

The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl

Considering Context to Determine Meaning

Passage (Matthew 13:44-46)

NKJV

⁴⁴ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew [13:44-46](#))

The Popular Interpretation

(Most frequently encountered)

These two parables have identical meanings. Both picture salvation as something hidden from most people (*see note on v. 11*), but so valuable that people who have it revealed to them are willing to give up all they have to possess it. -- John MacArthur, ed.⁵

The parables of the treasure and pearl indicate the incomparable value of the kingdom, which will cause a man to do everything possible to possess it. -- Charles Caldwell Ryrie⁶

Both study bibles suggest the purchaser in each parable represents a *believer*, who gives up everything to obtain that which is valued. The *MacArthur Study Bible* suggests the treasure and pearl represent *salvation* whereas Ryrie suggests they represent the *kingdom*. Another popular idea is that the treasure and pearl represent Christ Himself.

Problems with the Popular Interpretation

Nagging questions which arise... #1

The man in each parable not only sells all he has, but *buys* the thing of value (or its container: the field). This seems out-of-step with how Scripture describes the salvation, where *God* is the purchaser and the *believer* is the one purchased (redeemed).

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Nagging questions which arise... #2

The men in each parable have something of value sufficient to purchase the valued item. When the believer gives up "all that he has" to follow Christ, is that used to purchase salvation or the kingdom or Christ? What does the believer have of any real value to offer God? ⁶ Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, ⁷ None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him— ⁸ For the redemption of their souls is costly, (Psalm 49:6-8)

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Nagging questions which arise... #3

In the first parable, the man doesn't just buy the treasure, but something more—the entire field containing the treasure. If the treasure represents salvation or the kingdom or Christ, why would a believer buy the *field*? And what would it mean?

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Nagging questions which arise... #4

If the man is the believer who is “purchasing” salvation (or the kingdom or Christ), why does he subsequently *hide* the treasure? That seems antithetical to the evangelistic calling of believers.

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Nagging questions which arise... #5

What about the symbols within the parable—they seem familiar. Didn't Jesus already use—and explain—they earlier in the chapter? Jesus said the man who sowed the good seed is the *son of Man* (Mat. 13:37) while the field is the *world* (Mat. 13:18).

Would Jesus radically change the symbols used within the parables within the same series of teachings? Why does the popular interpretation disregard the definitions given earlier by Jesus?

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Nagging questions which arise... #6

The *MacArthur Study Bible* said, the "two parables have identical meanings."

Why does Jesus give two parables then?

Jesus doesn't repeat any of the the other parables with minor variations.?

Problems with the Popular Interpretation...

Just to be clear...

Every Christian agrees that salvation and the kingdom and Christ are immensely valuable and there is a cost to truly following Christ, but is that what this parable is about?

Remember: we aren't looking for a *possible* interpretation, but the *best* interpretation—the one that does justice to all the contextual clues?

The Importance of Context

Context is king!

When it comes to real-estate, the saying goes, value depends upon "location, location, location!" We might say something similar concerning the meaning of scripture: meaning depends upon "context, context, context!" Another way to say it is, *context is king* when it comes to understanding a passage?

Context Bullseye

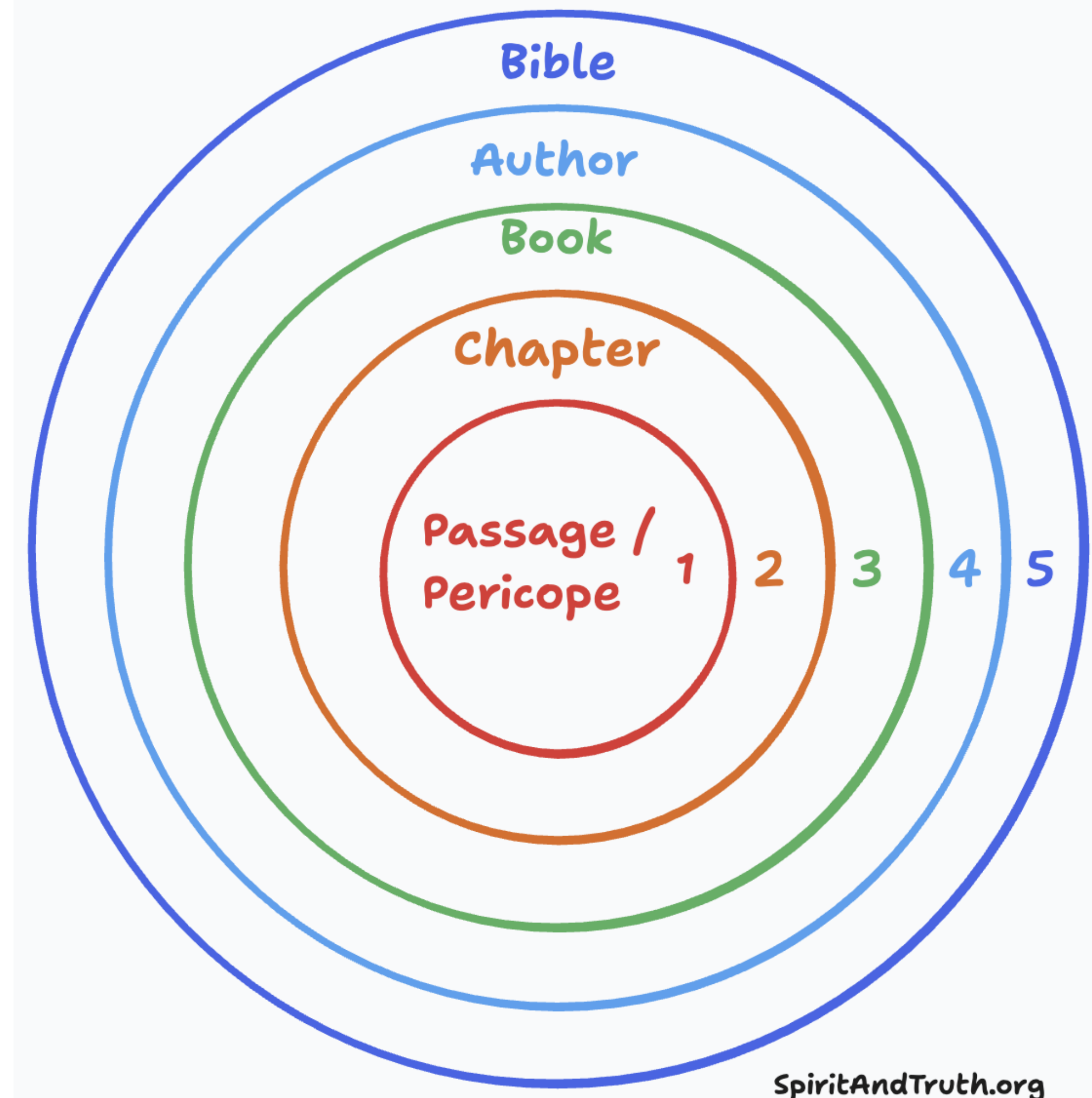
From innermost to outermost...

