

How to Know What the Bible Means by What It Says:

Contextualizing the Passage (Lesson 3)

Introduction:

Context Determines Meaning

“The interpretation that best fits the context is the most valid interpretation.”

The “Authorial Intent Approach” to biblical interpretation attempts to discover the one meaning of the passage that is tied to its historical-cultural and literary contexts.

Charts

I. Understanding the Historical-Cultural Context (Steps 1 & 2)

A. Why Important?

1. God spoke through the human writers of Scripture to address the real-life needs of people living during a particular time, in a particular place, within a particular culture.
2. Principle: A valid interpretation of any biblical passage must be consistent with the historical-cultural context of that passage.

B. SOAPS

1. Speaker/Author (Colossians 1:1, 24-2:1, 4:3-4)

- a. Who was he?
- b. His background
- c. When he wrote
- d. His ministry
- e. His relationship with his audience
- f. Other writings

2. Occasion of writing (Col. 4:7-9)

- The incident (if any) which prompted the author to write.

3. Audience (Col. 1:2-8, 2:1)

- a. Who were they?
- b. What situation and circumstances did they face?
- c. How was their relationship with God?
- d. What kind of relationship did they have with each other?

4. Purpose for writing (Col. 2:2-5; 4:7-8, 16)

- Why is he writing?
 - a. To Inform?
 - b. To Persuade?
 - c. To Remind?
 - d. To Rebuke?
 - e. To Warn?
 - f. To Exhort?
 - g. To Encourage?

5. Subject (Colossians 1:15-23)

C. Other Elements

1. History: What was happening regionally/globally at the time the book was written?
2. Geography
3. Social Customs
4. Religious Issues
5. Economic Issues
6. Political Issues

D. Tools (Bible concordances, handbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, commentaries, etc.)

II. Understanding the Literary Context (Steps 1 & 2)

A. Literary Genre

1. Historical Narrative
2. Law
3. Poetry
4. Wisdom literature
5. Prophecy
6. Gospels
7. Letters
8. Parable
9. Allegory
10. Apocalyptic literature

B. Literary Techniques (cf. *Hermeneutics* by Dr. Harold Anderson, pgs. 17-25)

C. Surrounding Context (chart pg. 152)

“The most accurate interpretation of a passage is the one that best fits that passage’s surrounding context” (157).

1. Immediate Context: What comes immediately before and after the passage.
2. How to Identify the Surrounding Context:
 - a. Divide the book into paragraphs/sections.
Transitional shifts:
 - i. conjunctions (therefore, then, but, so, as a result)
 - ii. change of topic or theme
 - iii. grammatical changes
 - iv. change of genre (from a greeting to a prayer)
 - v. changes in time, location, setting
 - b. Summarize the main point of each section in a dozen words or less
 - c. Explain how the passage under study relates to the surrounding sections and to the overall message of the book

III. Take Into Account the Biblical Context (Steps 1 & 2)

- A. Scripture interprets Scripture = Scripture will agree with itself. (Jn. 10:35)
- B. Clear passages interpret unclear ones.
- C. An unclear passage should not be interpreted so as to contradict a clear one.
- D. Covenant: Law vs Grace (Rom. 8:3-5, 10:1-13; Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:1-7 & 13, 9:11-15, 10:1-18)

- Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Law

IV. PRACTICING CONTEXT: ACTS 2:38

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and let each of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (NASB)

QUESTION: Does this verse teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?

Speaker/Author: Luke, companion of Paul the apostle, writer of the Gospel of Luke

Occasion: Unknown.

Audience: Theophilus

Purpose: Unstated, but as a sequel to *The Gospel of Luke*, probably having the same purpose: to set out in consecutive order an account of “the things accomplished among us” so that Theophilus “might know the exact truth about the things (he had) been taught.” (Lk. 1:1, 4) To inform.

Subject: The history of the spread of the gospel from Christ’s Ascension through Paul’s 3rd missionary journey and Roman imprisonment.

Historical Elements:

What was happening regionally in terms of social and religious customs?

The Feast of Pentecost (Feast of Weeks). 50 days after Passover. One of three feasts when the nation was required to come to Jerusalem. 16 regions represented.

One converting to Judaism must do three things:

1. Be circumcised
2. Offer sacrifice
3. Be baptized as a rite of purification and sign of allegiance to the Law of God.

Literary Context:

Genre: Historical Narrative

Immediate Context:

Peter delivers a sermon. The Messiah has come and gone. You killed Him, but He rose from the dead. God has made Him both Lord and Christ.

vs. 37: The people are pierced to the heart. “Brethren, what shall we do?”

vs. 41: Repentance and forgiveness precede baptism.

Grammar

“for” (greek: eis) = 2 Possible meanings: (1) (in order to achieve, result in) the forgiveness of your sins
(2) (because of) the forgiveness of your sins.

*An identical construction is used in **Matt. 3:11**. “As for me, I **baptize** you in water **for repentance**.” Baptism did not result in repentance. Repentance led to baptism.

Surrounding Context:

Sections:

- I. Witnesses in Jerusalem (chs. 1-7)
- II. Witnesses in Judea and Samaria (ch. 8)
- III. Witnesses to the Uttermost Parts of the Earth (chs. 9-28)

Acts 10:44-48 Holy Spirit fills them **before** they are baptized. (cf. Eph 1:13-14)

Acts 16:29-34 **After** one was saved he was to demonstrate his faith in Christ by being baptized.

Biblical Context

Matt 28:19-20:

- The main verb is **“make disciples,” NOT “make converts” or “be saved”**
- There are **TWO activities required** for making a **disciple**:
 1. **“baptizing them”** (see the discussion below re: metonymy)
 2. **“teaching them to observe (do) all that (Jesus) commanded you.”**
- If baptism is a requirement for salvation, then doing **everything** that Jesus taught His disciples is a requirement as well.
- Ephesians 2:8-9 denies this.

Literary Context: Metonymy (see Anderson, *Hermeneutics*, pg. 18).

- Metonymy: a figure of speech that replaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated.
 - Example: The verdict came down from the bench.
- Since Christians identify themselves publicly with the Lord Jesus by being baptized into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit immediately after they are saved, the phrase “be baptized” in Acts 2:38 is used as a substitute term for faith in Christ leading to salvation.

Cross the Principlizing Bridge

- Baptism is a requirement for discipleship, NOT salvation.
- Baptism is the first act of a **disciple after** being saved.

Consult the Biblical Map

Rom. 10:8-13

1 Cor. 1:11-17