**Interpret the Text: Literary Context**

**Week 5**

**3/8 and 3/18**

Lesson Plan

**1) Review**

In Class Personal Work

Read through the book of Jude on your own once or twice.

**1**From Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, wrapped in the love of God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. **2**May mercy, peace, and love be lavished on you!

**3**Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. **4**For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

**5**Now I desire to remind you (even though you have been fully informed of these facts once for all) that Jesus, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, later destroyed those who did not believe. **6**You also know that the angels who did not keep within their proper domain but abandoned their own place of residence, he has kept in eternal chains in utter darkness, locked up for the judgment of the great Day. **7**So also Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring towns, since they indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire in a way similar to these angels, are now displayed as an example by suffering the punishment of eternal fire.

**8**Yet these men, as a result of their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and insult the glorious ones. **9**But even when Michael the archangel was arguing with the devil and debating with him concerning Moses’ body, he did not dare to bring a slanderous judgment, but said, “May the Lord rebuke you!” **10**But these men do not understand the things they slander, and they are being destroyed by the very things that, like irrational animals, they instinctively comprehend. **11**Woe to them! For they have traveled down Cain’s path, and because of greed have abandoned themselves to Balaam’s error; hence, they will certainly perish in Korah’s rebellion. **12**These men are dangerous reefs at your love feasts, feasting without reverence, feeding only themselves. They are waterless clouds, carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit—twice dead, uprooted; **13**wild sea waves, spewing out the foam of their shame; wayward stars for whom the utter depths of eternal darkness have been reserved.

**14**Now Enoch, the seventh in descent beginning with Adam, even prophesied of them, saying, “Look! The Lord is coming with thousands and thousands of his holy ones, **15**to execute judgment on all, and to convict every person of all their thoroughly ungodly deeds that they have committed, and of all the harsh words that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” **16**These people are grumblers and fault-finders who go wherever their desires lead them, and they give bombastic speeches, enchanting folks for their own gain.

**17**But you, dear friends—recall the predictions foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. **18**For they said to you, “At the end of time there will come scoffers, propelled by their own ungodly desires.” **19**These people are divisive, worldly, devoid of the Spirit. **20**But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit, **21**maintain yourselves in the love of God, while anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings eternal life. **22**And have mercy on those who waver; **23**save others by snatching them out of the fire; have mercy on others, coupled with a fear of God, hating even the clothes stained by the flesh.

**24**Now to the one who is able to keep you from falling, and to cause you to stand, rejoicing, without blemish before his glorious presence, **25**to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time, and now, and for all eternity. Amen.

1) What does Jude indicate is the purpose of his letter?

*To appeal to readers to contend for the faith (vs. 3)*

2) What would you identify as the major sections that make up the book of Jude? (List between 4-9)

*1. Intro & Greetings(1-2);*

*2. Original Purpose for writing and New Purpose (3-4);*

*3. Comparisons with the Judgement of Past Rebellions (5-13)*

*4. The Fulfillment of Prophecy (14-16)*

*5. Jude’s Exhortations (17-23)*

*6. Closing Benediction (24-25)*

**3) Small Group Exercise**

1. Discuss your answers to the previous two questions.
2. Try to outline the book together.

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1. How does an understanding of Jude’s purpose and plan help us to understand the imperative in verse 21, “Keep yourselves in God’s love…”?

*He is telling his readers to reject false teaching and rebellion against God. He is not suggesting that we have to constantly be worrying about making sure we’re morally good enough to earn God’s love. In fact, he even tells us to have compassion on those who waver. But with respect to false teaching we are to have a strict and unwavering response.*

**4) Lesson**

Danger of Disregarding Literary Context

Three examples:

Revelation 3:20 “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock…” *Is this a passage to invite unbelievers to faith in Christ?*

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you…” *Is this a universal promise of blessing or an open-ended guarantee of eventual financial prosperity?*

2 Corinthians 10:5 “…we take every thought captive…” *Is this a verse about sexual temptation?*

When we remove a verse from its literary context, we do an injustice to both the Divine and human authors of the text. Further, by assigning a meaning or application to a verse that does not take into account its literary context we rob ourselves of enjoying the meaning and application of that verse which God intended us to receive. This is true even when we take an application from Scripture that is true but is taken from a passage that doesn’t support our interpretation (See 2 Cor. 10:5- it is *good* that we flee tempting sexual thoughts and surrender them to Christ, but that is not what Paul is encouraging us to do in this passage.” Often, we take the *right* application from the *wrong* text. This prevents us from obeying the passage’s real teaching (in the case of 2 Cor. 10:5 from the immediate context and purpose of the book we learn that we must staunchly refute false teaching).