We can view context as a bullseye of concentric circles.

The innermost circle is the passage or pericope (see below) itself. The outermost circle is the entire Bible.

By methodically gleaning relevant information within each circle, we obtain a more accurate understanding of what the passage is conveying. As with a bullseye, the innermost circle has the greatest importance (relevance in determining meaning).

Concentric Context



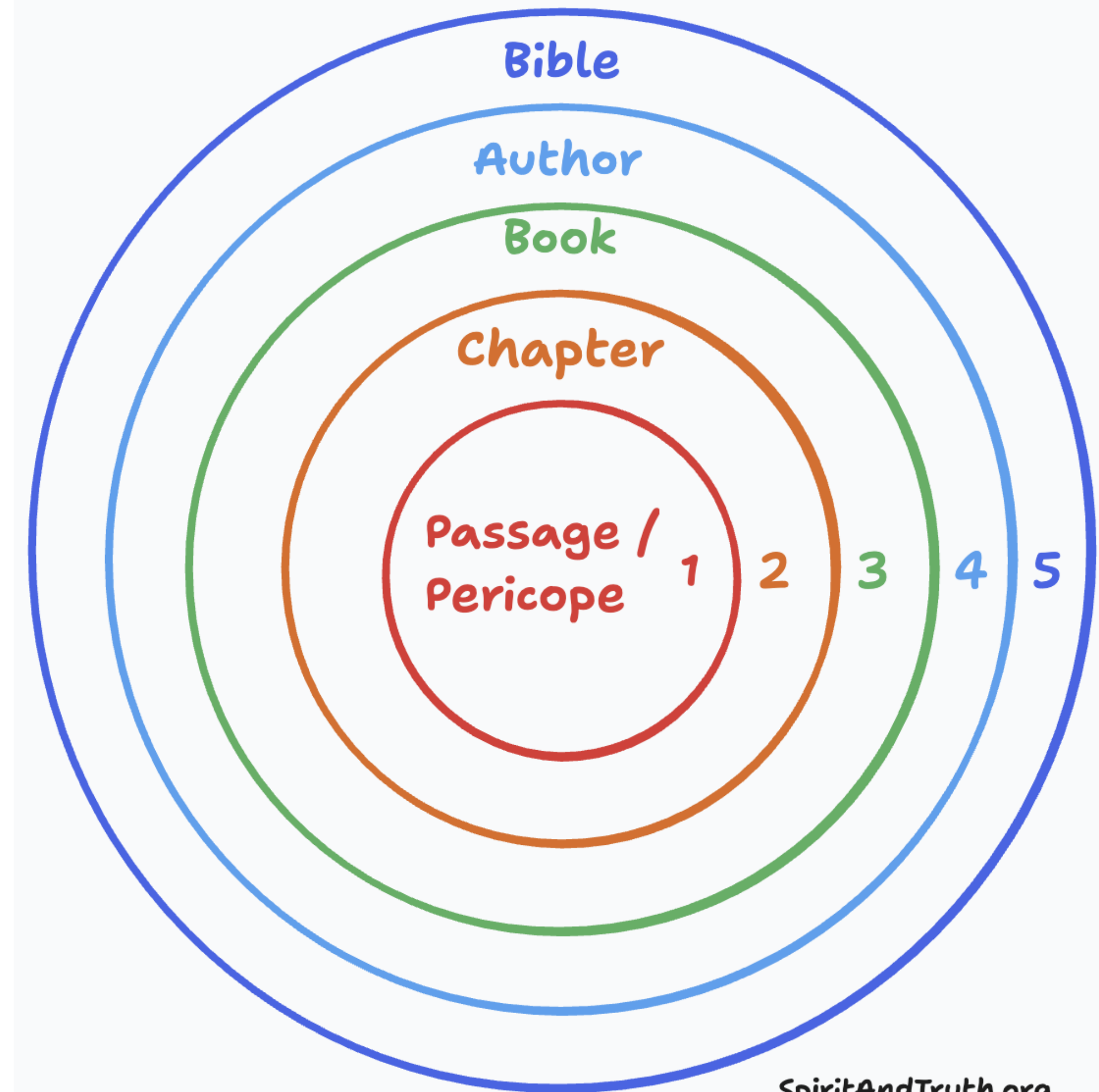
Passage/Pericope

Ring 1...

A *pericope* is "A paragraph or otherwise discrete section of writing, frequently the focus of exegesis [interpretation]. The term is often restricted to the literary units in the Gospels."⁸

A pericope could be a paragraph, but may include more than a paragraph. For our purposes we can think of it as the a group of semantically-related sentences within a chapter.

