

Session Five

I. INTRODUCTION

From the Five Laws of Bible Study (See page 62)

#1 Law of Observation

#2 Law of Interpretation

II. LAW OF INTERPRETATION

interpretation...

 explanation...

 meaning...

 understanding

To understand the meaning of a Biblical text requires a careful look at the contexts (and there is more than one context!).

III. LITERARY CONTEXT

Not all of the Bible is written in the same way. There is a difference between history, poetry and prophecy (the major components of the Old Testament). Gospels and Epistles are quite different.

The Bible is actually a collection of books written by many authors, in different literary styles, over several hundreds of years. The Bible is a collection of many books within the Book. Knowing the kind of literary types is indispensable to understanding.

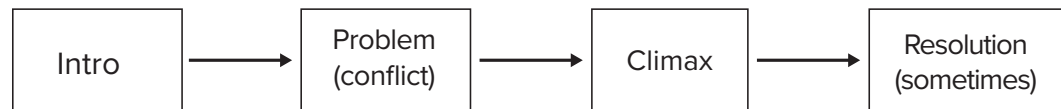
The more time you spend in fruitful observation, the less time you spend in aimless interpretation.

A text without a context is a pretext.

Advanced Thinking

Narratives as Stories:

Look for the elements common to a story:



Types of Narratives

1. **Tragedy:** the decline of a person
*See Life of David, Solomon, Samson
2. **Epic:** long narrative around a theme/people
*See Wilderness Sojourn or Exodus from Egypt
3. **Heroic:** the exploits of a hero, leader (example)
*See Joseph, Abraham, Daniel
4. **Polemic:** attacking/refuting views of others
*Elijah and prophets of Baal

A. Narrative

Narrative is a story (history) but one intended to convey a message (or purpose).

2 Samuel 11:1

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

Luke 4:1-2a

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Acts 6:1

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

“Broad Narrative” sections of the Bible include:

- Pentateuch (Books of Moses)
- Joshua—Esther
- Gospels
- Acts

STORIES...

- Intro
- Problem (plot)
- Climax
- Conclusion (resolution)

REFLECT:

Consider Exodus 1-12 and the deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Intro?

Problem (plot)?

Climax?

Resolution?

Legal

Exodus 20:1-17

Poetry

...as found in the Hebrew Scriptures, is characterized by:

EMOTION AND FEELING

Ecclesiastes 1:2

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”

says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless.”

PARALLELISM OF IDEA (not rhyming)

Psalms 2:4 NASB

He who sits in the heavens laughs,

The Lord scoffs at them.

Psalms 34:10

The lions may grow weak and hungry,

but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Psalms 1:3

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

HIGHLY FIGURATIVE (vibrant figures of speech)

Habakkuk 1:8

Their horses are swifter than leopards,

fiercer than wolves at dusk.

RHYTHMIC

rhyming was not characteristic of Hebrew poetry, but there is a definite rhythmic meter (accenting) in the original language.

SYNONYMOUS

repeat same idea

ANTITHETIC

contrast ideas

SYNTHETIC

building upon
a thought

B. Legal

Legal literary type speaks of “law” or “commands.” It is prevalent in Exodus 20-40, Leviticus, portions of Numbers and most of Deuteronomy.

C. Poetry

The Bible contains Hebrew poetry, characterized by imagery, poetic structure, emotion and feeling.

Psalm 101:1-2

*I will sing of your love and justice;
to you, O LORD, I will sing praise.
²I will be careful to lead a blameless life—
when will you come to me?
I will walk in my house with blameless heart.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

In legal literature ask “to whom is this addressed?”

“Is this still binding today?”

OT Poetry

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

NT Poetry

- Song of Mary, words of Zechariah
—LUKE 1

OT Prophecy

- also is found in poetic form

Wisdom

...found in two types of Wisdom Literature:

- 1. Proverbial Literature**

Book of Proverbs

- 2. Reflective Literature**

Job or Ecclesiastes

Logical Discourse

...epistles include two types of discourse:

- 1. Epistolary discourse:**

expounds an argument, a truth or doctrine in a careful, logical manner.

- 1 John 1:5-7**

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

- 2. Hortatory (exhorting or encouraging) discourse:**

exhorts to follow certain courses of action or develop moral, ethical, spiritual qualities.

- Romans 12:1-2**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

D. Wisdom

Characterized by general truths or maxims that are based on life experiences and observations.

These are precepts, not promises.

Proverbs 22:6

*Train a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

E. Logical Discourse (Epistles)

The NT epistle is a logical discourse that addresses matters of concern for individuals, churches and Christians in general.

The interpreter must ask the question of whether the discourse is **for a moment-in-time only...**

2 Timothy 4:21

Do your best to get here before winter.

Or is the teaching universal and true **for all time** (all believers)...

