



Context, Context, Context!!!

Context is the most important part of Bible Study!!!

Dr. Craig Keener says: "Context is the way God gave us the Bible, one book at a time.

We cannot, in fact, even pretend to make sense of most verses without reading their context.

Isolating verses from their context disrespects the authority of Scripture because this method of interpretation cannot be consistently applied to the whole of Scripture.

It picks verses that seem to make sense on their own, but most of the rest of the Bible is left over when it is done, incapable of being used the same way.

Preaching and teaching the Bible the way it invites us to interpret it—in its original context—both explains the Bible accurately and provides our hearers a good example how they can learn the Bible better for themselves."

He further states: "Many contradictions some readers claim to find in the Bible arise simply from ignoring the context of the passages they cite, jumping from

one text to another without taking the time to first understand each text on its own terms.

To develop an example offered above, when Paul says that a person is justified by faith without works (Romans 3:28), his context makes it clear that he defines faith as something more than passive assent to a viewpoint; he defines it as a conviction that Christ is our salvation, a conviction on which one actively stakes one's life (Romans 1:5).

James declares that one cannot be justified by faith without works (James 2:14)—because he uses the word “faith” to mean mere assent that something is true (2:19),

he demands that such assent be actively demonstrated by obedience to show that it is genuine (2:18).

In other words, James and Paul use the word “faith” differently, but do not contradict one another on the level of meaning.

If we ignore context and merely connect different verses on the basis of similar wording, we will come up with contradictions in the Bible that the original writers would never have imagined.”

<https://craigkeener.com/why-it-is-important-to-study-the-bible-in-context/>

I cannot emphasize enough it's important to study Bible passages and stories within their context. Taking verses out of context leads to all kinds of error and misunderstanding.

Understanding context begins with four principles: literal meaning (what it says), historical setting (the events of the story, to whom is it addressed, and how it was understood at that time), grammar (the immediate sentence and paragraph within which a word or phrase is found) and synthesis (comparing it with other parts of Scripture for a fuller meaning).

Context is crucial to biblical exegesis in that it is one of its most important fundamentals.

After we account for the literal, historical, and grammatical nature of a passage,

we must then focus on the outline and structure of the book, then the chapter, then the paragraph.

Immediate context - Immediate context is the closest to the passage being studied; it describes what comes immediately before and after your passage.
Book context - Book context is looking at the entire book being studied to see what the author was conveying not just through a passage but the entire book.

Bible Context - Bible context is more of a systematic approach as to what is the Bible (all sixty-six books) communicating about a particular topic, concept, idea, etc.

How important is “literary context” to understanding the Bible properly?

“Context determines meaning.”²

Literary context is the text that surrounds the text to be interpreted.³

“Literary context relates to the particular form a passage takes and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying.”⁴

Interpretation is something we all do, most times without even thinking about it.

However, it is crucial to properly understand the Word of God.

Once we recognize the nature of the Bible and the nature of ourselves as we read the Bible, we can better appreciate the importance of context which help us interpret and understand.

Now what is particularly important for us, is the fact that the Bible can never rightly mean to us what it never meant or intended to the original author and audience.

Ultimately, it is the reading of the Bible in it’s proper context that prevents us from taking verses and giving them meanings they were never intended to have.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NET) For I know what I have planned for you,' says the Lord. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV 1900) For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) 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.

This verse is a popular one with many modern-day believers, that is often removed from its proper context and used to make promises of personal prosperity and good fortune. Because that's exactly what it says!

However, when read within its proper context, this is an inaccurate interpretation and misunderstanding.

But if you read the surrounding verses, they actually tell us, quite clearly, that God was speaking to a specific group of people (the Israelites), at a specific time (in exile), and for a specific purpose (that they would obey and be redeemed).

Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NIV)

10) This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

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 on 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.

14) I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

This means that, contrary to popular belief and misuse, this is not a verse that speaks directly to the modern-day Christian.

The sad commentary is, there is no shortage of Scriptures being misused apart from their proper context.

This is an all-too-common practice by so-called Bible teachers and preachers that has led many people to misinterpretation, misunderstandings, misapplications, and down-right incorrect ideas about God and His people.

This is why the Bible tells us to test everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and that the Bereans were considered noble for examining the truth of what they were hearing against Scripture (Acts 17:11).

Because the Bible also tells us, many, many times, that there *will be* false teachers among us, who secretly introduce destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1).

Whose purposes are to scratch the itching ears of those who are self-seeking, not interested in God's truth (2 Timothy 4:3).

Another concern with taking the Bible out of context is the temptation to make the Bible say what *we want* rather than what it originally meant.

Those who have taken this misguided approach have used Scripture to "prove" a wide variety of practices as "biblical."

However, a practice is only biblical if it is based on an accurate understanding of Scripture that includes studying the context surrounding a passage.

So, we have the responsibility to protect ourselves from falling into the hands of these false teachers, with their bad habits and bad theology, by reading the Bible, in its proper context.

And by learning from those who teach how to interpret with integrity, themselves.