Concentric Context

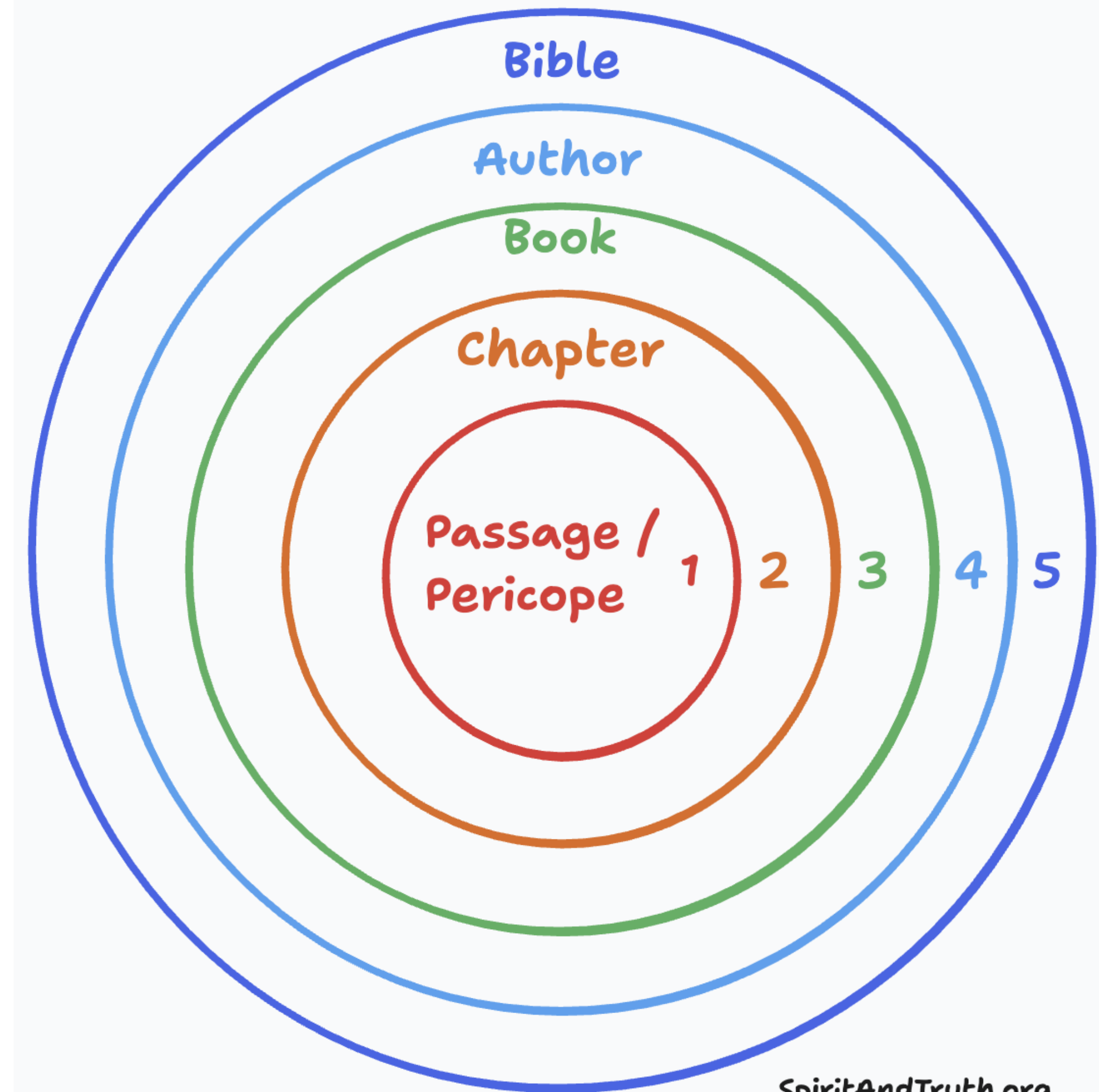


Chapter

Ring 2...

The chapter within which the passage is found often contains related ideas, phrases and terms that should be understood in a similar way.

Concentric Context



Book

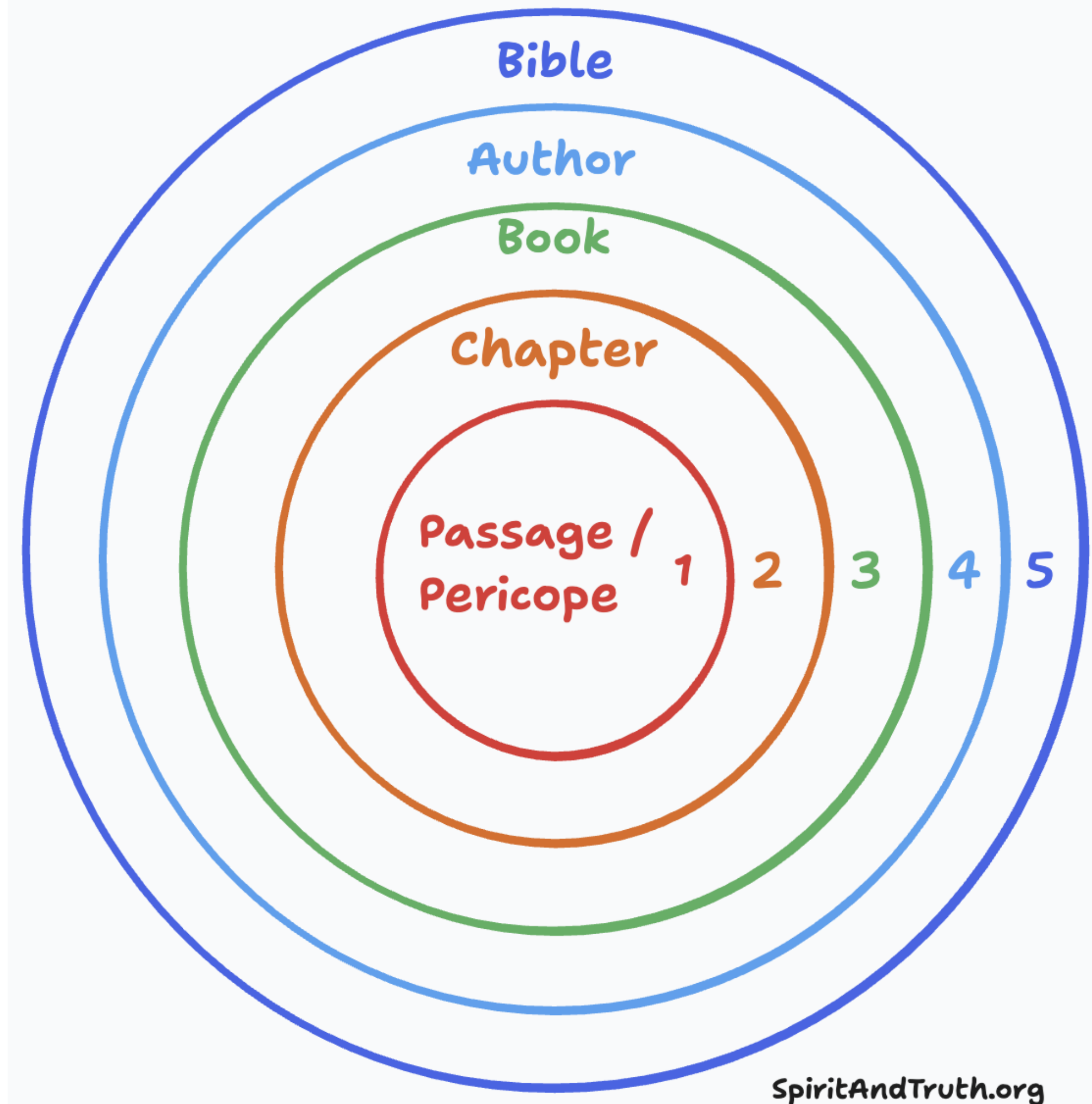
Ring 3...

The book containing the chapter often provides an understanding of the overall theme, purpose, and logical argument developed from chapter-to-chapter.

This provides similar information as the chapter, but it is usually broader in context.

The understanding of the passage should be compatible with the ideas conveyed within the chapter and the overall book.

