



# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Context is King!

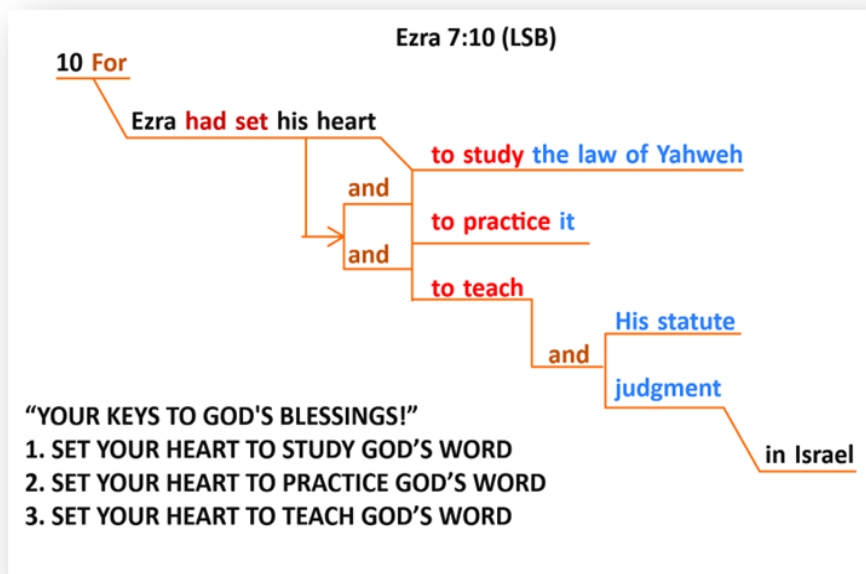
### Lesson #2

One of the skills every Bible student needs to gain is the ability to figure out what part of a text is the main part and what isn't. When you read a verse, you'll need to learn to distinguish between the main thing being talked about and the supporting details. To help you develop this skill, I'll be including a "Berean Breakdown" in every lesson from here on out. Each week, the "Berean Breakdown" will focus on a single text of Scripture related to Bible study, and we'll work together to identify the main point and its sub-points.

*Read the Bible daily. Make it part of your everyday business to read and meditate on some portion of God's Word. Private means of grace are just as needful every day for our souls, as food and clothing are for our bodies. Yesterday's bread will not feed the labourer today, and today's bread will not feed the labourer tomorrow. Do as the Israelites did in the wilderness. Gather your manna fresh every morning. Choose your own seasons and hours. Do not scramble over and hurry your reading. Give your Bible the best, and not the worst, part of your time. But whatever plan you pursue, let it be a rule of your life to visit the throne of grace and the Bible every day.<sup>1</sup>*

#### BEREAN BREAKDOWN

**Ezra 7:10** For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of Yahweh and to practice it, and to teach His statute and judgment in Israel.



<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, *How Readest Thou?*, pgs. 55-56.

## LESSON 2 - CONTEXT IS KING

In the first lesson, we discussed the importance of determining the **literary type** or **genre** of any given passage we are studying. We also talked about the **book's historical context and setting**, i.e., the historical, social, and political times in which the book was written. We learned that discovering the **theme** of a book is also a valuable tool in helping us arrive at the right interpretation. Like each of the lights in fireworks helps create images we enjoy, the individual parts of a book are building blocks that manifest a theme. We also talked about looking at an **outline of the book**. Outlines help you see how the book is structured and how your passage fits into that structure. In this lesson, we will learn the king of all bible study principles – **context (both near and far)**.

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF "CONTEXT"

**What do we mean by "context"?** It is what comes before and after a passage.

**A.** *The far context of a passage shows you:*

1. How your passage fits into the overall theme of the book
2. How your passage fits into a larger section that fits into the theme
3. It may help you understand your passage by showing you what leads up to it or what comes after it

It may give you clues as to how your passage might be interpreted more accurately

#### Examples:

- 1) The theme of **Genesis 12-50** is the sovereignty of God in the making of the nation Israel. God's sovereignty can be seen in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The story of Joseph is found in **chapters 37-50**.
  - If you were studying, let's say **chapter 42**, your far context would be **chapters 37-50**.
  - It's helpful to review the entire section on Joseph before studying a smaller section within the Joseph section.
- 2) If you were studying **Eph. 5:18** your far context would be **chapters 4-6**, which all deal with the believer's walk
  - How do I know that? One of the sources I showed you.
  - You would then be able to see how the Spirit-filled life in **5:18** relates to the far context of the believer's walk found in **chs. 4-6**.

