



every
member
able to
admonish

"I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."
- Romans 15:14

review: contextual analysis

Context is King! This level of study is the most important of all. Contextual analysis is the study of a passage within the framework of the other passages surrounding it. There are two levels of contextual analysis we will consider.

the book level

The first is the context and purpose of the book that is being studied. There are three questions we should consider in this analysis. A good study Bible or Bible Handbook will help answer these questions.

1. Who was the writer? What was his spiritual background and experience?
2. To whom was he writing?
3. What was the writer's purpose (intention) in writing this particular book?

the passage level

The second level of contextual analysis we will look at is the immediate context of the passage in question.

1. What are the major blocks of material and how do they fit together into a whole?
2. How does the passage under consideration contribute to the flow of the writer's argument?
3. Is the passage stating descriptive or prescriptive truth?
4. What constitutes the teaching focus of the passage and what is incidental detail?
5. Who is being addressed in the passage?

word studies (lexical/syntactical analysis)

The words and grammatical structure of the Bible are the platform from which God has chosen to convey His message to the world. While it is a spiritual message, it is conveyed through language, which has rules and structure. Remember, when Jesus spoke about the authenticity of Scripture He said, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18). In this statement, Jesus clearly implies that God's message inhabited the fullness of the original language. It would be good to begin by defining and distinguishing lexical and syntactical analysis:

Lexical Analysis – investigates the meaning of individual words, their etymology, and their usage. In the English language, we typically use a dictionary to do this work.

Syntactical Analysis – investigates the arrangement of and relationship between individual words, also known as grammar.

The subject of lexical / syntactical analysis is very broad and some scholars spend their lives in pursuit of knowledge in just one small area of this study. Because syntactical analysis is so involved, we will not discuss it in this class. Obviously, we will not go into great depth with this section of the lesson. It is my purpose to instruct you in the use of tools that will allow you to do a slightly above beginner level analysis of the original text.

biblical languages

There are a total of three languages that comprised the original texts of Scripture. The Old Testament was written almost entirely in Hebrew, the national language of Israel, with a very small portion written in Aramaic. Aramaic was an international trade language that was in use around the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires and

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became the common language of the Jews after their return from exile. Logically, Ezra and Daniel, two books written during and after the exile of the Jews, have small portions written in Aramaic.

Both Hebrew and Aramaic are Semitic languages and are therefore VERY different from English. Semitic languages are a completely different branch of the language tree. Typically, they write from right to left and use letter characters that are completely foreign to us. Additionally, there are very few Hebrew words you would recognize or be able to figure out if you heard them. The Hebrew language is not a predecessor to English.

The New Testament is written entirely in Koine Greek, with the exception of a few quotations of Christ. Koine Greek was the language of the common people throughout the Roman Empire. It is important to note that Jesus and the other Apostles spoke Aramaic. However, the Lord used the Greek language for His New Testament because it would allow it to be understood all over the civilized world. God obviously wanted this message to be spread. Greek is much more similar to English than Hebrew. While there are different letter symbols, they are not too far away from our English alphabet. Their vocalizations are also similar to ours. The English language is a large melting pot from other languages and it has a significant amount of Greek influence, so the Greek language is a bit more intuitive to us.

lexical analysis

Before we can dive into doing a word study, we need to grasp a few important concepts. The first is identifying the word that you want to look up. As I mentioned, there are varying levels of word study and we are going to stick to an advanced beginner approach. One of those scholars who spent his life working on Lexical / Syntactical analysis was James Strong. We have the result of his life's work in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. This tool is indispensable for most basic lexical analysis. This work catalogues every word in the King James Bible and points you to the lexical Greek or Hebrew word that it represents.

The lexical word that Strong's reveals is the unconjugated root word (lexical form) of the actual word used in the Hebrew Old Testament or Greek New Testament. See the example below:

Ex: The lexical form of "running" is "run". The lexical form of "women" is "woman"

Once you have identified the root word, you can begin to do a lexical analysis. The basic beginner method is to simply look up the word in the back of the Strong's Concordance and find its suggested meaning. What you will typically find is that there are a variety of shades of meaning. The definitions provided by Strong's are fairly good, but they do not provide much depth or explain which shade of meaning is appropriate for the text in question. How do we go about finding that out? We have to dig a little deeper. Let's consider four levels of study: Target text, Usus Loquendi, the New Testament, and the Septuagint. Each successive level is farther removed from the actual text, but can still provide useful insight.

T.T. – Target Text (the text you are studying)

Usus Loquendi – How does the writer of the target text use the passage throughout his other Scriptural writings?

The New Testament – How is the word used in other parts of the New Testament?

The Old Testament LXX & Hebrew text – How is the word used in the Septuagint (the Greek transl. of the O.T.)?

Typically, only the top three levels of analysis are all that is needed to get a solid foundation for your understanding of a word.

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some resources for basic lexical analysis

The resources mentioned below are useful in performing a lexical analysis of a text.

