

GRASPING
GOD'S WORD

Historical/Cultural
Context

Context

- Historical/cultural – background
- Personal – our own pre-understanding we bring to the Bible
- Literary – passages surrounding our passage
- Word studies in context

Context

- 2 Timothy 4:6-8 - For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Context

- 2 Timothy 4:9 - Make every effort to come to me soon;
- 2 Timothy 4:21 - Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

Why Context?

- In the Bible, God (the ultimate source) spoke through the human writers of Scripture (the immediate source) to address the real-life needs of people at a particular time in a particular culture. This is how God chose to speak to every person of every age in every culture.

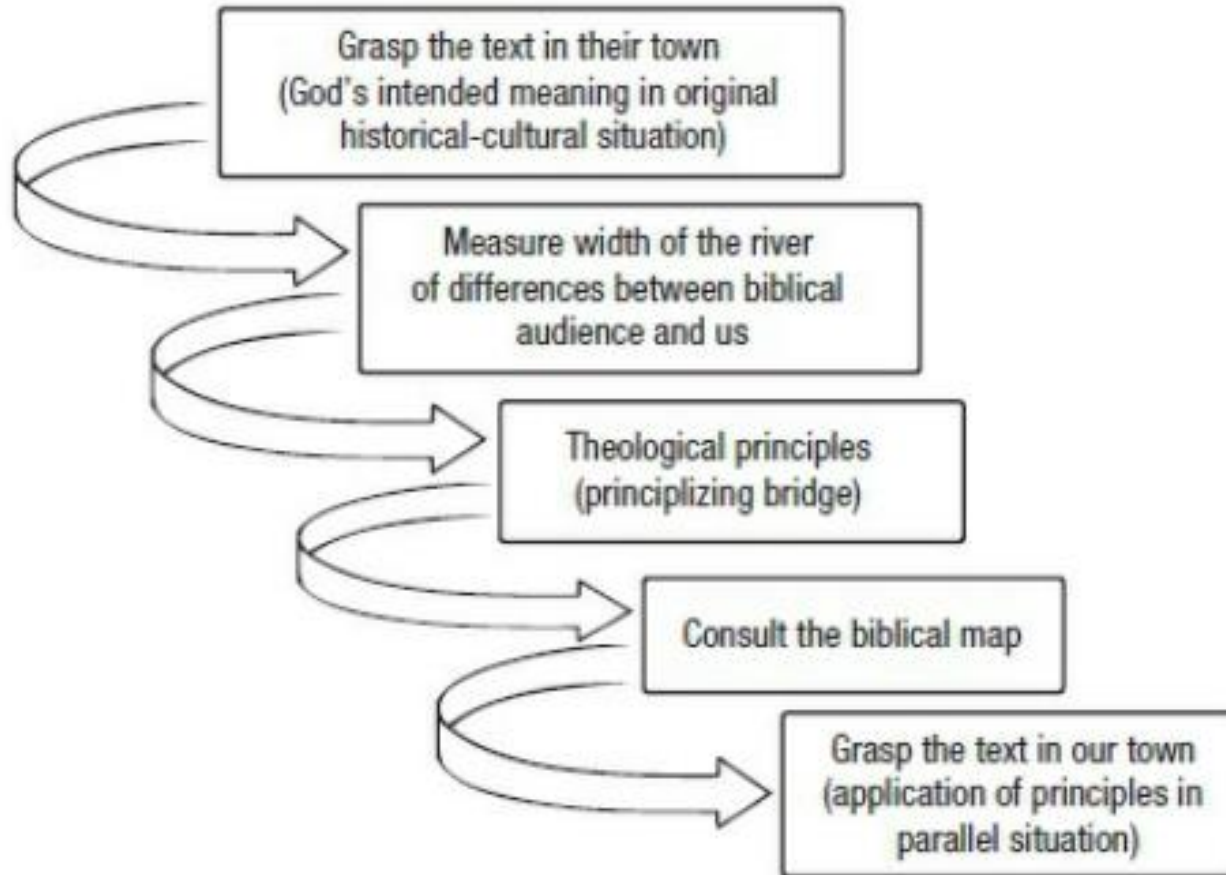
Why Context?

- In the Bible, God (the ultimate source) spoke through the human writers of Scripture (the immediate source) to address the real-life needs of people at a particular time in a particular culture. This is how God chose to speak to every person of every age in every culture.
- The way we approach the Bible (the way we listen to God) should match how God gave us the Bible (the way God chose to speak to us). Otherwise, we will likely misunderstand what God is trying to say to us.

Why Context?

- Since God spoke his message in specific, historical situations (to people living in particular places, speaking particular languages, adopting a particular way of life), we should take the ancient historical-cultural situation seriously.
- We cannot simply ignore “those people living back then” and jump directly to what God wants to say to us today.

Why Context?



Why Context?

- Since we live in a very different context, we must recapture God's original intended meaning as reflected in the Scripture and framed by the ancient historical-cultural context.
- Once we understand the meaning of the text in its original context, we can apply it to our lives in ways that will be just as relevant.
- For our interpretation of any biblical text to be valid, it must be consistent with the historical-cultural context of that text. If our interpretation would not have made sense back then, we are probably on the wrong track.

Historical-Cultural Context

- Generally speaking, this kind of context involves the biblical writer, the biblical audience, and any historical-cultural elements touched on by the passage itself.

The Biblical Writer

- Because God chose to work through human authors as the immediate source of his inspired Word, the more we know about the human author the better.
- 1 Timothy 1:16 - Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those [a]who would believe in Him for eternal life.
- Amos 7:14 - Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

The Biblical Writer

- “When did he write and what kind of ministry did he have?”
- “What is the relationship between the writer and the people he was addressing?”
- “Why are they writing?”

The Biblical Audience

- Think of the differences between the Gospels and the Prophets
- Most, if not all, New Testament letters are situational or occasional, meaning that they were written to address specific situations faced by the churches.
- Colossians, for example, is written to a group of believers battling a false teaching that gave Christ a place, but not the supreme, place that is rightfully his (2:4-5, 8, 16-23). Paul writes to refute this false teaching by emphasizing the absolute supremacy of Christ (1:15-20; 2:9-15).

Other Historical-Cultural Elements

- Sometimes it is difficult to know much about the biblical author and the audience or their specific circumstances.
- Often you will focus more on the historical, social, geographical, religious, political, and economic elements that shape your passage.

Other Historical-Cultural Elements

- Luke 10:30 - Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.
- Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,
- Luke 15:20 - So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Other Historical-Cultural Elements

- Acts 16:36-40 - And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.” The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Dangers of Studying Context

- Watching out for inaccurate background information
- Elevating background information above the clear meaning of the text
- Keeping background information in the proper perspective
- Assuming that we do not need to know any background information to understand the Bible.

Tools that can Help

- Study Bibles
- Background and Surveys
- Commentaries
- Atlases
- Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias
- Software and the Internet