

The Language of the Word: Context

As we study the Bible, we will repeatedly find problems in understanding the intent of various texts when they are taken in isolation. In this segment, our task is to discover the best way to develop a correct interpretation of any text. It should be noted that there is not necessarily one correct understanding of any given text. There may be several, since, just as a diamond reveals different facets when turned, the Bible reveals different details to different people under different circumstances. Our task is to determine how to be certain that the revelations are in fact from God.

1. Read Luke 14:26. Without referring to any other text, give two possible meanings for this statement of Jesus.

2. Read Luke 14:27. Without referring to any other text, give two possible meanings for this statement of Jesus.

3. NOW, read on through verse 33. How should we understand the statement in verse 26? Does Jesus call on us to hate anyone? (See Matt 5:43-44, Matt 19:19, Matt 22:39, Mark 12:31-33, Luke 10:27)

4. In the light of Matt 11:30, Lev 26:13, Deut 28:48, 1 Kings 12:4-14, Is 9:1-4, Is 10:27, etc. how should we understand the expression “carry his own cross”?

5. Read Matt 21:43 ONLY. How should we understand the word “nation” in this verse? Is it possible to determine the true meaning of the term from this verse alone?

6. Read 1 Peter 2:1-9 (see also Ex 19:5-6, Is 26:1-2). What is the true meaning of “nation” in Matt 21:43?

We can readily see that taken in isolation, various texts can be used to support ideas contrary to their actual intent. Safeguards must be used to avoid arriving at false conclusions. We should now investigate methods to allow us to understand the actual intent of biblical writers.

7. What statement may we make about the unity of scripture on any topic? (Is 8:20, 2 Tim 3:16, Titus 1:2, Mal 3:6, Heb 1:1-2)

8. Who is the proper interpreter of scripture? (2 Peter 1:19-21, John 14:26)

9. Does “prophetic” in 2 Peter mean only telling the future? What tasks do prophets perform? (3) Give examples.

10. How are we to know that we are following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our study? (1 Tim 4:1, 1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11, Is 8:20, 1 Thess 4:1-8, Heb 3:1-8, John 16:13-14)

11. Is human reason to be used to interpret the Bible, or to allow the Bible to interpret itself? (1 Cor 2:1-10, 2 Peter 1:19-21)

12. Discussion: The bible was written in times very different from today. How are we to deal with statements which are directed at specific social circumstances of the day (e.g. Sabbath day's journey [Acts 1:12], turning the other cheek [Matt 5:39], plucking out your eye [Matt 18:9], etc.)?

Def: exegesis: the process of extracting the meaning of a scriptural passage

Def: eisegesis: the process of finding scriptural support for a preconceived idea

Def: proof text method: the technique of using a single isolated scriptural statement to "prove" a theological point

13. Using the terms above, describe the proper method of Bible study.

"A text without its context is a pretext."