Call to Draw Near to God through Christ, Our High Priest 4:14–16 <i>Opening Argument:</i> Jesus’ Divine Appointment as Our Sympathetic High Priest 5:1–10 <i>Important Digression:</i> The Readers’ Spiritual Impairments 5:11–6:20 <i>Argument Resumed:</i> Christ’s Superior Mediatorial Work 7:1–10:18 Christ’s Melchizedekian Priesthood 7:1–28 Christ’s Initiation of the New Covenant 8:1–10:18 <i>The Supremacy of Christ’s Heavenly Mediation</i> 8:1–13 <i>The Supremacy of Christ’s Blood Sacrifice</i> 9:1–28 <i>The Fulfilling Satisfaction of Christ’s Sacrifice</i> 10:1–18		Climactic Exhortation: Call to Faithfulness in Following Christ 10:19–12:27 <i>Introductory Exhortation:</i> Call to Draw Near to God, Maintain Our Profession & Minister to One Another 10:19–25 <i>Grave Warning:</i> The Sorest of Punishments on Those Who Trample Christ Underfoot 10:26–31 <i>Curative Encouragement:</i> Reminder of Their Past Testimony and the Author’s Confidence in Their Faith 10:32–39 <i>Historical Examples:</i> Saints of Old—and the Savior Himself—Who Lived by Faith in God’s Promises 11:1–12:3 <i>Concluding Exhortation:</i> Endurance to be Rewarded with an Everlasting Inheritance 12:4–27		Practical Implications 12:28–13:17 Call to Show Gratitude for Kingdom Inheritance 12:28–29 Thru Selfless Love & Living 13:1–6 Thru Obedient Identification with Christ & His People 13:7–17 Concluding Interchange of Prayer 13:18–21 Postscript 13:22–25	

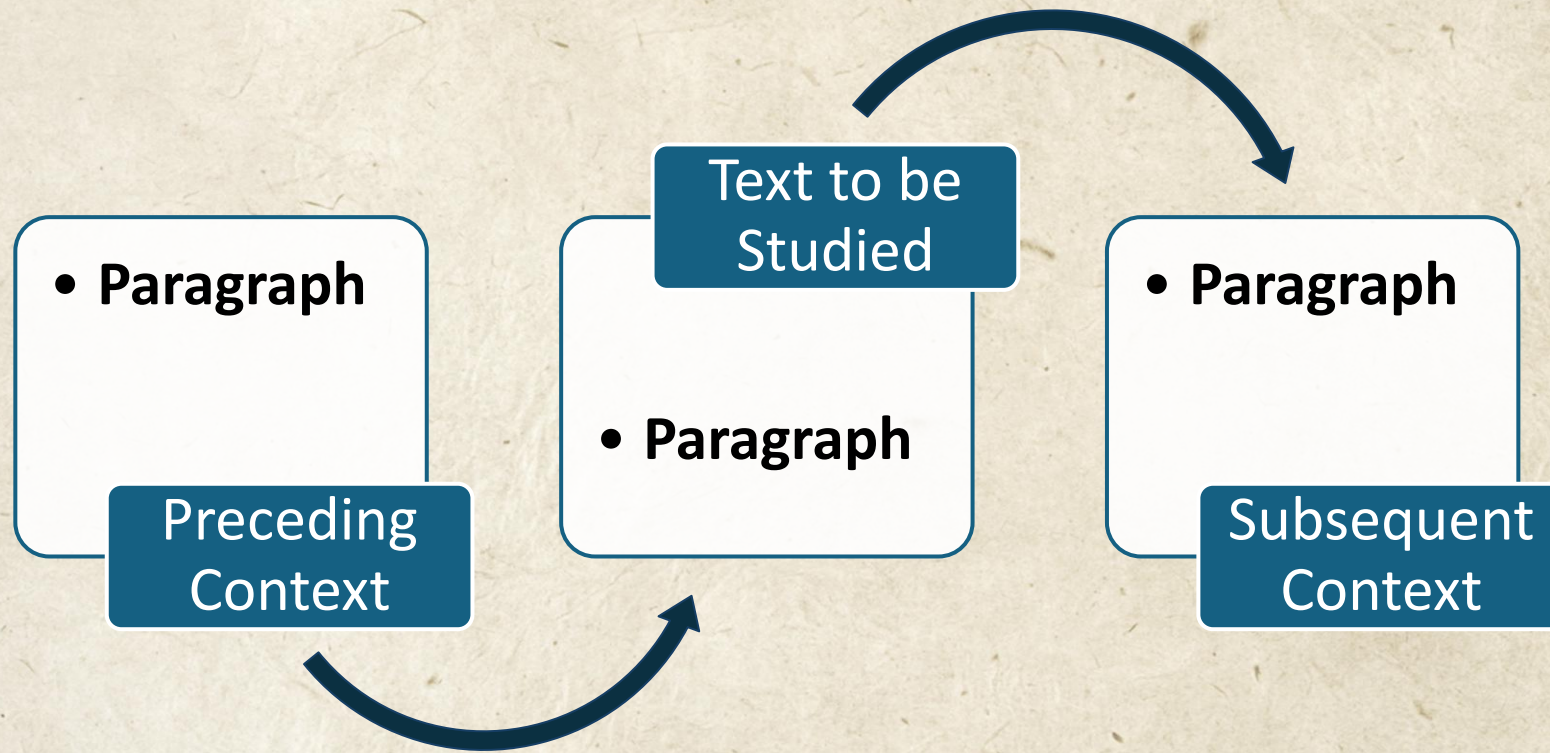
Text (3:10–18)

