

LESSON 4
Principles for Understanding Scripture (3)

Notes

Background Information for the Teacher

Objectives:

1. The student can explain the concept of context as it applies to Scriptures.
2. The student can demonstrate the use of context by describing its application to a particular passage.
3. The student can explain the use of the principle of "who said it and to whom" which we call "speaker/audience."

Preparation:

1. Have copies of Written Review No. 3 to hand out at the beginning of class. (At the end of this lesson.)
2. Have copies of Worksheet No. 4 for student to use during this lesson. (At the end of this lesson.) Work through this worksheet for yourself, filling in the blanks as you prepare, so you will be able to be sure the students get their blanks filled in. You should do this for all the worksheets as you prepare the lessons to follow.
3. Have Bibles and pens as needed.
4. Have a chalkboard or overhead projector on which to display key words, ideas, and Scriptures.

Theme: This lesson will help students understand how to determine the context of a passage and how to use that context in interpreting it. It will also explore the principle of speaker/audience in interpreting Scripture.

Lesson Plan for Conducting the Class

Introduction: (about 10 minutes)

1. Call the roll and make arrangements to contact those who are missing.
2. Make any necessary announcements.
3. Have a prayer and song as desired.
4. Check the answers to Written Review No. 3. 1—c; 2—Narrative/History, Law, Proverbs, Poetry; Prophecy, Epistles, Sermon, Apocalypse; 3—let some members of the class read what they have written about some of these and let the class answer whether what they have written is correct; 4—a is false and b is false.

Learning Experiences: (about 30 minutes)

1. We have now studied two principles about understanding scripture: conditions and genre. Today we study the third and fourth—context and speaker/audience.
2. **Q:** To what does context refer? **A:** Using the material before and after the passage we are studying to help



illuminate its meaning. A series of concentric circles can help us understand this concept.

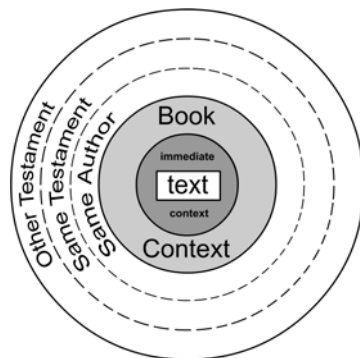


Figure 1 Circles of Context

So if we are studying a particular verse, we look first at that verse within its paragraph. What is the theme of the paragraph and what is its structure? And what do these tell us about the verse we are studying? Then we must look at the paragraph within the chapter of which it is a part. Then we must look at the chapter within the setting of the book and its theme. We even can carry the question about context to the place of the book within its Testament and its Testament within the story of the entire Bible. Thus, the question of context reaches not only to the immediate verses just before and just after the passage we are studying, but even to how that passage fits in the broader setting of Scripture. A statement some have used to express the idea of “study the context” is: “read the verse before and the verse after.” That is very good advice, but the principle extends even beyond the verse before and after.

3. To help us practice using the principle of context, let’s look at some particular passages. (Teacher—use enough of these to make the point but unless you have extra class meetings, use only enough of these to leave time to discuss the second principle for the day—speaker/audience.)
 - a. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 13:1-2. **Q:** In verse 1, about what action does Paul speak? **A:** Speaking in tongues. **Q:** In verse 2, about what actions does Paul speak? **A:** Prophecy and faith. **Q:** Are these actions mentioned in the preceding chapter? **A:** Yes. All three are defined in verses 8-10 as spiritual gifts. **Q:** How does the last part of 12:31 relate to 13:1-2? **A:** Paul is seeking to show the Corinthians that the most important thing for a Christian is not exercising special miraculous gifts,



but, rather, that love is “the most excellent way.” **Q:** How does Paul make his point that love is more important than spiritual gifts? **A:** By showing that exercising the spiritual gifts without love would be of little value but love, by contrast, is useful even without spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, then, must be connected with chapter 12 for us to understand its full meaning. Since chapter 14 as well as chapter 12 is primarily about spiritual gifts, we have to look at chapter 13 as Paul wrote it: a passage about love in the middle of his discussion of spiritual gifts to show that love is the more excellent way. And making such connections is “using the context.”

