

SHEFFEY BIBLE COLLEGE
Course: Hermeneutics 101
Chapter 8 Student Handout
THE LITERARY CONTEXT
Instructor: Dr. Mike Sage

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

WHAT YOU SHOULD LEARN FROM TODAY'S LECTURE

By the end of this lecture you should understand:

- Why context determines meaning in Scripture
 - What literary genre is and why it matters
 - What surrounding context is and how it functions
 - The dangers of ignoring literary context
 - How to properly identify surrounding context
 - How context protects against misinterpretation
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I. INTRODUCTION — CONTEXT DETERMINES MEANING

Without context, words can mean almost anything.

Example from lecture:

“Go for it!” has no clear meaning unless context is provided.

Biblical misinterpretation occurs when verses are taken out of context.

Example:

1 Corinthians 7:36 — “They should get married.”

John 13:27 — “What thou doest, do quickly.”

Without context, these verses can be wrongly combined to form a false conclusion.

Key Principle:

Context determines meaning.

Notes:

II. WHAT IS LITERARY GENRE?

Literary genre refers to the type or form of literature in Scripture.

Examples:

Old Testament:

- Narrative
- Law
- Poetry
- Prophecy
- Wisdom

New Testament:

- Gospel
- History
- Letters
- Apocalyptic

Each genre has its own rules for interpretation.

Just like different games have different rules, different genres must be read differently.

Key Principle:

We must interpret Scripture according to its literary form.

Notes:

III. WHAT IS SURROUNDING CONTEXT?

Surrounding context refers to the text around your passage.

This includes:

- Words
- Sentences
- Paragraphs
- Sections
- Entire book

The most important level is the immediate context.

1 Peter 5:7 “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

1 Peter 5:6–8 “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Key Principle:

The immediate context explains the meaning of a passage.

Notes:

IV. DANGERS OF DISREGARDING LITERARY CONTEXT

1. Ignoring Surrounding Context

Example: Revelation 3:20

Often used as an evangelistic verse, but in context it is written to believers.

Example: Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Context: Church discipline, not group prayer emphasis.

Example: 2 Timothy 2:22 “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Context: Avoiding false teaching and foolish arguments.

Key Principle:

A verse removed from context can lead to error.

2. Topical Preaching Abuse

Topical preaching can distort Scripture when verses are taken out of context.

Key Principle:

We must follow the author's flow of thought.

Notes:

V. HOW TO IDENTIFY THE SURROUNDING CONTEXT

Step 1: Identify sections in the text

Look for:

- Conjunctions
- Topic changes
- Grammar shifts

Step 2: Summarize each section

Ask: What is the main idea?

Step 3: Relate your passage to surrounding sections

Ask:

- What comes before?
- What comes after?
- Why is this included?

Example: Philemon 4–7

This section prepares for Paul's request regarding Onesimus.

Key Principle:

A passage must be understood within the whole message.

Notes:

VI. CONCLUSION — HONORING THE CONTEXT

The most accurate interpretation is the one that best fits the context.

Literary context includes:

- Genre
- Surrounding text

When context is ignored:

- Scripture is distorted

When context is honored:

- God's message is clearly understood

Key Principle:

We must seek God's meaning, not our own.

Notes:

CLOSING SUMMARY

Context is essential for correct biblical interpretation. Literary genre provides the rules for how a passage communicates, and surrounding context shows how each part fits within the whole message. Ignoring context leads to misinterpretation, while honoring context leads to accurate understanding of God's Word. Faithful interpreters seek to understand what God has said, not to impose their own meaning on the text.

THINGS TO KNOW (EXAM ANCHORS)

- Context determines meaning
- Literary context includes genre and surrounding context
- Genre provides rules for interpretation

- Immediate context is most important
 - Ignoring context leads to misinterpretation
 - Many verses are misunderstood when removed from context
 - Topical preaching can distort meaning if context is ignored
 - Three steps to identify context:
 - Identify sections
 - Summarize sections
 - Relate the passage
 - The best interpretation fits the surrounding context
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ASSIGNMENT

Read Chapter 9 in *Grasping God's Word* in preparation for the next lecture.