Levels of Literary Context[[1]](#footnote-1)

Whole Bible

Testament (Old or New)

Bible Book

Section/Chapter

Paragraph

Sentence

Three Important Questions to Ask Regarding Literary Context

1. What is the *Purpose* of the Book? We have to know the purpose of the book in order to understand the parts. Authors have various reasons for writing. Sometimes they make that reason clear; sometimes we as interpreters have to infer the reason from the contents.

Example: 2 John 10 says, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching to you, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.” This command sounds incredibly inhospitable and contrary to the teachings and example of Christ who welcomed everyone, Pharisees, tax-collectors, and prostitutes alike. In this case, understanding the *purpose* of 2 John helps us grasp the meaning of verse 10. The PURPOSE of 2 John is to warn the church about false teachers who are traveling from church to church denying that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. This is serious. And this heresy in John’s day was destroying whole churches. Now we can understand his call not to welcome these teachers into their homes.

1. What is the *Plan* of the Book? If we know how the book is structured, we can understand how the parts fit together. Authors structure their work in ways that help accomplish their purpose for writing.

Example: the PLAN of Isaiah is as follows: First comes a collection of messages given during the time of the divided kingdom (chs. 1-35); then comes messages given for the period of the Babylonian captivity (40-66). This puts into perspective the four historical chapters (36-39) which start with the Assyrian invasion and transition through Hezekiah to introduce a visit from the Babylonians. What might seem as a strange insertion of historical narrative is seen as a brilliant literary device to move from one era to another.

1. What is the *Immediate Context* of the Book? (also called “surrounding context”) We must follow the logic of the author. The immediate context is what comes just before and just after a passage.

Example: We know that “all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28) does not necessarily mean comfort and a trouble-free life because it is preceded by references to our weaknesses and groanings, nor is it an open-ended promise, as the context goes on to apply the promise to “those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.”

How do we find the Purpose, Plan and Context?

* Sometimes the author gives us his purpose; see John 20:30-31.
* Through inductive study, we can often discover the author’s plan, or outline. This requires us to read whole books (or large chunks of books) in one sitting, making note of major transitions.
* For both of these, a Study Bible, commentary, or some other secondary source can also be helpful. Many commentaries and online resources have helpful outlines of books of the Bible.
* Immediate context is easier to do on our own – just look at what comes before and after a passage – but sometimes we need help in deciding where a section begins and ends.

How to Identify the Surrounding Context

1. Identify how the book is divided into sections or paragraphs.

Often this means outlining the book. This works best with “letters,” but we can still identify “sections” of a narrative, poem, or prophecy.

1. Summarize the main idea of each section or paragraph in a few words.

Don’t dwell on details here; look for the main idea.

1. Explain how your particular passage relates to the surrounding sections or paragraphs.

When we combine the sections, we get an overall view of what the writer is saying.

**5) Recommended Reading and Next Steps**

Review:

* Literary Context Exercise from Matthew 11:27-30
* Watch: Bible Project Video “How to Read the Bible: Plot” <https://bibleproject.com/videos/plot-biblical-narrative/>

For Next Week:

* Read: Living by the Book chapters 17 and 32
* Listen: “What is Biblical Theology?” *Ask Pastor John Podcast Episode 644.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxE9MVoUz8c>
* Watch Tim Mackie “Design Features of the Bible” https://youtu.be/Vy2w8sqjvhY

**Literary Context Exercise from Matthew 11:27-30**

1) Read through the entire Gospel of Matthew in one sitting.

* If you don’t have time to read it all in one sitting, break it into two chunks.
* Try to read through the book like this at least 2 times.
	+ As you read make notes on a separate sheet of paper trying to determine the major divisions of the book.
	+ Write down shifts in subject matter, transitions from teaching sections to narrative sections and shifts in tone and mood. Note when major characters are introduced, as well as words, ideas, and phrases that are repeated throughout the book.

2) From your reading and notes, sketch out a basic outline of Matthew.

* Feel free to check your outline against some you find online or in a commentary/study bible. And use online resources (the Bible Project and thebible.org) as aides. **(See sample from Carson Provided but don’t go nearly as in-depth).**
* But try to own your outline as your work before consulting these resources

3) How would you summarize the purpose of Matthew’s Gospel? What evidence from Matthew would you give to support your answer?

4) How might understanding the flow of thought in Matthew’s Gospel and his purpose help you understand Matthew 11:27-30?

5) What insights into Matthew 11:27-30 can be gained from reading its immediate context? (11:20-12:8)

1. Chart adapted from *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God’s Word,* By Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach [↑](#footnote-ref-1)