

Lesson 7: Language, Text, and Context

KEY ASPECTS: interpreting the words, phrases, and narratives of Scripture within their original contexts helps us more fully understand God’s message for us today.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

“But you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, recalling the people from whom you learned it; and recalling too how from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through trusting in Jesus the Messiah. All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Moses stands before the children of Israel mere days before entering the promise land. He gives an impassioned speech about God’s great acts of deliverance, His protection, and love for them. Moses reminds the people of the tragic results when they rejected their Provider God in the past. He encourages them to internalize their past experiences with God lest they forget Him and go after other gods. He concludes, “so that you can use them in charging your children to be careful to obey all the words of this Torah. For this is not a trivial matter for you; on the contrary, it is your life! Through it you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deuteronomy 32:46-47) Moses wants his people’s children to experience a sustaining relationship with God. He wants them to cultivate a perpetual awareness of God’s presence, love, and the Source of life.

- How does God’s Word “prolong” our days? What might that mean in our context today?

The children of Israel were told to teach their own children the great truths committed to them and to retell the stories about God’s leading in their lives (Deut. 4:9).

- What is it about the teaching and the telling of stories about God’s leading in our lives that tends to increase our own faith?

WORDS AND THEIR MEANING

“Solomon said, “You showed your servant David my father much grace, as he lived before you honestly and righteously, having an upright heart with you. You preserved this great grace for him by giving him a son to sit on his throne, as is the case today. (1 Kings 3:6)

He will send from heaven and save me
when those who would trample me down mock me. (Selah)
God will send his grace and his truth. (Psalm 57:3)

Praise God!
He did not turn away from me—he listened to my prayer.
He continues to show his love to me! (Psalm 66:20)

Show me your faithful love this morning.
I trust in you.
Show me what I should do.
I put my life in your hands! (Psalm 143:8)

“God, please be true to Jacob. Be kind and loyal to Abraham, as you promised our ancestors long ago.” (Micah 7:20)

- How do God’s mercy and kindness extend toward His created beings?

“The Lord said to Moses, 23 “Tell Aaron and his sons that when they bless the Israelites, this is what they should say:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord smile down on you and show you his kindness.

May the Lord answer your prayers and give you peace.

In this way Aaron and his sons will use my name to give a blessing to the Israelites, and I will bless them.” (Numbers 6:24–26)

Job experienced vast tragedies and was so completely robbed of peace that he wished he had never been born. “I was afraid something terrible would happen, and what I feared most has happened. I cannot calm down or relax. I am too upset to rest!” (Job 3:25-26)

God gives strength and peace to His people. (Psalm 29:11)

“This will happen when the special child is born. God will give us a son who will be responsible for leading the people. His name will be “Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

“till the Spirit is poured out on us from above, and the desert becomes a fertile field, with the fertile field regarded as a forest. Then justice will dwell in the desert, and righteousness abide in the fertile field. The effect of righteousness will be peace; the result of righteousness, quiet trust forever. My people will live in a peaceful place, in secure neighborhoods and tranquil dwellings.” (Isaiah 32:16-18)

- In these passages, what is the “peace” or shalom talked about in them?

REPETITION, WORD PATTERNS, AND MEANING

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26 -27)

created (3)	He/His (3)	Our (2)
earth (2)	image (3)	over (5)
God (3)	man (2)	said (2)

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’” (Isaiah 6:1–3)

covered (2)	His (2)	Lord (2)
filling/full	Holy (3)	

- What words are repeated in these passages?
- How are these repeated words enhanced by different concepts that are introduced through repetition?

TEXT AND CONTEXTS

Words in Scripture always occur in a context. They do not stand by themselves. A word has its immediate context within a sentence, and it is this unit that needs to be understood first. Then there is the wider context of the overall unit in which the sentence occurs. This may be a section of writing, a chapter, or a series of chapters. It is essential to understand as well as possible the context of words and sentences in order not to arrive at erroneous conclusions.

Compare:

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7)

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

The Hebrew word for “man” is adam. Each passage uses the term with different connotations attached to it. What insights can we learn from simply examining these different passages and contexts the definition of “man”?

Books and Their Messages

As we seek to understand a book’s meaning and message, it is important to begin with authorship and setting. Many books of the Bible are assigned authors.

God’s covenant with Abram about offspring (Genesis 15:1–5).

God affirms the covenant with Abraham about offspring (Genesis 22:15-18).

Moses wrote Genesis. And is assigned authorship of the first five books of the bible. He is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom he wrote about.

Further Thought:

1. What can you do to make the most of the bible you have?
2. What Bible tools are available to you that can help you better understand the Bible?
3. How will you apply some of the lessons learned this week about the process of interpreting the Bible?
4. How does the understanding of a word and its depth of meaning help us see God's purpose for our lives? (Monday's study)
5. What kind of power do certain words have in the Old Testament (for example: justice, mercy, or hope)?
6. How do these words impact our knowledge of God's character?