Concentric Context



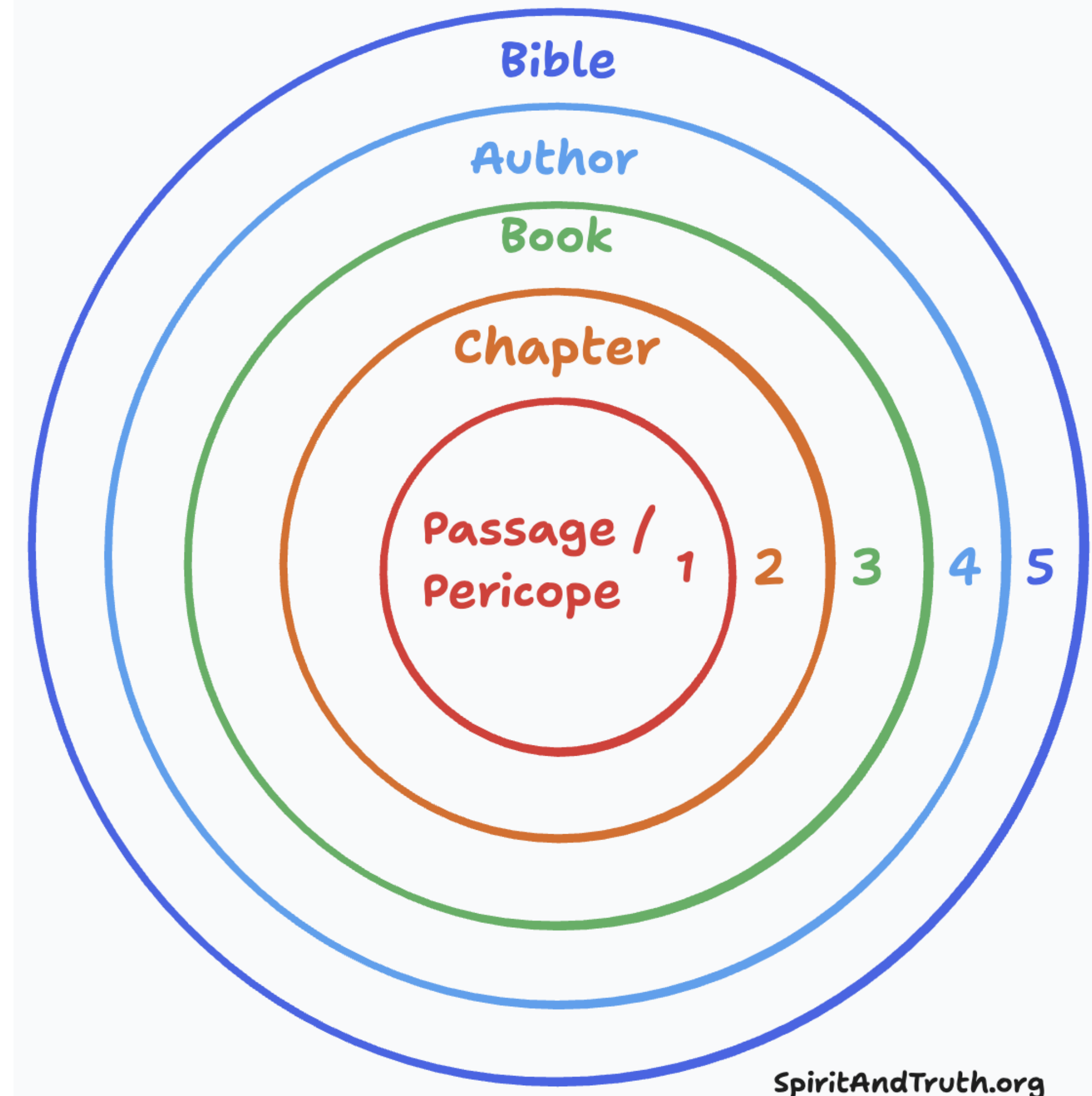
Author

Ring 4...

When the author of the passage wrote additional books of the Bible, it can often be helpful to examine the other books for similar themes. Authors tend to reuse phrases and ideas and express them in consistent ways.

As an example: when identifying the meaning of the one who *overcomes* in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation, we gain enormous help by considering passages on the the same topic in other books also written by John (1Jn. [2:13](#); [5:4-5](#)).

Concentric Context



Bible

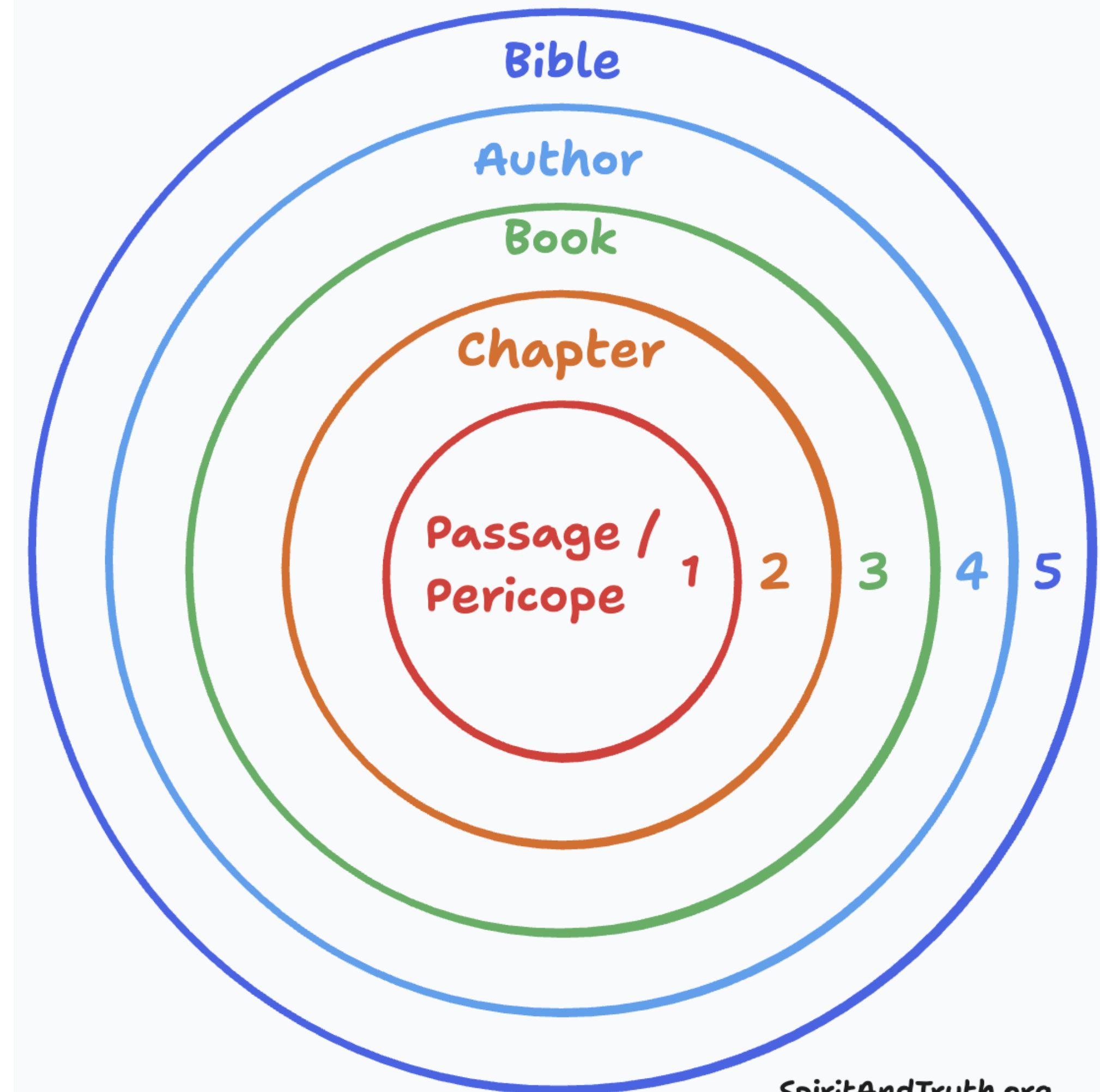
Ring 5...

Ultimately, all of Scripture was superintended by a Single Author: the Holy Spirit (2Ti. [3:16](#); 2Pe. [1:21](#), etc.).