## B. The Near Context

Near context is similar to far context but only those verses in the direct vicinity of the passage you're studying are considered. **Near context is CRITICAL to interpreting ANY passage correctly!** If you were to rate all the Bible study principles from most important to least important, near context would be at the top as the most important hermeneutical (Bible study) principle. **It is the King of all principles.** It is to be given the most weight in interpreting any text.

### Examples:

- 1) You get a knock on the door and when you open it, there are two clean-cut young men dressed in short-sleeved button-on shirts with name plates, smiling at you. The Mormons will try and tell you that Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus in the forest. For a proof text, they would refer you to **Ex. 33:11** which says, ***“Thus Yahweh used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.”***

At first glance, the verse *seems* to clearly say that Moses saw God and spoke to Him. But you are a Berean and examine the context and pay close attention to what is precisely said, and you discover something very different!

- First, you notice the phrase **“just as”**
- Second, you notice that the text doesn’t say anything about “seeing” but the emphasis is on “speaking.” **The text DOESN’T SAY “Moses saw God face to face.”**
- Third, you notice the near context of **verse 20** of the *same chapter* where God says, ***“You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live.”***

So it is clear that **verse 11** is a direct conversation between God and Moses and NOT a visual face-to-face appearance of God.

- 2) We have all heard the songs that talk about or heard someone pray ***“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*** This saying is taken from **Mt. 18:20** and many assume this verse teaches if we gather together in Jesus' name *His special presence is with us*. But when we examine **Mt. 18:20**, we discover something very different.

- Christ will be there in the midst of Christians *to back up their decision* on church discipline.
- His will is that unrepentant professing Christians be removed from His Church.
- Since Jesus is God and present everywhere and since He dwells in Christians, and Christians are in Christ, **He is always in our midst – even if there is just one us!**

### C. Testing your previous commitment to context

Almost everyone who has been a Christian for any length of time has been encouraged, exhorted, or admonished to observe the context when studying the Bible. As we've noted, this is important in Bible interpretation.

Below are a list of **some well-known verses**. See which ones you know the context of.

- a. **Jn. 3:16** *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* Who is speaking to whom? What is being discussed?
- b. **Eph. 2:8-9** *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not of works, so that no one may boast. Who is the author? What has he just said in the previous 7 verses? What does vs. 10 say?*
- c. **Ps. 118:24** *This is the day which Yahweh has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Who is speaking? What is he speaking about?*
- d. **Prov. 23:7** *For as he calculates in his soul, so he is. Who is speaking about what situation?*
- e. **Mt. 22:14** *For many are called, but few are chosen. Who is speaking to whom about what? How does this verse fit with the preceding context?*
- f. **2 Chron. 7:14** *[if] and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their evil ways, then I will listen from heaven, I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. Who is speaking to whom, about what, and when?*
- g. **Ps. 37:4** *Delight yourself in Yahweh; And He will give you the desires of your heart. What is the near context both before and after this text talking about?*
- h. **Mt. 7:1** *Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. Who is speaking? What is He speaking about? Is this a universal command never to judge?*
- i. **Rom. 8:28** *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. What is the preceding context of Rom. 8 talking about? What is the following context of Rom. 8 talking about? What does Rom. 9 talk about?*
- j. **2 Pet. 3:8** *But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.*

## What is the near context both before and after talking about?

### ARE YOU A BEREAN?!

8-10 correct – You are a Master Berean

5-7 correct – You are a Journeyman Berean

2-4 correct – You are an Apprentice Berean

0-1 correct – You are a Novice Berean

## **The Babylon Bee<sup>2</sup>**

### **Context of Philippians 4:13 Officially Banned, April 1st, 2016**

learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help

ATLANTA, GA - According to multiple sources, evangelicals across the nation have quietly confirmed that the context of Philippians 4:13 has been officially abandoned.

