

# Context & The Bible

## con·text

The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.

---

When someone makes a statement about something in the Bible,  
keep these 3 types of context in mind.

### **Description vs Prescription · Old Ceremonial Laws · Writing Style**

#### **1 Description vs Prescription**

**Example:** It has been argued that things like homosexuality should be embraced by Christians today, since our understanding of sexuality has progressed - even though practicing homosexuality is clearly defined as being a sin in the Bible. This argument follows that polygamy is practiced by people God used in the Bible and not specifically condemned by God, and since Christians condemn the practice today, it is evidence that our understanding of sexuality or marriage is continually maturing.

**The Contextual Problem:** Just because the Bible **describes** something being practiced by people in the Bible does not mean God **prescribed** the behavior. Since God has never condoned polygamy, there is no reason to deviate from what is specifically written in the Bible about homosexuality or anything else specifically written about.

#### **2 Old Ceremonial Laws**

**Example:** The idea that things like dietary restrictions, clothing restrictions, animal sacrifices, etc. (exclusively found in the Old Testament which set the Jews apart from the pagans) are no longer practiced today, so all of Scripture, or at least other parts of Scripture that specifically condemn or condone something, should also be ignored.

**The Contextual Problem:** As it is recorded throughout the New Testament, Jesus came to fulfill the law and His blood is our perfect sacrifice. Because of Him, he sets us apart, so we are no longer required to practice ceremonial laws.

#### **3 Writing Style**

**Example:** One of the main misunderstandings of this type is that the Biblical account of creation in Genesis is figurative, metaphorical or allegorical. That the 6 days where God created were not literal days but represented billions of years, and that God just used evolution to create, just not specifically described.

**The Contextual Problem:** If the writing style of Genesis were poetic, the context alone would possibly allow for such an interpretation, however, the writing style of the Biblical creation account is written in historical narrative:

The normal order for a Hebrew narrative sentence is:  
Conjunction--Verb--Subject--Object.

The order in poetic writing is:  
Subject--Verb--Object

So, since the Bible does not use poetry to describe how God created the universe, it is taking it out of context to say it is anything other than a literal historical account.