

Week 4: Understanding Context, Genre & Responsible Interpretation

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1. Why Biblical Context Matters

- Context helps answer:
 - Who is speaking?
 - To whom are they speaking?
 - Why is it being said?
 - What situation prompted it?
- Three Layers of Context
 - Historical / Cultural context (customs, laws, daily life)
 - Literary context (verses, chapters, book flow)
 - Theological context (God's nature, covenant, redemption story)
- When context is ignored:
 - False doctrine develops
 - Legalism or looseness increases
 - Confusion about God's character happens
 - Apparent contradictions arise

2. Culture, Audience, and Purpose

- Different audiences require different emphasis:
 - Jews — covenant, law, Messiah
 - Gentiles — grace and inclusion
 - The Church — doctrine, order, holiness
- Culture affects application (ex. greeting with a “holy kiss” reflected cultural expressions of unity).
- Purpose matters – Each book was written with a specific goal. (John 20:30–31)

3. Recognizing Biblical Genres

- Truth is constant — but how truth is communicated varies.
- Major Genres Include:
 - Narrative — records events (not always commands) (ex. Genesis, Acts)
 - Law — covenant instructions (ex. Exodus – Deuteronomy)
 - Poetry/Wisdom — figurative and emotional language (ex. Psalms, Proverbs)
 - Prophecy — symbolic and future-oriented (ex. Isaiah, Revelation)
 - Gospels — life and teachings of Jesus (ex. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
 - Epistles — doctrine and correction for the Church (ex. Romans – Jude)
- Not everything recorded in biblical narrative is automatically intended as doctrine.
 - Narrative passages (especially in Acts) describe what happened in specific situations.
 - The Epistles interpret, explain, and apply these experiences for the Church.

4. Interpreting Scripture Responsibly

- Scripture interprets Scripture (Isaiah 28:10)
- Do not build doctrine on isolated or unclear passages (2 Peter 3:16)
- Read all Scripture through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9)