- b. Turn to Acts 16:31. Read this verse. **Q:** What does Paul tell the jailor to do to be saved? **A:** Believe on the Lord Jesus. **Q:** Should we conclude from this verse that all one must do to be saved is to “believe on the Lord Jesus?” **A:** No. Before coming to that conclusion, we should look at the context—the verses before and after. **Q:** What do the verses before tell us about the jailor? **A:** That he is a pagan who did not believe in Jesus. The earthquake and Paul’s message to him, however, cause him to want to know more about Paul’s religion. So Paul starts by telling him of the need to believe in Jesus. **Q:** What does verse 32 say? **A:** They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to the others in his house. So what we read in verse 31 is not all he told him. **Q:** From what verse 33 says, what, would you reason, was included in this additional teaching? **A:** That he should show a change of heart (evidenced by the washing of their wounds), and that he would be baptized, which he and his household immediately did. To look at only verse 31, then, would be to take that verse out of its context.
- c. Read James 3:1. Is James really discouraging us from being teachers? Let’s look at the context of the passage from verse 1 to verse 12. **Q:** What is the theme of this section? **A:** The careful use of the tongue. **Q:** What connection is there between this theme and James’ statement about not many being teachers? **A:** Teachers use the tongue and, just as with other uses of the tongue, there is a danger we will not use the tongue properly. Seen in this context, then, James wants us to understand that when we teach we take on a high level of responsibility to use our tongues, our language, well. Since we are all commanded to teach (Matthew 28:18-19), James is not telling anyone not to teach.



He is, rather, reminding us to exercise care when we teach because we will be held accountable for what we say. We will also be held accountable for not teaching if we have the opportunity for doing so. Seeing this statement in the context of his discussion of the use of the tongue helps us get the right message from his statement.

- d. 1 John 2:18 says, "This is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming." If one read only that much of the statement, he might conclude that a single great opponent of Christ is coming right before the end of the world. But let's look at the context. Someone read 1 John 2:18-19 and 2:22-23. From these verses, let's answer some questions about "antichrist." **Q:** What is the number of antichrists to be? **A:** Many. **Q:** When will they start coming? **A:** Already started in John's day. **Q:** What is an antichrist? **A:** One who denies that Jesus is the Christ. So, from the context, we learn that there are many antichrists, that they began coming in John's day, and that they were those who denied that Jesus was the Christ. John's use of "the last hour" is a Greek expression to mean "a critical hour." John says, then, the church, at the time he is writing, faces a critical time because there are those arising, even from within the church itself, who are denying the divinity of Christ. Another verse in the same epistle, 1 John 4:3, says that "every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God" and is, therefore, the spirit of the antichrist, which was already in the world. This verse simply confirms from a broader context what we learned from the earlier passages. Using the context has helped us to get the clear meaning of "antichrist" as John uses the term.
- e. Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:17. Someone read this verse. Some have concluded from this verse that Paul discouraged people from being baptized because, he says, Christ did not send me to baptize. In fact, in verse 14 he says he is glad he had only baptized two of them. Should we take this to mean that Paul did not preach baptism and was glad when very few were baptized? Let's look at the context. Someone read 1:13-17. **Q:** What is Paul's point in these verses? **A:** Don't be divided according to the person who baptized you. **Q:** Had all those in the Corinthian church been baptized by someone? **A:** 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." So, yes, all in the Corinthian church had been baptized. In fact, we do not know of any who were members of early



congregations that were not baptized. **Q:** So why does Paul say he was glad he had baptized only two and was not sent to baptize? **A:** Since some were dividing the church according to the person who baptized them, Paul was glad the number he had personally baptized was only two. Not much of a sect could start with only two. And he is further making the point that who baptized a person is not important. The important thing is whether they have heard the right message. So his important job was to preach. He was not sent to be the one who actually immersed people, but the one to do the teaching. Others, who could not teach as effectively as he, could do the actual baptizing. When we understand Paul's words in the context in which they fall, then, we understand he is not devaluing baptism. Rather, he is glad that he had not personally baptized enough to for those he baptized to separate themselves into a sect. He also wants their common baptism experience to be a uniting act rather than a dividing one. If Paul had not taught baptism as a requirement for salvation, he could not then write the Corinthians in 12:13 and refer to the fact that all had been baptized.