General References

- Strong's Concordance – This book lists every word in the Bible and identifies the lexical form of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word used in the original text.
- Strong's Dictionary – This is usually included in the back of the Strong's Concordance. It can also be purchased separately. By looking up the number found in the concordance, you can find a simplified definition of the root word from the original language.
- Figures of Speech Used in the Bible – A useful book written by E.W. Bullinger, that explains the figures of speech used in the Bible. A figure of speech is language used in a non-literal way (it's raining cats and dogs; she's as thin as a wire). There is an index in the back that allows you to look up particular passages in the Bible to determine if a figure of speech was used.

Old Testament References

- The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon – This is a very good Hebrew lexicon that provides much more in-depth definitions of Hebrew words than Strong's. There is an index in the back for Strong's numbers that allows you to find the page where a particular word is defined.
- The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament – A tool that allows you to look up a Hebrew word and find out where it is used in the Old Testament. It is organized by the Strong's number of the Greek words and is therefore to be used with Strong's Concordance.

New Testament References

- Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament – A lexicon written that provides more in-depth definitions of the Greek words of the New Testament. It includes the Strong's number for each Greek word so it is easy to use in conjunction with Strong's if you want a more thorough definition¹.
- The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament – A tool that allows you to look up a Greek word and find out where it is used in the New Testament. It is organized by the Strong's number of the Greek words and is therefore to be used with Strong's Concordance.
- Robertson's Word Pictures – This is a fantastic reference that gives you the results of A.T. Robertson's thorough review of many important words in the New Testament. It is organized by book, chapter, and verse, so you can use it as you read through Scripture. It is rather expensive to buy as a book set (\$90 on Christianbook.com), but it is much cheaper as part of a software package (the entire Swordsearcher deluxe program is \$40 at swordsearcher.com).

questions

question 1:

It is your first Sunday at the pastorate of a new church. After service, one lady comes and shakes your hand and says, "I think you need to know that we don't tithe. Tithing is not commanded in the New Testament and I just try to give a little when I can." How will you respond to this woman?

(1 Cor. 16:1-2, 2 Cor 9:6-11)

¹ One draw-back of Thayer's is that it pre-dates the Dead Sea scrolls, so it does not include the most up-to-date lexical information. For more advanced study, I would suggest A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature by Walter Bauer, revised by Gingrich & Danker. However, this lexicon is not keyed to Strong's, so a knowledge of at least the Greek alphabet is required.

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question 2:

Nancy and Nellie are church members and good friends, but are as different as black and white. Sometimes, despite their friendship, they get caught up in disagreements and come to you to try and settle the score. Today's argument is about debt. Nancy says, "I believe it is a sin to borrow money and Nellie disagrees. Doesn't the Bible say, 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be?'. She goes on to say that money which is the root of ALL evil (1 Timothy 6:10)" Nellie retorts, "I don't agree. God is in control of everything and if He didn't want me to borrow, then He would provide me the money I need. The same is true when I borrow money; if He wants me to repay it He will give me the money I need to do so. I have just learned to trust God on these money issues. It doesn't matter what the banks and creditors think of me, only what God thinks." What will you say? Who is right? (Nancy's verse is from Shakespeare; Psalm 37:21, Eccl. 5:4-5, Matt. 5:33-37)

question 3:

Abigail calls you on the phone one night after work and breaks down. She complains that her life is a wreck and the problem as she sees it is her job; she does not enjoy what she is doing, and has a difficult boss and rude co-workers. This is her fourth job in two years and it doesn't look like she will be at this one much longer. "Whatever happened to my right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" she says. Abigail continues, "It can't be God's will for me to stay at a job I don't enjoy, working for people that don't like me!" She says that she feels like a slave in this job and, "didn't God deliver the Israelites from 400 years of slavery to live in freedom?" As a single mom with three kids depending on her, Abigail doesn't have the luxury of other sources of income. What counsel can you give her from the Word of God? ("life, liberty..." not in Bible; Gen. 3:17-19, 16:7-9)

question 4:

Steve is a seasonal worker. In the summer, he has a very successful landscaping business. In the winter... well, that's a different story. Once he gets past September, he is usually in pretty bad shape financially. Typically, his pattern is feast or famine. You've tried to talk to him about this several times, but he is adamant, based on Matthew 6:25-34, that the Bible teaches us to "take no thought" for material things beyond today. He says, "to think about whether I will have money next month, or even tomorrow is a sin; doesn't Matthew 6:34 say, 'take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.'" While it is important to bring up other relevant Scriptures, you need to help him understand what this passage really means. (take no thought = no inordinate focus; Prov. 6:6-11, Luke 14:28-30)

question 5:

"My faith must be weak," Wendy sighs. For the past eight months she has prayed daily for a steady job. Although she makes decent money, her current job has unreliable hours. She dreams of saving up her money and buying a timeshare someplace warm during the cold Alaskan winters. Right now, she isn't falling behind on her bills, but she isn't getting ahead. Any extra penny she gets goes into her special savings account for her dream home. Wendy is frustrated by her apparent lack of faith because Matthew 21:21-22 teaches that whatever we shall ask in prayer, believing, we will receive. Wendy is pretty faithful in church attendance, but you've noticed she gets upset at church whenever there is a sermon or lesson on giving. What do you say to Wendy? (John 16:24, James 4:1-3)