Outline of Romans						
1:1	1:18	3:21	6:1	9:1	12:1	15:14
1:17	3:20	5:21	8:39	11:36	15:13	16:27
Intro & Theme	CONDEMNATION: The Need for God's Righteousness	JUSTIFICATION: The Provision of God's Righteousness	SANCTIFICATION: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness	RESTORATION: Israel's Future in God's Righteousness	APPLICATION: The Practice of God's Righteousness	Conclusion

- Like a city map, a literary outline locates your text on the “map,” identifying its own “neighborhood” as well as the neighborhood next door.
- When interpreting the text, your awareness of this structural context will help you form solid conclusions about the meaning of the text you are studying.

STEP 5: Identify the text's immediate context.

- **PRINCIPLE:** Good orientation requires an attentiveness to the paragraphs before and after the text that is to be studied.
- **“Paragraph”** – “a subdivision of a written composition that consists of one or more sentences, deals with one point or gives the words of one speaker, and begins on a new usually indented line” (Merriam-Webster).
- *As a complete unit of thought*, the paragraph—not isolated phrases or sentences—should be the focus of interpretation.
- Key question: *What is the paragraph that precedes the text, and what is the paragraph that follows?*



“The material before the passage is the radar which guides the approach, and the following material is the radar of the leaving. And if we can track the material approaching and leaving the particular passage, we have the framework in which the passage is to be understood.”

—Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 139

2 For I want you to know ^u how great a ^u struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that ^u their hearts may be encouraged, being ^u knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of ^b God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ ^u in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order ^u that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For ^u though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your ^f good order and ^u the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Alive in Christ

⁶ ^u Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ ^u rooted and ^f built up in him and ^b established in the faith, just ^u as you were taught, abounding ^u in thanksgiving.