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Be joyful always; ¹⁷pray continually; ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

All Wisdom
Literature is poetry..
*not all poetry is
Wisdom Literature*

Logical Discourse
Romans to Jude (NT)

Observation about Paul's Epistles:
Often you can discern at least two broad sections to his discourses: doctrine and practice.

EPHESIANS 1-3:
DOCTRINE

EPHESIANS 4-6:
PRACTICE

Daniel 9:24-27

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. ²⁵Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. ²⁶After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. ²⁷He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

F. Prophetic

Preaching and prophesying material that condemns, rebukes, encourages and promises.

Some prophetic prophecy can predict future events.

Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— ²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

G. Summary

In order to interpret correctly, (first) determine what kind of literary context you are dealing with:

- is it narrative (story)?
- is it wisdom?
- is it legal?
- is it discourse?
- is it poetry?
- is it prophetic?

(Then) using your observations, begin to ask, "What does it mean?"

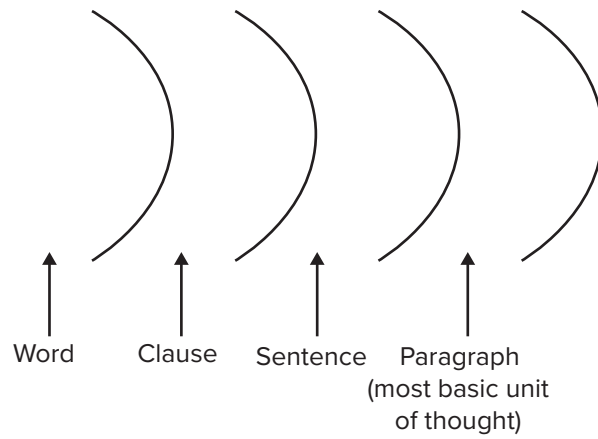
Thinking Deeply

- Is this prophetic passage about the First Coming of the Messiah or the Second Coming?
- Can prophetic Scripture that predicts events compress two distinct time frames into one passage?
- Double Fulfillment in prophecy:
...a partial fulfillment of a passage with a yet distant, deeper (fuller) fulfillment.
...SEE ISAIAH 7:14

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Broad Interpretive Context *More detail*

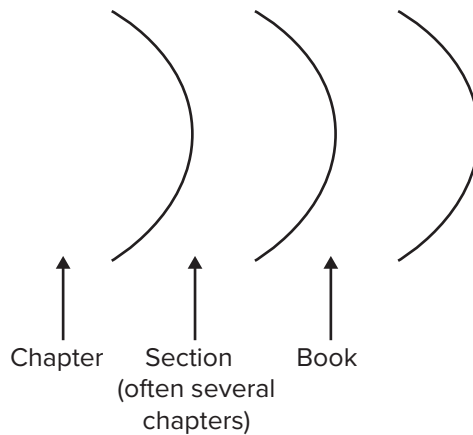
Grammatical Context:



Interpretive Clues:

- Look for structure
- Look for central idea
- Look before and after (near context)

Book Context:



Interpretive Clues:

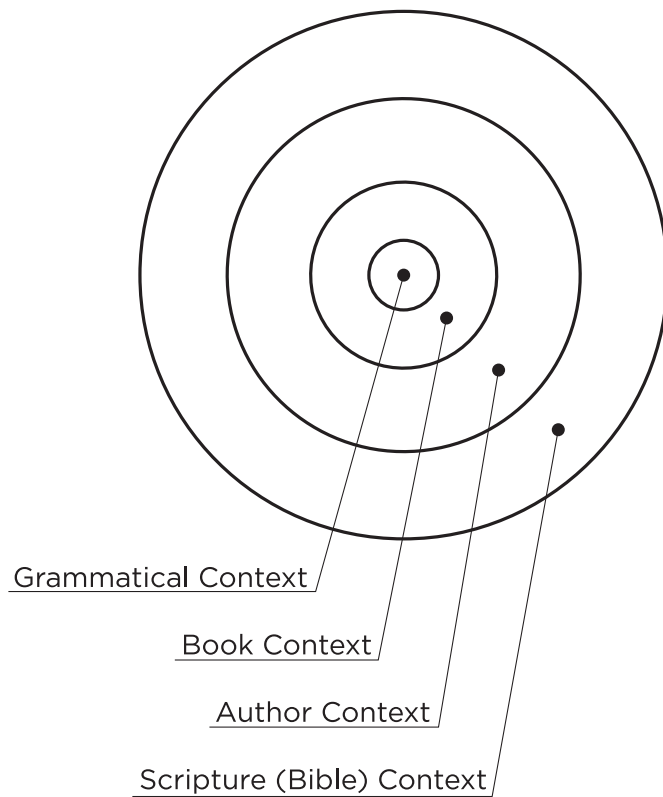
- Look for **themes**
- Look for breadth or development of **main ideas**
- Look for “broad” structure (far context)

IV. GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT

To interpret (therefore, understand), first, look at the type of literature...

Next, note the grammatical structure of the passage. Understand that it is part of a wholistic look at the passage in its much greater Scripture-wide context.

