

# Contextualism in bible essay



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One of the biggest debates between Christians is how to read the Bible. By understanding what He meant by what He said, one can fulfill God's will. There are various interpretations to His words.

Contextualism, in the Bible, refers to interpreting text in context to which the Bible was written. From a contextualist view, because there are many books that come from various years, the reader must take into account the historical context at the time the book was written.

Also, the reader must take into account the social, political, and theological context in order to get meaning from text. Contextualists also believe that God is the author of the Bible, through the words of human authors. When reading interpretations of scripture, it is easy to notice whether the interpretations have a contextual view or a literal view. One can also see the pros and cons of contextualism in its practice.

In Genesis, it can be read that the creation of the heavens and earth were created in six days by God. In the Bible, the term "yom" denotes the period of time that passes between each major creation event. Norman L. Geisler's interpretation of the time of a "day" is as follows. . .

It is true that most often the Hebrew word yom ("day") means "twenty-four hours." However, this is not definitive for its meaning in Genesis 1 for several reasons. First, the meaning of a term is not determined by majority vote, but by the context in which it is used. It is not important how many times it is used elsewhere, but how it is used here.

Second, even in the creation story in Genesis 1-2, “ day” (yom) is used of more than a twenty-four-hour period. Speaking of the whole six “ days” of creation, Genesis 2: 4 refers to it as “ the day” (yom) when all things were created.

Third, and finally, yom is elsewhere used of long periods of time, as in Psalm 90: 4, which is cited in 2 Peter 3: 8: “ A day is like a thousand years.”

(Norman L. Geisler, 639) According to Geisler, the time of a “ day” should be taken in context in which it was used. He also states that the term “ yom” is used throughout the Bible as a long period of time and not the standard 24-hour day.

These accusations point that Geisler is a contextualist because in defining the time in which the heavens and earth were created, he did not use the literal definition of a day. Instead, he took clues from the context of the bible and also the time of its origin and formed a definition in which made sense in context.

There are many advantages of contextualism. A Biblical contextualist is someone who believes that most, if not all, of the Bible should be open for interpretation. This means that because ideas are meant not to be taken literally but in context they can answer the tough contradictions within the scripture. This is advantageous for a contextualist for when the literal view of a situation does not align with the time period, setting, or meaning of a text.

Also, reading scripture in context allows the reader to view the text differently. Because different events, may it be historical, political, social, etc., bring out different emotions, the reader can see where the text is

coming from and the impact the author had on the text. However, contextualism does have its disadvantages.

A contextualist interpretation can be confusing for many believers who lack the training or ability to examine the historical circumstances of the text. If the context in which scripture was written is unknown or unable to be viewed, it is impossible to know how it affects the scripture.

Also, critics can argue that since contextualists believe God authored the Bible through humans that the authority of the Bible is questioned and that as time progresses, interpretations may change, changing ones beliefs on the Bible. In conclusion, contextualists interpret the Bible in context to which each book was written.

The meaning of text can be persuaded by factors from when the text was actually written. Interpretations of the bible can easily be noticed as contextual through obvious clues. If the interpreter relates the issue to the time and setting of when it was written, he/she is most likely a contextualist in contrast to a literalist who will view the issue exactly how it presents itself.

Contextualism has its advantages - the most obvious being that the meaning is, in a way, open-ended; it can be viewed as the reader views its context. Lastly, contextualism has its disadvantages - one being that, in a way, it questions the authority of the Bible.