"At best, we can say it has something to do with the other things the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 4," born-again Christian Richard McPhee told reporters. "Exactly what those things are, I don't really know; I'm not a scholar. I'm just a man with a Bible, trying to do what it tells me. Don't put this on me."

"Seems pretty clear cut," shrugged local Christian Dan Jeffries. "'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' - that's it." Pressed to define "all things," Jeffries laughed nervously. "Come on, it's obvious. It means, like, what I want to do. The other day it was 225 on the bench, and I nailed it. God is so good!"

"You have to break it down and examine each word," explained Tina Carrera, who leads a weekly Bible study at her home. "'All' means 'any' . . . or . . . 'whatever,' and 'things' refers to 'stuff,' or 'other things' . . . 'things that may be on your heart.' So I think the meaning is pretty clear. I have no further comment."

Reporters found local man Dan Hansborough reading his Bible in a local coffee shop after the announcement, and he was defiant. "Of course I know the context! Philippians 4:13 is my life verse. It's my mantra when I'm struggling to stay on task online, or stay awake in a movie, or even when I have to take the trash out and it's

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<sup>2</sup> Babylon Bee, [Context Of Philippians 4:13 Officially Abandoned](#) A Christian Satirical website that seeks to use humor and satire to make a difference.

really heavy. Wait, what does 'context' mean again?"

#### D. HOMEWORK

The goal of your homework assignment is to apply what you've learned in the first couple of lessons. Answer the questions concerning genre, theme, historical context, setting, and outline. Then make observations of **2 Tim. 2:15** as required below.

##### A. Read **2 Timothy**

- i. What kind/genre of book is it?
- ii. What is the theme of **2 Timothy**?
- iii. What is the historical context/setting?
- iv. What are the major outline points of the book?

##### B. Using only your Bible and no other resources, write down **15 observations** from **2 Tim. 2:15** and its near context. *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

- 1.
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- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.

14.

15.

C. Write down **5 key observations** of what **2 Tim. 2:15** does not say.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

D. Write down **10 key questions** that might be asked of the text, which if answered would help you understand the text better. (I.e. Questions that might relate to Paul's motives, words and their meaning, what we see in the text about God, what we see in the text about our relationship to God, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

E. Write down some of the lessons you learned that will help your future study of the Scriptures.

- F. Read the entry below by Charles Spurgeon and examine and consider how you can apply what he says.

***“Search the Scriptures” (John 5:39).*** The Greek word here rendered search signifies a strict, close, diligent, curious search, such as men make when they are seeking gold, or hunters when they are in earnest after game. We must not rest content with having given a superficial reading to a chapter or two, but with the candle of the Spirit we must deliberately seek out the hidden meaning of the word. Holy Scripture requires searching— much of it can only be learned by careful study. There is milk for babes, but also meat for strong men. The rabbis wisely say that a mountain of matter hangs upon every word, yea, upon every title of Scripture. Tertullian exclaims, “I adore the fulness of the Scriptures.” No man who merely skims the book of God can profit thereby; we must dig and mine until we obtain the hid treasure. The door of the word only opens to the key of diligence. The Scriptures claim searching. They are the writings of God, bearing the divine stamp and imprimatur— who shall dare to treat them with levity? He who despises them despises the God who wrote them. God forbid that any of us should leave our Bibles to become swift witnesses against us in the great day of account. The word of God will repay searching. God does not bid us sift a mountain of chaff with here and there a grain of wheat in it, but the Bible is winnowed corn— we have but to open the granary door and find it. Scripture grows upon the student. It is full of surprises. Under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to the searching eye it glows with splendour of revelation, like a vast temple paved with wrought gold, and roofed with rubies, emeralds, and all manner of gems. No merchandise like the merchandise of Scripture truth. Lastly, the Scriptures reveal Jesus: “They are they which testify of me.” No more powerful motive can be urged upon Bible readers than this: he who finds Jesus finds life, heaven, all things. Happy is he who, searching his Bible, discovers his Saviour.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Evening, June 9<sup>th</sup>.