

Dr. Matthew S. Harmon, The Bible's Use of the Bible, Session 2, The Value of Context and Textual Networks

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This is Dr. Matthew S. Harmon in his teaching in the series of The Bible's Use of the Bible. This is session 2, The Value of Context and Textual Networks.

Welcome to session two of our course on The Bible's Use of the Bible.

And in this session, we are going to talk about the value of context and textual networks. And just as a reminder, this content is based on material found in How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible. And in particular, this content comes from chapter four, which is the chapter on horizontal and vertical contexts.

And so we have to clarify: what is it we mean by horizontal and vertical contexts? Horizontal contexts: by this, we mean the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, book, and even the canonical section of the passage. So what we typically think of, mostly in the sense of literary context, is where the passage you're looking at falls within the surrounding paragraphs, chapters, book, etc. The other kind of context that we're going to talk about, and probably spend a little bit more time on this than the other, is vertical context.

And this context is created by allusions that connect or tether texts together within redemptive history. And so the idea is that as biblical authors allude to texts, there is an accumulation of meaning that takes place. It's almost like starting with a small snowball at the top of a hill that you push down the side.

And as it rolls down the side of the hill, it picks up more and more snow and gets larger. And so we'll see more clearly what that means as we go. So horizontal context, vertical context.

Here's a basic depiction of how vertical and horizontal contexts interact. So let's say you have a text, we'll call it text A. And text A is alluding to text B, but text B has already within it an allusion to text C. Now we'll show a real example of this, so if this seems a little muddy, just hang with me. And then there also might be the case that text A is not just alluding to text B, but also has in mind text C as well.

And then you see these horizontal markers here, and these are the surrounding literary contexts. So the surrounding verses to each of these texts, the surrounding paragraphs, and surrounding chapters. And the thing that I want to start with here in pointing out is that the vertical context can and often does activate horizontal context.

And you'll understand what I mean by that as we go later. But to explain it now and briefly, when text A engages with text B, it's not just engaging necessarily with that immediate verse that it's quoting or alluding to. It often has the surrounding horizontal context in mind as well.

And so we'll see an example of that later on in this lecture. Now, in one sense, this is a simple version of this, right? This can get very complex very quickly. So, for example, hang with me here.

You might have a text that text Y is already drawing on text A, which draws on two other texts before it, text B and text C. And text C might be drawing on text Y as well as text A. And so you can see how this interconnectedness of texts can potentially be challenging to kind of untangle to see the bigger picture. Let's start with an Old Testament example. We're going to look at 1 Kings chapter 11, verses 1 through 4. And so I'll have it up on the screen, but I encourage you to go ahead and open up your own copy of the scriptures so you can follow along.

1 Kings 11, verses 1 through 4. Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women. From the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, you shall not enter into marriage with them. Neither shall you. Neither shall they with you. For surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love.

He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

So, when you read this, and you notice within there, there's a specific reference to something that the Lord had commanded the people about not entering into marriage with these different groups of people. And so we can depict the horizontal and vertical context of 1 Kings chapter 11, verses 1 through 4, in this way.

Let's start with the horizontal context. So, we read verses 1 through 4, which is part of the unit, stretching from 10:26 through 11:43, that captures Solomon's downfall. That is part of a larger narrative unit, 1 Kings 1 through 11, which focuses on Solomon and his rule and reign.

And that, of course, is part of an even larger unit that we know as the Book of Kings. Which, in the Old Testament originally, would have been one book, not two separate books. So, think of both 1 and 2 Kings.

And then, even larger than that, we can think of the Book of Kings within the larger historical narrative context that's given to us in Joshua and Judges and Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. So that's the horizontal context of what's going on in the surrounding chapters and so forth. But if we just stop there, we're going to miss out on some of the significance of what the author is saying.

Because this description of Solomon's wives depends on, at least I would say, probably three other Old Testament texts. So you've got Deuteronomy chapter 7, verses 3 through 4, which is a prohibition against intermarriage with the surrounding nations. And that, in turn, can be traced back to Exodus 34, where there is a prohibition against marriages with those who don't share faith in Yahweh.

But the second line here we can draw, that 1 Kings 11 is probably drawing on, is Deuteronomy 17, which talks about the responsibility of kings. And one of the things that

that text tells us is that kings were not supposed to accumulate numerous wives. And then a third strain, Deuteronomy 23.3 and maybe Deuteronomy 23.7 as well, a prohibition specifically against Ammonites and Moabites entering into the assembly of Yahweh.

You think, well, why does God single them out? Well, part of it goes back to Numbers 22 through 24, where the Moabites acted treacherously against the Israelites. So you can see how this vertical context comes together in this statement here in 1 Kings 11:1-4. And if you understand that vertical context, you're beginning to see the significance of the failure of Solomon. That this is not just a sort of incidental thing, but that these are things he should have known better and actually, in fact, did know better based on Scripture.

So that's our first example. We wanted to start with one in the Old Testament itself. Now you'll notice this lighter gray up here might be hard to see, but in Nehemiah chapter 13 verses 23 through 27, there also is a text there about marrying the women of Ammon, Moab, and also Ashdod like Solomon.

