

Context Is King

Summer Reading Series

- A) Context is key to understanding the meaning of any literature, including scripture.**
- 1) We often pull scripture out of context, in easy to digest nuggets that impart familiar lessons, rules, advice, etc.
 - 2) This is often done with individual verses, but also with larger stories, which is the focus of this class.
 - 3) Understanding the context of a story or passage can reveal previously hidden meaning
 - a) Not the Dan Brown / Bible Code kind of hidden
 - b) Deeper layers of truth, each informing the other.
 - c) Evidence of divine inspiration
 - 4) Context is too broad an issue to cover in one class or even a short series. We will focus on individual examples to get a taste of the larger idea.

B) Context in the sense of overarching biblical themes

- 1) Example: **Genesis 20:1-18** (condensed below)

From there Abraham journeyed...in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."... ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not be done."... ¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him... ¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. ¹⁸ For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

- (1) People _____ in a foreign land
- (2) _____ by a foreign king
- (3) God demands release using _____
- (4) The wanderers are sent home _____
 - a) The proper context is the theme of _____
 - b) This theme is echoed in every generation (Adam, Cain, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, the Exodus proper, Assyrian and Babylonian invasions).
 - c) Finally, recapitulated in the life of Jesus. Specifically the Exodus narrative.
 - (1) Down into _____ (Matt 2:13)
 - (2) Wicked _____, Slaughter of _____ (Matt 2:16)
 - (3) Picture of _____ to _____ through water (1 Cor 10:2)
 - (4) Led by _____ into wilderness (Mt 4:1, Lk 4:1, Mk 1:12)
 - (5) Tempted to break covenant for _____, (Mk 1:12-13, Lk 4, Mt 4)
 - (6) Presentation of the _____ on the _____ (Mt 5)
 - (7) Feeding the multitude with _____ (Mt 14, Mk 6, Lk 9, Jn 6)
 - (8) 12 gathered round the _____ (John 1:14)
 - (9) Slaughter of the _____ to commemorate _____

- d) Gen. 20 is an example of multiple themes woven together. In addition to Exile, the theme _____ is incorporated into the story.
- (a) Also seen w/ Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Hanna, Samson's mother, Elizabeth, etc.
 - (1) Genesis 18: God promises a son through Sarah; she laughs
 - (2) Genesis 20: God shows he is up to the challenge: _____
 - (3) Genesis 21: Sarah gives birth to Isaac.

B) Context in the more localized sense of parallels

- 1) Example 1: **1 Samuel 24,25,26**
 - a) Chapter 24 and 26 appear to be clumsy editing by a primitive redactor.
 - (1) David catches Saul unaware and vulnerable
 - (2) David's men encourage him to strike now, the Lord has put Saul in your hand
 - (3) David decides against it, and instead snatches an item to prove his proximity
 - (4) David calls out to Saul and his army from safe distance
 - (5) David proclaims his innocence and asks God to judge between them.
 - (6) Saul is contrite, agrees that David is correct.
 - (7) Both men go their separate ways.
 - b) Chapter 25 offers a third parallel, which informs the other two.
 - (1) David feels that Nabal has not given him his due
 - (2) He decides to simply kill Nabal and take what should be his
 - (3) Abigail intervenes, convinces David that God has already ordained he will be king, there is no need to have blood on his hands
 - (4) David sees the wisdom and refrains
 - (5) God does in fact smote Nabal, and David receives all that was his
 - c) Though after the first incident (chap. 24), David now knows he cannot trust Saul (who continues to pursue him), he repeats his actions (chap. 26) in light of what he has learned with Nabal (chap. 25)
 - (1) Key difference: instead of taking _____, he takes _____
- 2) Example 2: **Luke 18-19**
 - a) The story of Jesus and the blind beggar (Luke 18:35-43)
 - (1) Jesus loves the weak, the meek, the less fortunate. And he heals them.
 - b) The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
 - (1) Jesus rewards the scrappy underdog, popularized in song...

Zacchaeus was a wee little man
 A wee little man was he
 He climbed up in a sycamore tree
 For the Lord he wanted to see
 - c) When the artificial chapter break is removed, we find one story in two parts
 - (1) Each side of the parallel stories informs the other.
 - (2) Outline of the entire story (including preceding and following verses) follows...

18:31-34 - Disciples misunderstand, cannot _____

(18: 35-43) _____ Jericho,

- man wants to _____, but unable
- He is _____
- crowd blocks access (_____)
- _____ calls out to him
- Salvation to the _____
- The crowd _____

(19:1-10) _____ Jericho,

- man wants to _____, but unable
- He is _____
- crowd blocks access (_____)
- _____ calls out to him
- Salvation to the _____
- The crowd _____

19:11 Onlookers misunderstand, cannot _____

d) When the two stories are seen independently, we identify with the beggar and with Zacchaeus, two men desperate for Jesus.

(1) As a single story, now understanding the opposing roles of each man, as well as the crowd, we can see ourselves as: oppressed, oppressor, or the fickle crowd.

e) Other meanings made more clear in the combined narrative:

(1) The theme of Seeing

- (a) 18:31 _____
- (b) 18:34 _____
- (c) 18:36 _____
- (d) 18:38 _____
 - a. Note theological progression _____
- (e) 19:3 _____
- (f) 19:5 _____
- (g) 18:41, 19:7 _____
- (h) 19:8 _____

(2) The character of Jesus

- (a) Jesus speaks directly to only two men in the town; both outcasts
 - (i) Healing the oppressed is expected and celebrated – they deserve it
 - (ii) Healing the oppressor is unacceptable - we are to defeat them.
- (b) Supporting the oppressed = opposing the oppressor (Occupy Wall Street)
 - (i) Jesus opposes oppression AND loves the oppressor
 - 1. Healing the oppressor through love frees the entire town (tax reform)
 - 2. Both men receive salvation, The response from both is discipleship

Further Reading:

The Meaning of the Bible, What the Jewish Scriptures Can Teach Us, 2011. Douglas A Knight and Amy Levine

The Art Of Biblical Narrative, 1983. Robert Atler

Through Peasant's Eyes, 1983. Kenneth Bailey