

TLCBiblical.com Video Series

108 Establishing & Understanding Context

1. Introduction

Many doctrinal errors and misinterpretations of the scriptures begin with a failure to recognize, understand and maintain the context of Bible passages. In this video we'll talk about how to establish context and why this is so important.

A critical concept in the study of any subject is that of understanding contextual relationships in the material. When dealing with complex subjects and large volumes of information its imperative that we recognize and respect the way in which facts are presented and develop the ability to objectively interpret them. Contextual relationships are key factors in helping us properly understand something and places limitations on the way in which these can be interpreted. Although this is not a difficult thing to do it is often overlooked and leads to misconceptions, or in the case of the Bible, to doctrinal errors.

2. So what do we mean by context?

We can define context as the conditions or environment that words, phrases, or, in the case of the Bible, entire books occur in. This environment defines what we are reading and therefore identifies limits to our interpretation. There are several elements that make up the context. We can summarize these as:

- a. Time period during which events occur or are recorded
- b. Audience being addressed
- c. Subject under consideration
- d. Law in effect at the time

3. Let's examine each of these elements

a. Time period - The historical setting in each of the books will provide information about the specific dispensation, the cultural state at the time and other relevant facts. Some books are part of a chronological record while others have to be compared to other books to determine when the events recorded took place. In a few cases the time period represented in the book can't be determined so other factors have to be taken into consideration to determine a possible time. Although the absence of specific information may seem confusing the lack of specific time markers is significant.

b. Audience - Some books of the Bible are addressed to individuals or groups while others lack any information denoting a specific address. For doctrinal discussions this will be a decisive factor when determining a proper application of what is being stated.

c. Subject - Simply stated, we need to identify what the writer is talking about. Is this a general narrative of events, are questions being answered, commands delivered and so forth. This is

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possibly the easiest of the elements to understand but will be vital with regard to interpreting the passage.

d. Law - In a later video we will talk about the dispensations recorded in the Bible. A dispensation marks the way in which God interacted with humanity. There are three of these listed in the Bible and each have distinct characteristics. To fully comprehend any passage we have to understand what dispensation or law of God is in force at a particular time. This will have much to do with how things are stated and the ways in which we can interpret and apply what we've learned.

4. The importance of context

Context is an important structural and doctrinal consideration that affects the overall meaning of the Bible. By preserving and respecting the context we also gain an appreciation for how the books in the Bible contribute to the unity of the message. When the context is not recognized misinterpretations arise and lead to conflicts in the scriptures. Alleged errors in the Bible are many times a failure to understand this important aspect of understanding the scriptures. We will see this at work as we continue building the study.

5. Next

In the next video we'll look at the Bible From 30,000 Feet.