So a later text is picking up what's done here, and even in that later text, it's probably also dependent on Deuteronomy 23. So it's helping you to see the interdependence of how these texts are accumulating and building together into almost like, as we'll see later, a network or an association, a web of texts that, when they interact together, accumulate meaning as an association of texts. I hope this doesn't discourage you, but that's a relatively simple example here.

I want to show you another example now from the New Testament, and maybe you'll be familiar with this one. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, turn to Mark chapter 1. Mark chapter 1, the very opening of Mark's Gospel account, Mark writes this. Now maybe you've read this text before, and you've done a little bit of digging, and you realize that there's something that initially you look at and go, wait a minute, did Mark get something wrong? Because when he says in verse 2, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, the quotation that he gives next is not from Isaiah.

Now, in verse 3, what he says is from Isaiah, but what he says first there in verse 2, the line about, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way, that's from Malachi chapter 3, verse 1. So, let's take a look at the vertical context. We can represent it like this. We start with Mark chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, and we see that it's drawing on both Malachi 3: 1 and on Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. What we may not fully appreciate, though, is that Malachi 3.1 is already drawing on Isaiah chapter 40, and that Isaiah chapter 40 already has embedded within it an allusion to Exodus 23:21. So let me show this to you.

I have the text right here. So again, let's look at Mark, and I've tried to color-code these so you can see the connections between these passages. So Mark wrote, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way.

You say, okay, that's Malachi 3:1. Well, we go to Malachi 3:1, we see, behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And you go, wait a minute. Actually, when you look at Isaiah chapter 40, it sure seems like Malachi is picking up language from there, because Isaiah had said, in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the wilderness, sorry, in the desert, a highway for our God. So here's the point. Already in Malachi 3, there's an allusion to Isaiah 40, verse 3. So the immediate takeaway is to realize that when Mark combines these two texts, he's not doing something new.

He's simply following the lead of Malachi and saying, Malachi has already brought together his own words with Isaiah 40 and connected this messenger with preparing the way for the Lord. But that's not quite far enough, because what we have to realize is that even in Isaiah, he has picked up language from Exodus 23, verses 20 and 21. This is where Yahweh says to Israel, behold, I send a messenger before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. Now here's something you have to recognize here: that both in Hebrew and in Greek, the term that is used there can mean either a human messenger or an angelic being.

And it all depends on the context of what is being intended there. When you look at Exodus 23, the context sure seems to point to an angelic being of some kind. But when you look at Isaiah 40, and then again in Malachi chapter 3, it appears to be a human messenger.

And that's what Mark is picking up on here in Mark chapter 1, verses 2 and 3. So going back to our diagram here now, what we can see is that Mark chapter 1 is drawing on both Malachi and Isaiah. And then Isaiah has drawn on Exodus already, and then he's following the lead of Malachi in putting these two texts together. But what's new on this slide is that because of these texts being tethered together, it has the effect of activating additional connections in the horizontal context.

And let me explain what I mean by this. You'll see here that there's this line up here, gospel, right? That Mark introduces his account with the word, the gospel. And you think, okay, well, where does he get that term? Well, if you look at Isaiah chapter 40, verse 9, it says, That's gospel language in the Septuagint.

That's the same; that's the verb, euangelizo, that is related to the noun euangelion. And so this is where this gospel language is coming from: the broader context of Isaiah. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news.

Lift it up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, behold your God. And so if we go back, it shouldn't be surprising that in the context of Mark 1, we see gospel language because it's also present in Isaiah 40, verse 9, in the horizontal context here. What about Malachi chapter 3, verse 1? Is there any horizontal context? Well, actually there is, because later in Malachi, who gets mentioned? Elijah.

Look at Malachi chapter 4, verse 5. Now, in fairness, in Mark chapter 1, verse 6, he doesn't explicitly use the term Elijah, but how does he describe John the Baptist? With his clothing and his diet and how he's described, he is pictured as an Elijah figure. And so that's an example of the horizontal context that is activated by this network of texts that go together. Let's look at a couple more here.

This idea of the presence of the Lord. So you remember that here in Mark chapter 1, we had seen how he had announced, let's go back here. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. So the presence of the Lord is going to be prepared for by this messenger. And we see in Exodus chapter 33 that God promises to Israel, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

So, this gives the picture then of how the vertical context, this connection, this tying together of these three texts that feed into Mark chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, has the effect of activating additional connections to the horizontal context of these Old Testament passages. And that's why it's so crucial when studying how a New Testament author is using an Old Testament text, or even how a later Old Testament author is using an earlier Old Testament text, to go back and read around the specific verse or verses that are being used. Because often, you will see additional connection points within those contexts that reveal that the later Biblical author is not just cherry-picking one little phrase, extracting it surgically out of that passage and then dropping it into his own work.

He is, in large measure, assuming some sort of textual and contextual connection. That's one example from the New Testament. What I also want to highlight in our discussion of context is what we can refer to as textual networks.

Now, let not your heart be troubled, because what you're about to see on this screen could feel completely overwhelming. And I'm not going to unpack all of it. I'm just going to try to explain to you what it is you're seeing and how it can be helpful.

