

How to Study the Bible

Unit 2: Setting – Lesson 3: Lab in Determining the Setting

Course Goal: To equip the believer to “Rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

At the conclusion of this lesson, the believer should be able to:

- Recall the different types of settings (or “contexts”) that may affect an exegesis
- Select appropriate on-line and written tools to help with Bible interpretation

A Brief Review:

1. What is setting or context?

If one goal of hermeneutics is to exegete the original writer’s intended meaning, then it would be helpful to apply the principle of “context”: the original setting of the human author and audience.

- a. Scriptural: Does the passage refer to the Old Testament, New Testament, or Inter-Testamental Period?
- b. Geographical: Where on the globe is the writer and audience?
- c. Historical: When is this being written? What else is happening in history at that time?
- d. Cultural: What influences are working on the writer and audience?
 - (1) Political: Which government and economic system is in operation?
 - (2) Religious: Is the audience atheistic, polytheistic, Christian, Hebrew? What sects exist?
 - (3) Philosophical: Do they embrace an Eastern or Western philosophy?

2. “The meaning of a text *cannot* be interpreted with any degree of certainty without a historical-cultural [i.e., setting] analysis.”¹

Class Exercise

1. Read John 6:22-71. What does Jesus mean when He states in vs. 53, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”?

Remember that this is a lab on using the setting (contexts) to help us determine what the original writer intended for the original audience. What would First Century Jews have understood Jesus to be saying? Obviously, some had trouble with this. [And please do not use commentaries... we are attempting to develop here today our own “Belleville First Assembly of God Commentary”]

a. Did Jesus mean that His followers had to physically eat His physical flesh and blood? Roman Catholics believe this exegesis through their doctrine of “transubstantiation”. But if Jesus truly meant this, then how could He be present at the Last Supper at the same time He claimed the bread and wine to be His body and blood? Was Jesus present there twice? Probably not. If God forbade the eating of blood (Leviticus 9:4), then God in the flesh certainly would not prescribe it, which is why some First Century Jewish followers left in Jesus in vs. 66.

b. First Century Jews would have understood that the “eating of flesh” brings nourishment (Genesis 9:2-3). Could Jesus have meant that He brings “spiritual nourishment” to His followers? He did claim to be the “Bread of Life” (35).

¹ Virkler, H. and Ayayo, K., *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 1981), 81 [emphasis added].

c. First Century Jews would have understood the sin offering as something that needed to be eaten (Leviticus 6:24-29), and that the Passover Lamb was also eaten (Exodus 12:8). Could Jesus have meant that He is the ultimate sin offering, or the ultimate Passover Lamb... which must also be consumed (i.e., internalized)?

d. First Century Jews would have understood sacrificial blood as bringing atonement for their sin (Exodus 12:1-30; Leviticus 17:11).² Could Jesus have meant that His blood was to be the ultimate atonement for sin... which needed to be internalized by the believer (Hebrews 9:11-22)?

e. The Gospel writer, John, opens his work by claiming that Jesus is the Word of God, and that the Word became flesh (John 1:1-5, 14). Could Jesus have been saying that to "eat His flesh" really meant to internalize God's word (John 6:63)?

f. The Gospel writer, John, later records Jesus as claiming to be the vine and His followers are the branches of that vine (John 15:1-6). Could Jesus have meant that as a branch has one sap the vine, so must a believer receive his/her life force flowing from Him?

All of these interpretations (except for "a") are well-grounded on the context of the First Century Jewish audience.

Homework:

² Lockyer, H., Editor, *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 933.