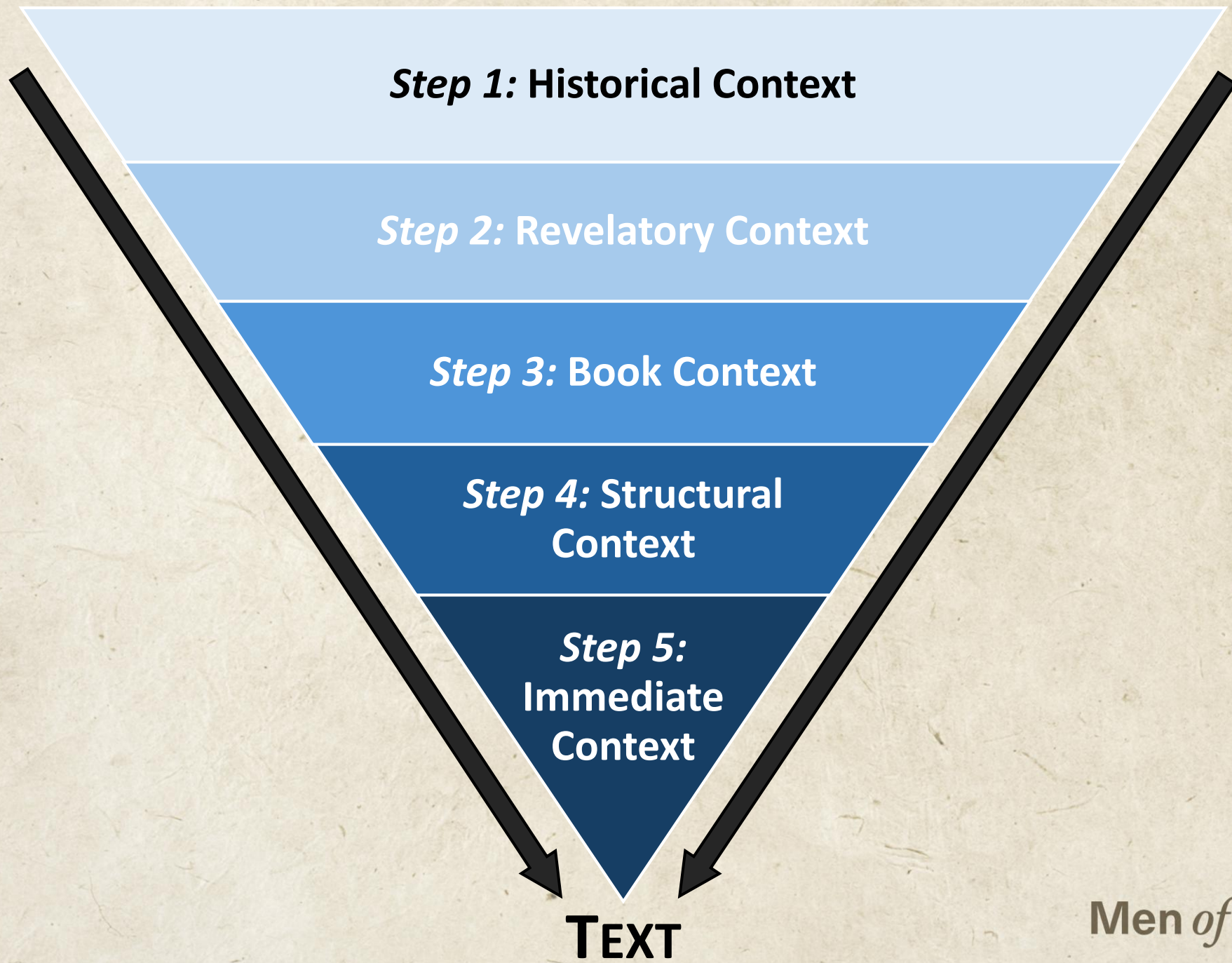
⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by ^u philosophy and ^u empty deceit, according to ^u human tradition, according to the ^u elemental spirits ⁷ of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For ^u in him the whole fullness of deity dwells ^u bodily, ¹⁰ and ^u you have been filled in him, who is ^u the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also ^u you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by ^u putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² ^u having been buried with him in baptism, in which ^u you were also raised with him through faith in ^u the powerful working of God, ^u who raised him from the dead. ¹³ ^u And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God ^b made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by ^u canceling ^u the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ ^u He disarmed the rulers and authorities ² and ^u put them to open shame, by ^f triumphing over them in him. ³

Let No One Disqualify You

¹⁶ Therefore let no one ^u pass judgment on you ^u in questions of food and drink, or with regard to ^u a festival or ^f a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ ^u These are a shadow of the things to come, but ^u the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one ^u disqualify you, ^u insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, ^u going on in detail about visions, ^u ^u puffed up without reason by ^u his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and ^u not ^u holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰ If with Christ ^u you died to the ^u elemental spirits of the world, ^u why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ ^u “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (^u referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to ^u human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in ^u promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are ^u of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