So, what we have here on the screen is a snapshot of the Davidic covenant network. And so, when we think of the Davidic covenant, the key text here is 2 Samuel 7, verses 11 through 15. And what this diagram is attempting to show you is how that text is then used, alluded to, and expanded upon in later Biblical texts.

How other later Biblical texts, both in the New Testament and in the Old Testament, take up that Davidic covenant and reflect on it. They expand on it. They tie it to other Biblical ideas and themes.

But what this also shows you is that there are some precursors to the covenant with David. That, for example, in Genesis 49, verse 10, you have a text that is pointing forward to and going to feed into what we see in 2 Samuel 7. So, let's try to unpack this a little bit. Here's 2 Samuel 7, verses 12 through 15.

God says to David, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. So that's the core promise that we see of God's promise to David of this king, first a line of kings, but ultimately an individual king who would come from this line and rule over an eternal kingdom.

And this textual network is trying to show you how that promise, how that language gets picked up later in the Biblical storyline. And so, for example, I mentioned Genesis 49. If you look there, Genesis 49, this is God's blessing of his people through the patriarch, Jacob.

And he's blessing his sons before he is about to die. And he says this to Judah. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Now, of course, we remember that David is from which tribe? He's from the tribe of Judah. And so that promise in Genesis 49 is now taking on much more specific shape here in 2 Samuel 7. But it's not as if it just stops with 2 Samuel 7. Later Biblical texts expand on it, develop it, reflect on it. So, for example, you see one of these right here, Psalm 2, verses 6-8.

And you'll notice that there's a dotted line from Genesis 49:10 to Psalm 2, verses 6-8. Which is a way of saying that both 2 Samuel 7 and Genesis 49 seem to be influencing what's said there in Psalm 2. So Psalm 2, verses 6-8. So even in this Psalm 2 passage, you can see how there's some influence from Genesis 49.10, right? The idea of the obedience of the peoples, right? I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

But this language of, you are my son. Well, that's language borrowed directly from, essentially, 2 Samuel 7. Where God says of this future king, I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. So you can see how Psalm 2 is drawing together both Genesis 49 and 2 Samuel 7. And this gets picked up later in the Psalms as well.

Psalm 89, verses 20 and 21 and then 26 and 27. I have found David my servant with my holy oil I have anointed him, so that my hand shall be established with him. My arm also shall strengthen him.

He shall cry to me, you are my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Now, verse 27. And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

And I would suggest to you that when we get to the New Testament, and we see at Jesus' baptism that the voice from heaven says to Jesus, "You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. That we should understand that sonship language against the backdrop of this entire network of expectations and hopes and promises that developed in connection with this promise made in 2 Samuel chapter 7. Now I just want to say a brief word about this particular diagram here.

Because again, when you look at this, it can seem utterly overwhelming. And I don't want you to get lost in all of the details. This is taken from Gary Schnittjer's helpful book, *The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

He's got a whole series of these textual networks. The key thing that I want you to understand, though, is just the accumulation of meaning that takes place. And that when a later biblical author draws, for example, on the language from Psalm 2. If we just stop and look at Psalm 2 and go, okay, that's what the biblical author is drawing from.

And don't realize that Psalm 2 is actually itself drawing on 2 Samuel 7. And influenced as well by the expectation in Genesis 49. That we're only getting a portion of the full picture of what the biblical authors understood. And so the idea here is again not to figure out for yourself all the specific details of how these texts relate.

It's more about being able to use something like this and say, okay, if I come across Psalm 89 and I see this language. Or even Psalm 110, which we didn't specifically talk about, but which is quoted repeatedly in the New Testament. You have to really, to appreciate what Psalm 110 is saying, have to understand it in light of 2 Samuel 7. And the rest of this network of promises connected with this promise made to David.

Okay, let's step back now and come to some takeaways here. That's a lot. Here are some key takeaways.

The first is simply pay attention to both the horizontal and vertical context. So when you come across what seems to be an allusion to a previous passage. Go back and read more widely around that original passage.

And I think what you'll begin to discover is you'll see additional contact points. Between what we're calling the donor text, the original text that's being cited or alluded to. And the receptor text, where that original text is being engaged.

Second, pay attention to the accumulation of meaning through vertical context. In other words, as you see these networks, these associations of text, these web-interconnected texts. Pay attention to how they are expanding upon the nature of what God is promising or saying that he is going to do.

And then lastly, pay attention to these textual networks. The place that you can most readily find these is, as I mentioned in Gary Schnicker's book, *The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament*. He's got about, I can't remember if it's about a dozen or fifteen of these different textual networks.

That helps you see the interrelationship of how these texts relate to each other. And the growing web of associations and meanings that accumulate as these texts were reflected on, studied. And as God's Spirit guided later biblical authors to refer back to those.

But then expand upon the nature of who this person was going to be, what he was going to do. And the nature of how that would ultimately be fulfilled. So, big picture takeaway.

Pay attention to those contexts. Horizontal and vertical. And pay attention to the accumulation of the meaning that comes from the vertical context.

In our next session, we will look at the sometimes controversial topic of typology. And how to think carefully about the way the biblical authors use that.

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