

# Understanding Scripture Class

## Session 4: Context

---

### Recap:

*Biblical hermeneutics is the craft of interpreting Scripture.*

1. *Grasping the Text in Their Town*
2. *Measuring the Width of the River to Cross*
3. *Crossing the Principizing Bridge*
4. *Grasping the Text in Their Town*

### We need to look at context:

context |'kän,tekst| noun

1. (Historical-Cultural Context) The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.
2. (Literary Context) The parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning.

### I. Historical-Cultural Context (i.e. “Background”)

God spoke to a particular people in their particular culture. God didn't simply use them to get a message to us, He was actually speaking to them, too!

Our goal: recapture the meaning of the text for the original audience. Only then can we rightly apply it to our lives. \*If our interpretation of the text would not have made sense to the original hearers, we probably haven't gotten it right.

#### A. Examples:

1. The entire book of Revelation.
2. Creation Account - Primarily to argue Creation vs. Evolution
3. **Daniel 7:2-14** *Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. **And four great beasts came up out of the sea**, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And*

*behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.*

*“As I looked,  
thrones were placed,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;  
his clothing was white as snow,  
and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
his throne was fiery flames;  
its wheels were burning fire.  
A stream of fire issued  
and came out from before him;  
a thousand thousands served him,  
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;  
the court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.*

*“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*

*“I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with **the clouds of heaven**  
**there came one like a son of man,**  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.*

## **II. Where do we begin: Doing our Homework.**

- A. The Biblical Writer**
- B. The Biblical Audience**
- C. Other Cultural Historical Elements**
  - 1. Geography/Topography**
  - 2. Social Customs**
  - 3. Economic Issues**

#### 4. Political Issues

##### D. Dangers

###### 1. Inaccurate Information

- a. Jonah & his appearance
- b. Eye of the Needle

###### 2. Elevating Background over Textual Meaning

###### 3. Pride Comes with Knowledge

Resources: Bible Handbooks, Old/New Testament Surveys, Commentaries, Bible Atlases, Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias.

### III. Literary Context

#### A. The word “Dude”

#### B. Categories for Literary Context

1. **Literary Genre** We must understand the Genre we are reading.

##### **Robert Frost: The Road Not Taken**

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood,  
and I— I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

Literary Genre must shape our expectations for what we are reading.

Types: Narrative, Poetry, Prophecy, Gospels, Letters (Epistles) and Apocalyptic.

## 2. *Surrounding Context*

- a. Like a target - highest priority must go to the bullseye and work outward.
  - Passage
  - Immediate Context
  - Rest of Larger Section
  - Rest of Book
  - Old/New Testament
  - Whole Bible
  
- b. Example: 1 Peter 2:18-19 *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.*

**If we're not careful, we can make the Bible say anything we want it to say. We must pay attention to context!**

## IV. Example of Mark 4:35-41

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

Is the meaning: what storms in your life does Jesus want to calm?