This means that meaning within our immediate passage will be consistent with information elsewhere in the Bible.

⚠️ *If our interpretation ignores or conflicts with related information elsewhere in Scripture this is a red flag—our interpretation needs reevaluation!* This principle has been called, *The Analogy of Faith*.

Concentric Context



The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

The *analogy of faith* is the foundational principle behind a very important interpretive practice: *Scripture interprets Scripture*.

This principle applies within every concentric context.

The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

Hermeneutically, “analogy of faith” is defined as the “general harmony of fundamental doctrine that pervades the entire Scriptures.” Two degrees of analogy are acknowledged: (1) *the positive*, something so plainly stated and based on so many passages that there can be no question as to the meaning (e.g., sin, redemption, and omnipotence), and (2) *the general*, something not based on explicit declarations but on the obvious scope and import of Scriptural teachings as a whole. . . . Bernard Ramm defines “analogy of faith” in terms of one and only one system of doctrine taught by the Bible. This, he says, forbids pitting one author against another or finding doctrinal contradictions within the Bible.” -- Robert L. Thomas⁹

The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

No theological doctrine should be based on a single passage of Scripture in isolation from the whole counsel of God.

McQuilkin remarked, “It will not do to determine the meaning of a passage independent of the rest of Scripture. . . . To study only one element of a revealed truth in a single passage may lead to a distortion of that truth. Inconsistencies, omissions, and wrong emphases may go undetected.” [Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 209, 219] -- Steve Lewis¹⁰

The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

No passage contradicts another passage. We may not always understand how these passages harmonize, but any perceived problems or contradictions are from the perspective of finite humans. They are not true contradictions. --

Michael Vlach¹¹

The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

We believe they [the scriptures] contain one harmonious and sufficiently complete system of doctrine; that all of their parts are consistent with each other; and that it is our duty to trace out this consistency by a careful investigation of the meaning of particular passages. -- Lorraine Boettner¹²

The Analogy of Faith

Our safety net...

We affirm the unity, harmony and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter. We deny that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them. -- J. I. Packer, *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*¹³

The Analogy of Faith

Interpretation without the safety net...

The “Grasshopper Method” of interpretation or exegesis must be avoided. There is no form of evil doctrine or practice that may not claim apparent Scriptural sanction and support from isolated passages taken out of their context, but no erroneous doctrine can ever find support in the Word of God when the whole united testimony of the Scriptures is weighed against it. --

Charles Spurgeon¹⁴

The Analogy of Faith

Interpretation without the safety net...

The fact of the matter is you can make the Bible say whatever you want it to say if you don't care about context. I've used this example before:

Judas went out and hung himself, go thou and do likewise and what you do, do quickly.

So wow, the Bible supports suicide, right? Well, not if you care about the context of those verses. But anybody can string together a bunch of out of context verses and make it sound any way they want. -- Andy Woods¹⁴

Applying the Context Bullseye

1 → Passage/Pericope

- Examining the meaning of symbols in immediate context, as we saw earlier.
 - The man who previously sowed the good seed is "The son of Man" (Mat. [13:37](#)).
 - "The field is the world . . ." (Mat. [13:18](#)).
 - In the absence of other information, we should initially assume the man (in each parable) is Jesus and that the field represents the world.
 - We can already see a concept emerging which is highlighted elsewhere in Scripture, ¹⁶ **For this is the way God loved the world: He gave [as a purchase] his one and only Son . . .** (John [3:16](#), NET) —but we are getting ahead of ourselves. 😊

Applying the Context Bullseye

1 → Passage/Pericope

- What do we notice about the pearl?
 - Why is a similar principle stated in two ways? Is it only to provide "two witnesses"?¹⁷ Perhaps the variations between the two otherwise-similar parables conveys something of significance?¹⁸
 - Why does one parable concern something valuable associated with the *earth* and the other associated with the *sea*? (We file this observation on the shelf for now.)
 - Whatever the two represent, they are both considered valuable enough to purchase, even though they represent different things that were purchased by "the man."

Applying the Context Bullseye

2 → Chapter

- Jesus begins teaching in parables at the start of this chapter (Mat. 13:3 is the first mention of *parable* in Matthew's gospel).
 - This is a definite shift in teaching style which the disciples noticed, ¹⁰ *And the disciples came and said to Him, Why do You speak to them in parables?* (Matthew 13:10).
 - Jesus explains it is a fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10.¹⁹
 - Parables allow Jesus to teach in a way which reaches people who are open, who exercise faith, while at the same time obscuring understanding from those with hard hearts.

Applying the Context Bullseye

2 → Chapter

¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but **whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.** ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; ¹⁵ For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' ¹⁶ But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; (Matthew [13:12-16](#))

- This is a form of judgment, where God gives them over in their willful rejection.²⁰
- *Why has Jesus turned this corner? What has changed which caused this shift in teaching style?*
- The preceding chapter (Matthew [12](#)) provides the key (to be examined in association with the next contextual circle: book).

Applying the Context Bullseye

2 → Chapter

Along with switching to teaching in parables, Jesus says the content of His teaching concerns "the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven."²¹

- Although it is beyond the scope of this presentation, the term "mystery" is not to be understood as *mysterious* — as pertaining to something difficult to figure out but yielding to sufficient study. Rather, it refers to that which has not previously revealed and only known by revelation provided by God (e.g., Rom. 16:25; 1Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:4,9; Col. 1:26).²²
- Jesus closes out his "kingdom of heaven" teaching by describing how, . . . **every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things new and old***. (Matthew 13:52b). The *old things* are found in the Old Testament, the *new things* are found within the new revelation just given by Jesus concerning the interadvent age.
- Therefore, we should expect the parables of the treasure and pearl have something in common with the other parables: *understanding them requires combining information from both the Old Testament and the New Testament*. The popular interpretation doesn't benefit from this synthesis.

Applying the Context Bullseye

3 → Book

- Matthew's gospel begins with a genealogy which establishes Jesus as the Messiah, the promised King in the line of David (Mat [1:1-17](#)).²³
- John the Baptist and Jesus preach the nearness of the kingdom, the "kingdom is at hand" (Mat. [3:2](#); [4:17](#); [10:7](#)). Jesus is preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" (Mat. [4:23](#); [9:23](#)).
- The kingdom is never explained by John the Baptist or Jesus—they assume it is understood as defined in the Old Testament and in agreement with the words of Gabriel to Mary: a geopolitical kingdom ruling from the throne of David (Luke [1:31-33](#)).
- Surprisingly, Jesus' initial message does not concern universal salvation, but is focused on preaching the kingdom to Israel (Mat. [10:6](#))—we know this because the disciples don't yet understand His impending death.