Note the broad “Interpretive Context” below.



If one does not know what it meant to the original audience, how can one apply it to the present audience?

Refer to preceding page for further detail.

For example, using the concentric circles of context, locate John 3:16 at the center and fill in insights for each of the outer contexts.

Word Studies

- to understand the meaning of a passage may require knowing the meaning of a key word.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- use Concordances (to see how a word is translated throughout the Bible); also use Bible Dictionaries (e.g. *New Ungers* or *Vine's NT Dictionary*)

CONFESSION (Hebrew from *yadâ*, lit., to “use,” i.e...extend the hand). Used in the Old Testament in the sense of acknowledging one’s sin (Leviticus 5:5; Job 40:14; Psalm 32:5). In the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple he uses the expression “confess Thy name” (1 Kings 8:33, 35; 2 Chron. 6:24, 26), doubtless meaning the acknowledgment of Jehovah as the one against whom the Israelites might sin, and the justice of punishment meted out by Him.

**The Greek, word rendered “confession” is *homologeō*, lit., to “say the same thing,” i.e., not to deny and so to admit or declare one’s self guilty of what he is accused. It is also used in the sense of a *profession*, implying the yielding or change of one’s conviction (John 12:42; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:13; etc.).

CONFESS. CONFESSION

A. Verbs.

I. HOMOLOGEO (ὁμολογέω), lit. to speak the same thing (*homos*, same, *lego*, to speak), to assent, accord, agree with, denotes. either (a) to confess. declare. admit; John 1:20; e.g. • Acts 24:14; Hebrews 2:13; (b) to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of. the result of inward conviction. I John 1:9; (e) to declare openly byway of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts, Matthew 7:23; 10:32 (twice) and Luke 12:8 (see next paragraph); John 9:22; 12:42; Acts 23:8; Romans 10:9, 10 (“confession is made”); I Timothy 6:12RV; Titus 1:16; I John 2:23; 4:2, 15; II John 7 (in John’s Epp. it is the necessary antithesis to Gnostic doceticism); Revelation 3:5. in the best mss. (some have NO. 2 here); (d) to confess by way of celebrating with praise. Hebrews 13:15; (e) to promise. Matthew 14:7.

In Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8 the construction of this verb with *en*, in, followed by the dative case of the personal pronoun, has a special significance, namely, to confess in a person’s name, the nature of the confession being determined by the context, the suggestion being to make a public confession. Thus the statement, “every one...who shall confess Me (lit., in Me, i.e., in My case) before men, him (lit., in him i.e., in his case) will I also confess before My Father...” conveys the thought of confessing allegiance to Christ as one’s Master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant. His loyal follower; this is appropriate to the original idea in *homologeō* of being identified in thought or language. See PROFESS, PROMISE, THANK.

New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press.

Expository Dictionary of NT Words, W.E. Vine, ed.

*also use Dictionaries of Theology (e.g. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Elwell, ed.) when the words have rich theological significance (e.g. righteousness, covenant, faith, et al.)

“Grammatical Context” includes...

- words
- sentences
- paragraphs

A. Words

- The basic building block of all communication is words (and what do they mean?)
- Importance of “word studies”

TOOLBOX RESOURCES

For Word Studies: Suggestions

- *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, R. K. Harrison, ed. Moody.
- *Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible* (2 vols.), W. Elwell, ed. Baker.
- *NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, Goodrick and Kohlenberger, Zondervan, (or another based on your study Bible translation—KJV, NASB, ESV).
- *Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, W.E. Vine, ed. Revell.
- *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, W. Elwell, ed. Baker. (intermediate - advanced tool)

Remember the “Law of Observation” and “Key Words”?

Without the
right “tools”...

- a mechanic cannot repair a car
- a brickmason cannot build a wall
- a surgeon cannot operate
- a plumber cannot fix a leak
- a Bible student cannot mine the depths of Scripture

What is the Main Idea?

SENTENCE: Matthew 7:24

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

- What is the main idea?

- What is being said about it?

PARAGRAPH: Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

- What is the main idea?

- What is being said about it?

[For the paragraph, “mark up” the text with your observations]

B. Sentences

- a grammatical unit of thought that expresses a statement, also asks a question, issues a command (or wish or exclamation)
- look for the subject...
look for the verbs

2 Chronicles 7:14

“if my people who are called by name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

C. Paragraphs

n. : a subdivision of a written composition that deals with one point (or gives the words of one speaker).

—*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

a paragraph is a **developed** unit of thought

a paragraph helps define the context of what the writer is conveying

Sentences are word relationships to produce a thought or idea.

if → then
cause/effect

people

- will humble
- pray
- seek
- turn

I (God)

- will hear
- will forgive
- (will) heal

N.B. paragraph context: Crucial to good interpretation

Practice: Acts 2:42-47^{NASB}

Snapshot of the Early, Healthy NT Church

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.