

“FINDING THE CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE”

Isa 41:5-7

Howard Hendricks: Listening to Roger Stanbach being interviewed by Sports Illustrated. When he read the article, the reporter pulled statements out of context and totally misrepresented what Stanbach had said. Was not anything like the conversation that actually took place. Very important understanding – context. Key to interpretation/revelation.

I. CONTEXT IS KING

A. The Bible is written in sections of ideas or themes: **Connected thoughts**

1. When you disconnect a phrase or scripture from its section – it leads to misunderstanding!

a. **Rom 11:29** For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

1. I've heard this used as justification why a pastor can never be disqualified from ministry

a. But Romans chapter 11 is a section speaking only about National Israel!

b. **Mat 18:20** For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

1. This is used by people as justification why they don't need to go to church

a. But the context is church discipline: When you deal with sin in church – God confirms

2. Today's lesson came out of a question asked about **Isa 41:7**

a. Who is the 'he' referring to? God? b. Why is God hammering/soldering/fastening? c. What are we to do?

B. #1 rule of Bible interpretation is context: **With the text**

1. It is the understanding that any word, phrase or verse is set within some connected thoughts

a. The setting or the place of the passage in the Bible: *That which comes before and that which comes after*

1. The parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning.

2. The main question is: *What was the author talking about – what is the overall point being made?*

a. “Context is king” means that the context often drives the meaning of a phrase

1. If you understand the context – the passage/phrase or verse can become plain

C. Some tips for determining context

1. Carefully read the text: Asking questions – 5 W's; *Who/what/where/why/when*

a. Looking for clues/key words that explain: V2 the righteous man from the east...

1. Apparently he was a conqueror 2. V4 God was involved with Him in some way

2. Look for logical sections of division in the text

a. V1-4 speaks of the conquering man b. V5-7 speaks of the peoples reaction c. V8-20 speaks of God's care for Israel

d. V21-29 speaks of the foolishness of idolatry

1. The key: Are these connected, or separate ideas?

II. TOOLS FOR DETERMINING CONTEXT

A. **Commentaries**: Scholars who will give light on language/customs/meanings

1. I often counsel men to go to commentaries last

a. They have doctrinal bias b. They lead your mind down their path c. They focus on minutiae:

1. Adam Clarke: *That it should not be moved "That it shall not move"*—Five MSS., (two ancient), and the ancient Versions, add the conjunction *vau*, *and*, *Reading* *וְהוּא* *velo*, "and not, "which seems to be right.

2. A few others ignore this scripture completely

B. **Study Bibles**:

1. Study Bibles often will give the larger/macro view of what's going on in the passage – context!

2. It's good to have access to more than one: Some skip V5-7 altogether (Life Application)

3. They identify who the man in V1-4 is: King Cyrus II of Persia

4. They explain that V5-7 is the reaction of the nations to Cyrus/conquering in V1-4

a. **RyrieSB**: Isaiah mocks the heathen nations' futile attempts to stop Cyrus's campaigns.

b. **Scofield**: The reference here seems to be to Cyrus, whose victories and rapid growth in power are here ascribed to the providence of God. Verses 5-7 describe the effect upon the nations of the rise of the Persian power. They heartened each other, and made (v. 7) new idols. At verse 8 the prophet addresses Israel. Since it was their God who raised up Cyrus, they should expect good, not evil, from him (vs. 8-20). Verses 21-24 form a contemptuous challenge to the idols in whom the nations are trusting.

c. **NLT SB**: This taunt against idolatry (see note on 40:18) was a response to God's raising up of Cyrus; the nations hope to find protection in their idols.

d. **ESVSB**: The nations respond to the upheavals of history by nervously constructing more gods to believe in. But how can created "creators" save?

C. Ask some questions now that you know this

1. What is the historical setting of the scripture?

a. When was it written? Exile – destruction of the nation b. To whom? The nation of Israel

c. Why was it written? Because they were discouraged, thinking God must hate them and had given up on them

III. APPLICATION

A. Now we can begin to decide which theme we want to follow

1. Think of the main ideas:

- a. God is involved in planning His will: **V4** God planned/named Cyrus 100 years before his birth
- b. People trust in idols instead of God: **V5-7, 21-29**
- c. God does not give up on people with problems/who have failed/gotten off track: **V8-20**

B. Choosing a theme

- 1. You can choose one of the individual ideas: Planning/idols/God's help for His people
- 2. You can merge some of the ideas in one sermon/lesson
 - a. Because God cares/plans, we should trust Him instead of idols
- 3. Whatever we choose should not violate context
 - a. *V17 when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none...*
 - 1. So God wants us to dig wells for poor people in Africa!