Applying the Context Bullseye

3 → Book

- In chapter 12, Matthew underscores a critical event in the teaching ministry of Jesus: Jesus' miraculous healing abilities are attributed to demonic powers (Mat. [12:24](#)).²⁴
- *This represents a fulcrum, a pivot, in Matthew's gospel. The religious leaders and "this generation" are committed in rejecting their king.*
- Jesus emphasizes this turning point by proclaiming their ongoing resistance to the Holy Spirit as the unpardonable sin, blasphemy against the Spirit—which will not be forgiven (Mat. [12:31](#)).
- Jesus strongly condemns both the religious leaders and "this generation," explaining that even the Queen of the South (a Gentile) responded to Solomon (Mat. [12:42](#)) while the Jews are condemning "a greater than Solomon" in their midst (Mat. [12:42](#)).

Applying the Context Bullseye

3 → Book

- Jesus emphasizes the coming spiritual state of Israel, the result of having rejecting her King.
 - ⁴³ When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation. (Matthew [12:43-45](#))
 - His exorcisms had cleansed Israel, making it ready to receive the Messiah. The nation was "empty, swept, and put in order."
 - Having resisted the spiritual transformation required to see the kingdom (John [3:3](#)), the nation would now go from bad-to-worse.²⁵

Applying the Context Bullseye

3 → Book

- Whereas the kingdom was previously said to be "at hand" (Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) no longer would it be so. *The offer of the kingdom has been rejected, the die is set.*
- The message shifts from the "the kingdom is at hand" (Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) and "the gospel of the kingdom" (Mat. 4:23; 9:35)²⁶ to "salvation through the death of the King" (Mat. 16:21-22; 17:22; 20:18; 26:2).²⁷

Applying the Context Bullseye

4 → Author

In this case, the author only wrote a single book of the Bible so we don't have additional books by the same author to mine for other contextual clues.

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible

Since Jesus mentions the scribe "is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mat. [13:52](#)), we can expect to find clues to understand the parables in the "things old" — the Old Testament.

What does the Old Testament say about treasure in a field (the world)?

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Treasure?

We find that Israel is said to be God's treasure, in comparison with all other people in the world (field):

- Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a **special treasure** to Me above all people; for **all the earth is Mine**. (Exodus 19:5)²⁸
- ⁶ For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a **special treasure** above all the peoples **on the face of the earth**. (Deuteronomy 7:6)
- ² For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a **special treasure** above all the peoples who *are* **on the face of the earth**. (Deuteronomy 14:2)

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Treasure?

- ⁴ For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His **special treasure**. (Psalm [135:4](#))
- ³ For I *am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. ⁴ Since you were **precious in My sight**, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. (Isaiah [43:3-4](#))
- ¹⁷ "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them **My jewels**. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." (Malachi [3:17](#))

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → Was the treasure purchased?

- ¹³ You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom **You have redeemed**; You have guided *them* in Your strength To Your holy habitation. . . . All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. ¹⁶ Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be *as still as a stone*, Till Your people pass over, O LORD, Till the people pass over **Whom You have purchased**. (Exodus [15:13-16](#))
- ⁶ Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? *Is He not your Father, **who bought you***? Has He not made you and established you? (Deuteronomy [32:6](#))

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → Was the treasure purchased?

- ²³ And who *is* like Your people, like Israel, the **one nation on the earth** whom **God went to redeem** for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name-and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land-before Your people whom **You redeemed** for Yourself from Egypt, the nations, and their gods? (2 Samuel [7:23](#))
- ⁵¹ *Are You not the One* who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; That made the depths of the sea a road For **the redeemed** to cross over? (Isa. [51:10](#))
- ¹¹ For the LORD has **redeemed Jacob**, And **ransomed him** from the hand of one stronger than he. (Jeremiah [31:11](#))

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → Was the treasure purchased?

Israel was redeemed from Egypt (2S. [7:23](#)) in close association with the Passover—a picture of the spiritual redemption achieved by a future Passover Lamb (John [1:36](#), [39](#)). Thus, the Old Testament establishes Israel as God's treasure which He purchased out of Egypt. In purchasing the *nation* Israel from Egypt, God typified His ultimate purchase of *believing Jews among Israel* on the cross.

However, when believing Jews were purchased by The Son of Man, so too were believers of all nationalities.

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → Was the field purchased?

From the “things new” (New Testament)

- ¹⁰ For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, **who is the Savior of all men**, especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy [4:10](#))
- ⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a **ransom** for **all**, to be testified in due time, (1 Timothy [2:5-6](#))
- ¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for **the whole world**. (1 John [2:1-2](#))

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Pearl?

What does the Old Testament (“things old”) reveal concerning the pearl of great price?

- In contrast to the treasure, which resides in a *field*, pearls reside in the *sea*. In the Old Testament, the sea is used to symbolize the tumult of the non-Jewish (Gentile) nations (Ps. [65:7](#); Isa. [17:12-13](#); [60:5](#); Jer. [6:23](#); [51:42](#); Dan. [7:2](#)).²⁹
- Among edible items found in the sea, shellfish are designated as unclean by God (Lev. [11:10](#)).
- The pearl is produced by an oyster (unclean) and resides in the sea (typifying the Gentile nations).
- It seems the treasure and the pearl represent two different people groups, both of which the Son of Man values and purchases.
- Indeed: this is a theme we find in Matthew’s gospel: even as the Jews—informed by the Old Testament—are rejecting their King, the Gentiles—without the benefit of the Old Testament—are responding in faith (Mat. [8:10](#); [9:18](#); [12:42](#); [15:27-28](#)).

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Pearl?

- The gospels and Acts record a transition where emphasis shifts from presenting the promised kingdom to Israel (the treasure, Acts 1:6) to evangelizing the world (the pearl, Acts 1:8)
- ⁴ And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," *He said*, "you have heard from Me; ⁵ "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time *restore the kingdom to **Israel** [the treasure]?" ⁷ And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸ "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth** [the pearl]." (Acts 1:4-8)

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Pearl?

- Because the pearl is considered as unclean, Peter was given the vision of unclean animals on the roof of Simon the Tanner (whose house, *coincidentally*, was by the sea) where God said, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This paved the way for Peter journey to the house of Cornelius, where the gospel was presented to a group of Gentiles. ³⁴ **Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."** (Acts [10:34-35](#)) Later, he faced the following accusation from his fellow Jews, ¹¹ . . . **"You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"** (Acts [11:3](#))
- Those who were members of the purchased *treasure* struggled to accept that God also highly-valued and purchased a *pearl*.³⁰
- If the treasure symbolizes Israel and the pearl symbolizes Gentiles, then it begins to make sense that Jesus mentions these two valuable items in association with parables about the kingdom heaven in Matthew [13](#)—which we previously saw were in response to the rejection of the King by Israel.

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → What is the Pearl?