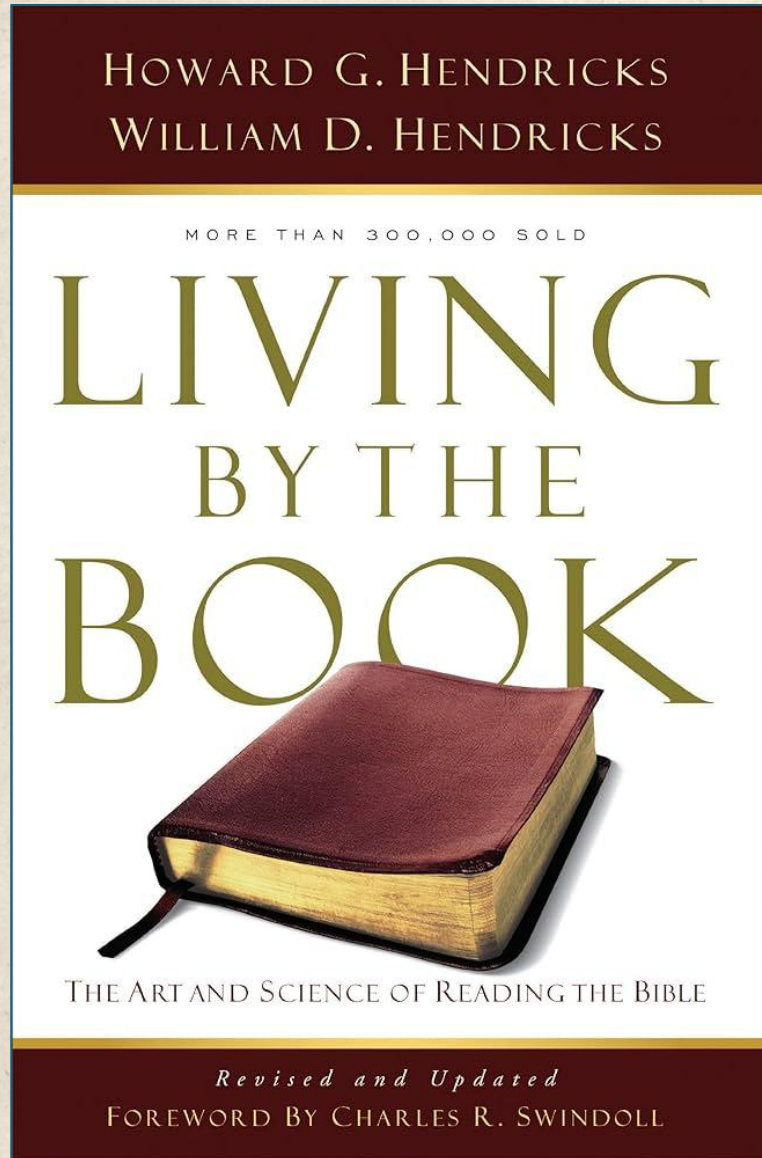
- To identify a paragraph, look for . . .
 - a) a *unifying theme* that ties a group of sentences together (a repeated word, an emphasized concept, etc.);
 - b) a *change of topic, setting, timing, or character*;
 - c) a *transitional word or phrase* (“Therefore,” “For this reason,” “Now concerning,” “It came about,” etc.);
 - d) A case of *direct address* (“Beloved,” “Brothers,” etc.).



“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, *Knowing Scripture*



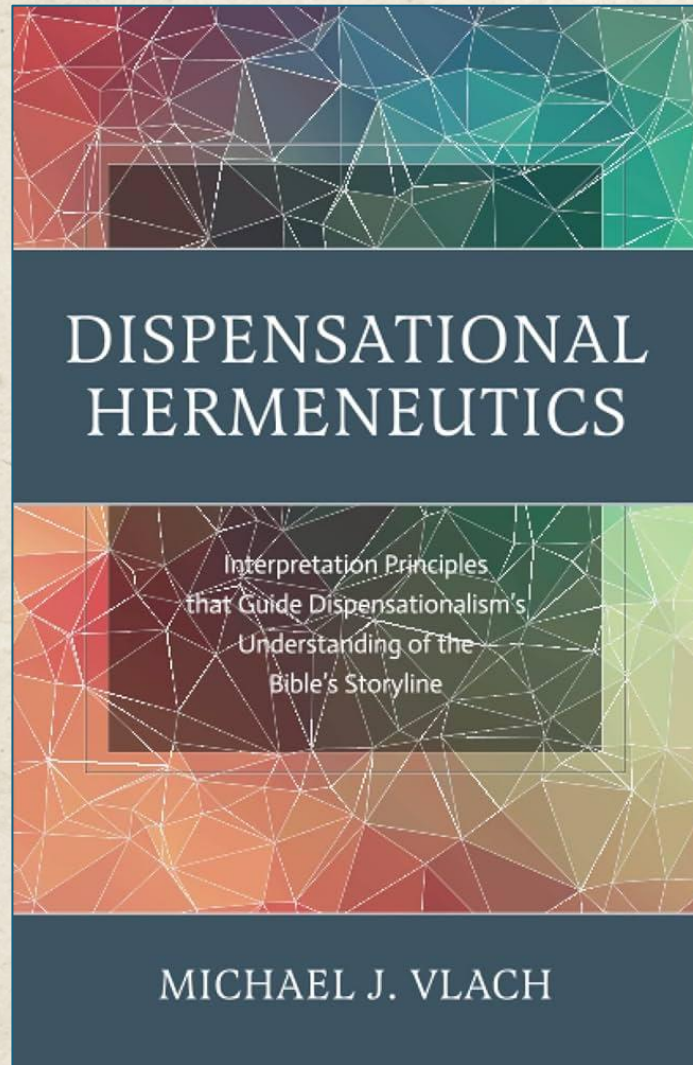


RECOMMENDED RESOURCE FOR BEGINNERS

Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks

Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible.

Men of the Word



RECOMMENDED RESOURCE FOR BEGINNERS

Michael Vlach

***Dispensational Hermeneutics:
Interpretation Principles that Guide
Dispensationalism's Understanding of
the Bible's Storyline.***

Men of the Word

Men *of the* Word
2024–2025

IT IS WRITTEN

A Study of
the Doctrine
of Scripture