5. Now let's turn to another of our ten principles: Who said it and to whom? We represent this idea with the words "speaker/audience."
- a. Look at Malachi 1:1-7. Notice as someone reads this passage slowly how the speaker changes back and forth. If we took one of those verses and were not aware of whether it was the Lord's words or the people's words, we would easily misunderstand it.
 - b. Someone read John 9:31. **Q:** Who says these words? **A:** The blind man who was healed. **Q:** Was he inspired to deliver messages from God? **A:** No. He was just stating a generally accepted truth. What he says may or may not be in harmony with what other verses teach on this topic. This verse cannot be taken as the final word on this subject because of who said it.
 - c. **Q:** Does the Bible ever give a correct, inspired report of what someone says who is not telling the truth? **A:** Yes. **Q:** Can you give an instance of this? **A:** Satan speaking with Jesus at His temptation and at other times he spoke. Statements of Job's friends such as Job 4:7-8 are accurately recorded but are not necessarily in harmony with God's teaching. The Bible's reporting of the statement is inspired, but the statement itself could be what someone is saying which might not be a message from God.



- d. Asking who is speaking will be very important because the speaker could be Satan, or Jesus, or a prophet, or someone just voicing an opinion. And that will have a major effect on how we interpret the meaning of the passage.
- e. It is also important to ask, "Who is being addressed?" In Acts 8:22, for example, an apostle tells of Simon who has sinned that he should repent and pray for forgiveness. **Q:** Is that a good message to give a person who has never come to Christ? **A:** No. **Q:** What do we know of the man being told to repent and pray? **A:** That he has already been baptized, so Peter is telling Christians what to do after they sin and not those who are not yet in Christ. **Q:** When Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan, to whom did He particularly address the message? **A:** To the Jewish leaders who had a strong aversion to Samaritans and who were proud of their own achievements. To note this helps give the parable an even stronger meaning.

Application: (3 minutes)

- 1. So we must ask two more important questions: "What is the context?" And "who said it to whom?" Jesus said, for example, "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave" (Matthew 10:11). Does this mean we cannot stay in hotels when we travel? Let's ask our two questions? **Q:** What is the context? **A:** Jesus is sending out people on a limited mission, just to their own countrymen and in a very small area of the world at a time when taking strangers into your home was very common. **Q:** What do we learn from speaker/audience question? **A:** Jesus is speaking to the twelve as He sends them out locally where they could stay with their own people. This is not a statement intended for all Christians in all places.
- 2. Four principles so far: conditions, genre, context, speaker/audience.

Assignment: (2 minutes)

- 1. Study your notes and be ready for a written review at the next class.
- 2. Study Revelation 3:20 about Jesus knocking at the door in light of context and speaker/audience. We'll discuss this passage next week.



3.

**WRITTEN REVIEW NO. 3
(For use with Lesson 4)**

1. Below is the description given for each of five different genre used in Scripture. In the blank provided, write the name of this genre. These are not in the order studied in the last lesson.
2. Just below the description, write the name of a book of the Bible that would fit into this genre.
3. In the space after each description and the place for its name, describe one principle to use when interpreting this genre.

_____ a. A letter written by an inspired person to an individual or group.
Example of this genre:
Principle to use:

_____ b. A book of the Bible that gives its message in story form.
Example of this genre:
Principle to use:

_____ c. A short, memorable saying that capsules human experience or God's wisdom.
Example:
Principle to use:

_____ d. Teaching or commandments that instruct us in particular behavior.
Example:
Principle to use:

_____ e. A book that is primarily a prediction about the future, sometimes in figurative language.
Example:
Principle to use:

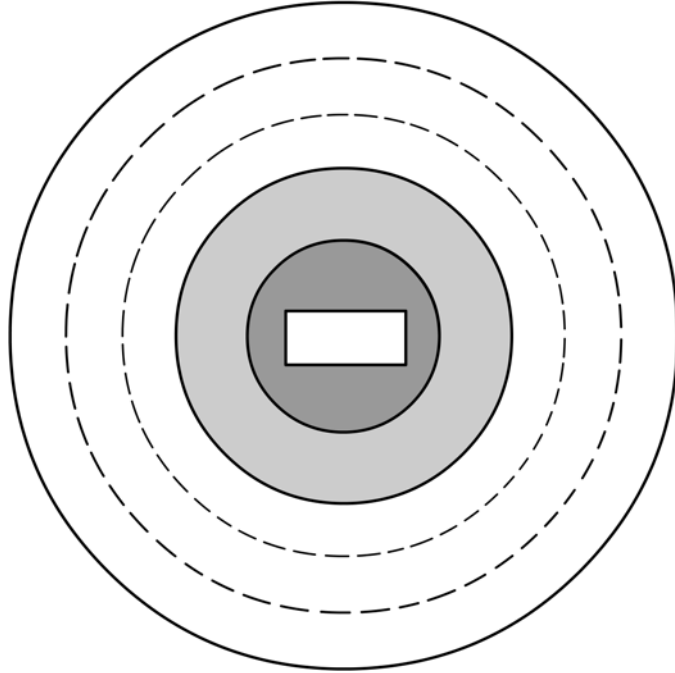
4. Mark each of the following as true or false:

- a. T or F A book in the Bible will be composed of only one genre.
- b. T or F One cannot draw doctrinal conclusions from a narrative.



**UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE
WORKSHEET NO. 4**

1. Write the words inside the circles to represent the concept of "context."



2. To understand 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 2, we need to look back at chapter _____ and ahead to chapter _____. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:31 about "a more excellent way" refers to his description in chapter 13 of _____.
3. In Acts 16:31, Paul tells the jailor to "_____ on the Lord Jesus and you will be _____." The jailor was a _____ who knew little or nothing about Jesus. So this was a good beginning point. Verse 32 tells us that Paul "spoke the _____" to him and those in his house. So he told him more. After this, the jailor was _____.
4. In James 3:1, James says, "Let not many of you be _____." The theme of this section is the careful use of the _____. James means that since teaching involves using the tongue, we need to be aware of the _____ teachers have when we teach.
5. In 1 John 2:18, John says, "This is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming." When we study in the context what John says about antichrist, we understand the following:



- a. There would be _____ antichrists.
 - b. Antichrists will start coming in _____.
 - c. An antichrist is one who _____ that Jesus is the Christ.
 - d. "Last hour" means "a _____ hour."
6. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul says he was not sent to _____, but to preach the _____.
- a. How many of the Corinthians had Paul personally baptized? _____
 - b. Paul was disturbed because the Corinthians were calling themselves after the person who had _____ them.
 - c. From 1 Corinthians 12:13 we learn that all the members of the church in Corinth had been _____.
 - d. From the context we learn that Paul was emphasizing that his role was to _____, which included the message of _____, but that he did not personally do much of the baptizing.
7. The next principle to learn about asks _____ said it to _____. We represent this as _____/_____.
8. In Malachi 1:1-7, the speaker changes back and forth between _____ and the _____.
9. In John 9:31 a person says, "We know God does not hear _____." This person was a blind man Jesus _____. He was stating a generally accepted truth but was not speaking by _____. To learn the teaching of the Bible on this point, we would have to look at other verses. The Bible sometimes quotes a person who is making a statement that is not _____. The report is accurate but we must know who _____ it. An instance of this is when _____ spoke at the temptation of _____.
10. We also need to know to _____ the person was speaking. In Acts 8:22, Peter spoke to Simon and told him to _____ and _____ that his sins could be forgiven. It is important to note that Simon was already a _____. So this is not a teaching for those who are outside of Christ.
11. Matthew 10:11 tells those going with the message of Christ to stay in people's homes. The context shows this is given to a small number of people who are going to preach _____ to home and among their own countrymen.



12. Four principles so far:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

FOR NEXT CLASS PERIOD, BE READY FOR THE WRITTEN REVIEW AND STUDY REVELATION 3:20 BY LOOKING AT THE CONTEXT AND SPEAKER/AUDIENCE.