We know from the *Parable of the Hidden Treasure* that in the process of purchasing His people Israel, Jesus also paid the purchase price to redeem the entire world. That parable implied that redemption was available both for believing Jews as well as for believing Gentiles. . . . Since the previous parable focused on the redemption of Israel, it seems likely that this parable completed the picture by focusing on the redemption of Gentiles using the metaphor of a pearl. -- Steve Lewis³¹

The message of the *Parable of the Pearl* is that the redemption which Jesus provided was sufficient, not only for His people Israel, but also for believing Gentiles. At the beginning of the age during which the kingdom is postponed, Jesus will give the ultimate sacrifice to purchase both His treasured people as well as “taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name” (Acts 15:14-18). -- Steve Lewis³²

Applying the Context Bullseye

5 → Bible → Hiding the Treasure in the Field

- Both the treasure and the pearl are purchased by the man, but the treasure is hidden again in the field. What might this unexpected action convey?
- This brings us back to the conditional statement we previously encountered in Exodus 19:5, ¹⁰ **Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.** (Exodus 19:5)
 - Having broken her covenant with God³³ Israel went still further into disobedience by rejecting and crucifying her King and Messiah.
 - Since she has not obeyed God's voice or kept His covenant, Israel's significance and national hopes will be "hidden," *buried* until she comes to her senses ushering in the second coming (Matthew 23:37-39; Romans 11:25-27).
 - During the upcoming interadvent age, the focus will *not* be on Israel, but on *global evangelization*.³⁴

Applying the Context Bullseye

4 → Bible → Hiding the Treasure in the Field

The Lord died for that nation, and still the results of that death are not yet manifested. Israel is hid in the field, in the world. The Lord will come again and return to the field, the world, once more. He comes to claim His inheritance. Then He will lift the treasure, then He will claim His people Israel and they will rejoice in His salvation. During this age, the age of an absent Lord, Israel is kept hid in the field. This is one of the mysteries in the kingdom of the heavens. . . . Israel is the Lord's peculiar treasure. He has purchased His earthly people. They shall yet be His peculiar treasure, displaying in the earth, in the coming age, all the excellencies of Himself. They will be a justified, a separated and Spirit-filled people. . . . The Lord died for that nation, and still the results of that death are not yet manifested. Israel is hid in the field, in the world. The Lord will come again and return to the field, the world, once more. He comes to claim His inheritance. Then He will lift the treasure, then He will claim His people Israel and they will rejoice in His salvation. During this age, the age of an absent Lord, Israel is kept hid in the field. This is one of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens. -- Arno C. Gaebelein³⁵

Applying the Context Bullseye

4 → Bible → Hiding the Treasure in the Field

This identification of Israel as the treasure seems to be the most plausible explanation for the subject of this parable. But if the treasure is God's people Israel, then why would they be described as hidden? And why, once the man found them, would they be hidden again? One commentator explained it this way: *When God chose Israel to become His treasure, it was not because they were better than other nations. God wanted a people to represent Him, to be a repository for His Word, and to be an example of what a nation ought to be. God intended Israel to show to the rest of the world how any nation can be blessed with peace and prosperity through a right relationship to Himself. ... In this parable Israel is His treasure. However, when Christ came, Israel was no longer a shining example of what a people in fellowship with God should be. For more than seven hundred years Israel had been the military target of other nations. The people had violated God's laws and become involved in various forms of idolatry. As a result of their backsliding, God allowed them to suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in His first advent, His treasure was hidden, that is, the people were scattered without a king. A remnant that returned from their latest captivity was then chafing under the bitter yoke of Rome. God's treasure had failed to fulfill her role. ... He uncovered His treasure, but only for a brief period of time. When they said they would not have Him and openly rejected Him, He hid the treasure again. [Lehman Strauss, Prophetic Mysteries Revealed, Loizeaux Brothers (1980): 92, 93, 94.] -- Steve Lewis³⁶*

Putting it All Together

According to the concentric context...

- The **man** represents the *Son of Man* (Jesus)
- The **field** represents the *world*
- The **treasure** represents the Jewish nation, *Israel*
- The **pearl** represents the non-Jewish nations, the *Gentiles*
- The man purchased *both*
- The purchaser had sufficient funds to pay the price required to buy the treasure, the pearl, and in fact the entire field : *Christ's atonement on the cross* (Tit. [2:14](#) cf. Acts [20:28](#); 1Cor. [6:20](#); [7:23](#); Eph. [1:14](#))
- The man hid the treasure. During this age of the Church, *Israel's ultimate role in God's plan is hidden* while the pearl is God's focus (Acts [1:6-8](#)). But a day is coming when the Son of Man will uncover the treasure—at the second coming (Zec. [14:16](#))

Putting it All Together

John Walvoord on the Hidden Treasure...

A common interpretation, such as is advanced in Trench's work on parables, is that the man who finds the treasure is the believer who finds Christ, with the same interpretation carried over to the merchant who finds the pearl. Everyone agrees that Christ is a treasure whom all the world has not discovered, but upon close examination, the interpretation is shallow and unsatisfactory. In the parable, the man was represented as hiding the treasure and selling all he had to buy it. The facts are, of course, that a believer in Christ has nothing to offer and the treasure is not for sale. The believer does not buy a field, representing the world, in order to gain Christ. Further, upon discovery of the treasure, a believer shares it with others rather than hides it. The key to the parable is to determine what the treasure was that was held in the field. Although the interpretation should not be dogmatically held, there is scriptural evidence that what was referred to here was none other than the nation Israel. Although Israel is an obvious factor in the world, apart from scriptural revelation, no one would recognize Israel as a treasure, and especially a treasure for which anyone would sell all that he has to buy. Scriptural support is given for interpreting the treasure as Israel . . . Ex. [19:5](#) . . . Ps. [135:4](#) . . . The fact that Israel is a treasure not recognized by the world and therefore hidden is all too evident today. Even among evangelical Christians, there are those who question whether Israel is an important biblical nation today with a prophetic future. Yet as we trace the gospel narratives, it is clear that Jesus came with a special purpose of redeeming Israel, although at the same time He reconciled the world to Himself. It was Jesus, therefore, who sold all that He had in order to buy the treasure, Israel, and to purchase it with His own blood (Php. [2:7-8](#); 1Pe. [1:18-19](#)). During the present age, Israel is a hidden entity in the world, only to emerge at the end of the age as a major factor in the prophetic fulfillment leading up to the second coming of Christ. -- John Walvoord³⁸

Putting it All Together

John Walvoord on the Pearl of Great Price...

In this parable, the same thought was presented as in the preceding one; only here, the pearl seemed to represent the church rather than Israel. . . . The parable emphasized that the church has been made possible by the merchant who sold all that He had to secure the great pearl. So Christ, leaving the glory of heaven, made the supreme sacrifice of dying on the cross in order to make possible the formation of the church. . . . In the treasure and the pearl are the two major purposes of God for Israel and the church from a spiritual point of view, and His purposes for both are realized, even though there is a dual line of development of good and evil culminating in the second coming of Christ. -- John Walvoord³⁹

Endnotes:

