



Understanding The Bible in Context

DAY 22

Have you ever been misunderstood? Have your words ever been taken out of context? Has someone ever repeated something you said, but it isn't what you meant to say? It can lead to problems, hurts, and frustrations. If only people would take the time to understand what the person intended to say – our relationships would go a lot better. We do the same thing with the Bible. Sometimes there is a gap between what God's Word means and what we think it means.

The key to understanding the Bible is to understand the context.

Context refers to the broader world in which the Scripture was written. It's like being a detective, gathering as much evidence as we can to gain a proper understanding.

Literary context

01

When we say the word literary context, we pay attention to how the verse or passage we are reading fits into the bigger picture of the words spoken before and after. This means we need to understand the verse or passage we are reading in light of the words that surround them, in light of the book's primary message we are reading, and in light of what the Bible says as a whole.

Example: I heard about a Scripture inspiration calendar that said, "If you worship me, it will all be yours." **Luke 4:7** That sounds great until we ask who said this? Satan used this to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. And when we read the verses around this, we realize this is not a verse that we stand on as a promise because it is not true. But if we pull one verse out of context, we can mess up God's intended meaning and make it say whatever we want it to say.

Historical context

02

The question we should ask when it comes to historical context is to ask the question – When was this written? Remember, the Bible was not categorized chronologically, so we need to take the time to connect the dots of the time frame for when it was written.

Example: When we read **Psalms 137**, a Psalm of Lament, we understand it better when we realize it was written during the exile of God's people in Babylon.





God inspires the books of the Bible, but there is a human element to them.

Humans wrote each of these books, just like us. God didn't directly dictate to them; God allowed them to communicate His message using their creativity and writing style. This is how we verify that some of the various authors of the New Testament books are written by certain people – because of their writing

styles. We need to be careful that we don't read our world and culture into the Bible. The cultural gap between our gap and, for example, the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament. People wrote the Bible, and their own culture influenced them. We have to be careful because we will read our culture into the text.

Many Americans are terrible at this – we will read our Bibles in the context of the American story or American western culture. But the Bible applies to all cultures equally; American, Middle East, and China, the Bible always apply to all cultures.

One of the best examples of this is Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians about women in ministry in Corinthians. When you dig into the cultural context of why these instructions were written, you begin to understand this was written for that context and is not a doctrine for all churches of all time everywhere.

This is why the previous principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture is so important. We don't want to take one verse or passage and make a doctrine out of it. Remember, the principle is out of the mouths of two or three witnesses is every word established. We ask the question – What else does the Bible say about that issue?

Recommended Resource: How To Read The Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon Fee



What is your one takeaway from this session?

