

9. LITERARY CONTEXT

Part 3: Context – “Where does the passage fit?”
How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament
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Goal: Comprehend the role that the passage plays in the whole book.

1. Grasping Literary Context

- a. Literary placement: a passage’s location
 - Key questions:
 - Is the passage part of a larger literary grouping that has a discernible beginning, middle, or end?
 - What leads up to the passage?
 - What flows from it?
 - How is the book organized, and how does the passage fit within the section of the section, book, canonical division, Testament, and Bible—in that order?
 - The literary placement of Daniel 3
 - Within the book’s overall structure
 - Within the section
 - Within Jesus’s Bible

- b. Literary function: a passage’s purpose and contribution
 - Key questions:
 - What is the main thrust of the book as a whole, and what role does this particular passage play in the book’s storyline or reasoning?
 - Does the passage fill in, add on to, introduce, bring to completion, or counterbalance the portion or book of which it is a part?
 - What does it add to the overall picture?
 - What does the overall picture add to it?
 - If this passage were missing from the book, what would be lost?
 - The literary function of Daniel 3

- c. Literary details: the particular aspects of a passage that set it apart and that help identify its overall contribution
- Key questions:
 - How comprehensive or selective is the passage?
 - Do any details help you decide whether or not the author wrote it in connection with a specific cultural or historical situation?
 - Does the passage relay material from a distinctive perspective? What does this tell you about the author's intentions?
 - The literary details of Daniel 3

2. A Case Study in Literary Placement: Psalm 121

- a. Main idea and outline: The psalmist calls others to join him in celebrating Yahweh's guardianship in their lives.
- *The Personal Celebration of Yahweh's Guardianship* (vv. 1–2)
 - The posture of the guarded (v. 1)
 - The confidence of the guarded (v. 2)
 - *The Assurance to Others of Yahweh's Guardianship* (vv. 3–6)
 - The nature of Yahweh's guardianship declared (vv. 3–4)
 - The ensurer of our perseverance (v. 3a)
 - The constant watcher over his own (vv. 3b–4)
 - The nature of Yahweh's guardianship expounded (vv. 5–8)
 - His identity: the ever-present defender (vv. 5–6)
 - His actions: the life-preserver and lasting protector (vv. 7–8)
- b. The placement of Ps 121 in:
- The Writings (former and latter)
 - The Psalter (5 books)
 - The 5th book of the Psalter (Pss 107–150)
 - The Songs of Ascent (Pss 120–134)

3. A Case Study in Literary Function: The Twelve

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| SIN | Hosea | Israel, Yahweh has a case against you: You have played the harlot and been like an unfaithful wife, departing from faithfulness, steadfast love, and knowledge. Please return to Yahweh, your husband! |
| | Joel | For the Day of Yahweh is at hand, and repentance is your only hope! I will be a refuge to my people, but a roaring, devouring lion against all who fail to heed my voice! |
| | Amos | How secure you feel, yet how insecure you actually are! I have disciplined you, yet you have not learned from the discipline. You anticipate my coming, but for you this Day will be darkness, not light. Prepare to meet your God, for the fulfillment of my kingdom promises is only for those who truly repent! |
| | Obadiah | Know this: Pride and hatred have no place in my coming kingdom; this is why your brother Edom will be destroyed. |
| | Jonah | Yet be warned, for your own pride and hatred of others resembles that of Edom and stands in direct contrast to the mercy Yahweh gives to whomever he wills. Don't be like Jonah; be like Yahweh and extend compassion rather than gloating in others' destruction, lest God's judgment fall on you! |
| | Micah | Yahweh, from his courtroom, has found you and the nations guilty! Yet your final judgment Day has not come, and in his mercy, he will still forgive your sins, if you but return. Soon God, through his Word and Messiah, will be exalted over all things. Will you be a part of the judgment or the redemption? |
| PUNISHMENT | Nahum | Know this for certain: Yahweh is a stronghold only for those who accept his terms of peace, but he will justly judge all his unrepentant enemies. |
| | Habakkuk | Yahweh is just, and in his time he will indeed punish all wrongdoers and preserve all who walk by faith, looking to him for help, guidance, and satisfaction. |
| | Zephaniah | Please be part of the remnant that draws near to God, so that the coming Day may be one of rejoicing! Yet for all who fail to heed God's voice, the Day of Yahweh the warrior will be sure destruction! |
| RESTORATION | Haggai | Drawing near to God necessitates that you take seriously the need for his presence in your midst, that he might bring forth the fulfillment of all he has promised, blessing for you and for the nations who surrender to him. |
| | Zechariah | You need God's presence among you, for his kingdom restoration will be brought not by human effort but by the power of his Spirit working through his slain and yet victorious priest-king. |
| | Malachi | This restoration is for you, if you will but fear and honor God in all areas of your life, awaiting the day when curse will give rise to full restoration blessing! |
| Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie. | | |