1	https://spiritandtruth.org/teaching/topics_by_tony_garland_02/21_The_Parable_of_the_Hidden_Treasure/index.htm
2	Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the <i>New King James Version</i> , copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3	Ref-1640, Mat. 13:44-46
4	To his credit, Ryrie also mentions the interpretation we derive here. “Another possible interpretation equates the man with Christ (as in v. 37) who sacrifices His all to purchase His people.” -- Charles Caldwell Ryrie ³
5	Ref-0089, Mat. 13:44
6	Ref-1640, Mat. 13:44-46
7	A common, but unwise pursuit, attempts to leverage minutia within the original languages—word meaning and grammatical subtlety—to determine meaning, while paying insufficient attention to the context. But the Biblical languages <i>are like all other human languages</i> where grammar and individual word meanings play a secondary role to the context within which they are found. See Q387 : Misusing Greek when Interpreting a Bible Passage .
8	DeMoss, Matthew S, <i>Pocket dictionary of the Study of new Testament Greek</i> (Lisle, IL: Intersity Press, 2006), 96.
9	Ref-0231, 64.
10	Ref-0785, Steve Lewis, "The Doctrine of the Trinity - Part 1," Volume 12 Number 35, March 2008, 47
11	Ref-1631, 36
12	Ref-0096, 51
13	CSBH, Article XVII
14	Ref-1324, Dan. 1:1
15	Woods-Kingdom, Part 53

Endnotes (continued):

16	Ref-0015 , 283.
17	Actually there is only one <i>witness</i> : Jesus, but two <i>similar aspects</i> to the parable.
18	Some may object that one shouldn't attribute importance to this detail within the parable. Indeed, this is a general principle: " <i>Determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to teach</i> . This might be called the golden rule of parabolic interpretation for practically all writers on the subject mention it with stress. 'The typical parable presents one single point of comparison,' writes Dodd. 'The details are not intended to have independent significance.' Others have put the rule this way: <i>Don't make a parable walk on all fours.</i> " -- Bernard Ramm ¹⁶ But in this case, we have two parables with very similar content: a valued item found and purchased by an individual. But in only one of the parables, the
19	The passage in Isaiah has multiple referents. It applied to those in his own day, but also applies to the generation which rejected Messiah Jesus.
20	For more examples of being given over to one's own desires by God, see Ps. 81:12 ; Isa. 66:4 ; Acts 7:42 ; Rom. 1:26,28 ; 2Th. 2:11 .
21	The word <i>of</i> here, speaks of the <i>origin</i> of the kingdom, not its <i>location</i> as might be assumed (Dan. 7:13-14, 22, 27).
22	This is also evident from Jesus' comment closing out the "kingdom of heaven" parables, . . . <i>every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.</i> (Matthew 13:52b). The <i>old</i> things are found in the Old Testament, the <i>new</i> things are found within the new revelation just given by Jesus concerning the interadvent age.
23	For more on the significance of the threefold division of Matthew's genealogy, see my presentation on The Times of the Gentiles ^f , and especially lesson 5, Presentation of the Kings ^g .
24	In actuality, Jesus' power over the demonic realm represents a reversal of The Fall and a foretaste of conditions in the coming kingdom when demonic influences will be absent—one reason why Jesus said, ²⁸ <i>But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.</i> (Mat. 13:28)
25	And such remains the <i>spiritual</i> condition of Israel down to our day.
26	Although it will be the focus of preaching once again prior to his return (Mat. 24:14).
27	This is not to say that the death of the King was unknown to those familiar with the Old Testament (Ps. 22 ; Isa. 53 ; John 1:23,36).
28	We discuss the significance of the conditional aspect mentioned in Exodus 19:5 later in the presentation.
29	This association continues in the New Testament (Rev. 13:1 ; 17:5).

Endnotes (continued):

30	“The one pearl is still in the dark waters of the sea. How many more members will be added to this one pearl we do not know. How long it will be yet, before the Lord takes her unto Himself into the air, to adorn Himself with that precious pearl, none can tell.” Ref-1643 , 52
31	Lewis-1 , 5
32	Lewis-1 , 6
33	Israel broke the Mosaic Covenant: Deu. 29:25 ; 31:16 , 20 ; 1K. 19:10 ; Isa. 24:5 ; 33:8 ; Jer. 11:10 ; 22:9 ; 31:32 ; Eze. 16:59 ; 44:7 ; Hos. 6:7 ; 8:1 ; Heb. 8:9 .
34	“One of the transitions taking place in the text is that Israel, due to its rejection of Christ through its leaders, is being rejected for a time, while Christ does some work that is unexpected, namely the calling out of many unanticipated sons of the kingdom throughout the world. . . . the focus of joy by the man in the parable (Christ) shows that He has a heart for the world (the field) in light of the treasure itself. This is in keeping with the theological understanding of
35	Ref-1643 , 50-51
36	Lewis-1 , 2
37	Our own Steve Lewis and myself can be seen standing behind Dr. Walvoord in the linked image.
38	Ref-1268 , 104-106
39	Ref-1268 , 104-106

Sources:

CSBH	J. I. Packer, <i>Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics</i> , https://spiritandtruth.org/reference/chicago_statement/hermeneutics.html accessed 2026-03-27.
Lewis-1	Steve Lewis, <i>The Private Parables</i> , https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Matthew_13_by_Steve_Lewis/006_Matthew_13_44-52/20240331_006_Matthew_13_44-52_notes.pdf , accessed 2026-03-24.
Ref-0015	Bernard Ramm, <i>Protestant Biblical Interpretation</i> (MI: Baker Book House, 1970).
Ref-0055	Michael Stallard, "Hermeneutics and Matthew 13: Part 2", <i>Conservative Theological Journal</i> , vol 5 (Dec. 2001)
Ref-0089	John MacArthur, ed., <i>The MacArthur Study Bible</i> (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997).
Ref-0096	Loraine Boettner, <i>The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination</i> (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932).
Ref-0231	Robert L. Thomas, <i>Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002).
Ref-0785	<i>Journal of Dispensational Theology</i> , Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary. [www.tyndale.edu].
Ref-1268	John Walvoord, <i>Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come</i> (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1974). ISBN:08024-5189-6 ⁿ .
Ref-1324	Iain H. Murray, <i>The Forgotten Spurgeon</i> (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966, 2009). ISBN:978-1-84871-011-5 ⁱ .
Ref-1631	Michael Vlach, <i>He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God</i> (Silverton, OR: Lampion House Publishing, 2017, 2020). ISBN:978-1-7345067-0-9 ⁱ .
Ref-1640	Charles Caldwell Ryrie, <i>Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version</i> (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994). ISBN:9780802438591 ^k .
Ref-1643	Arno C. Gaebelin, <i>The Seven Parables - Matthew 13</i> (Los Angeles, CA: The Bible House of Los Angeles, 1906).
Woods-Kingdom	Andy Woods, <i>The Coming Kingdom, Part 53 - Kingdom Now Passages, Part 11 (John 18:36)</i> , https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/The_Coming_Kingdom_by_Andy_Woods/53_kingdom_now_passages_11/20181017_53_coming_kingdom_transcript.html accessed 2026-03-25.

Links Mentioned Above

a	https://spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm.
b	https://spiritandtruth.org/reference/tyndale/walvoord_200111.htm.
c	https://spiritandtruth.org.
d	mailto:contact@spiritandtruth.org.
e	https://www.spiritandtruth.org/questions/387.htm.
f	https://spiritandtruth.org/teaching/93.htm.
g	https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Times of the Gentiles/005 Presentation of The King/index.htm.
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