

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 18

April 28-May 4, 2014

John 18:1-20:29

Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, it makes reading like an ordinary book quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament, were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John’s gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week eighteen, along with the readings for week eighteen appended. Join in. It’s never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Eighteen Readings

<p>4/28 Jesus’ Arrest Jn 18:1-18:27</p> <p>Matt 26:47-26:65 Ex 28 Ex 39 Matt 26:66-26:75 Matt 27:1-27:31 Prov 17:11-17:15; 17:20,23; 27 Prov 18:3; 21:28 Prov 24:26-24:29</p> <p>Jesus’ Arrest: The Cup Jn 18:1-18:11</p> <p>Matt 26:36-26:39 Hab 2:6-2:17</p>	<p>4/29 Peter’s Denial Jn 18:12-18:27</p> <p>Luk 22:31-22:38 Luk 22:47-22:62 Pslm 12 Pslm 143 Prov 20:6</p> <p>Jesus Before Pilate Jn 18:28-19:16</p> <p>Pslm 78 Ex 29 Luk 22:63-22:71</p>	<p>4/30 Jesus’ Kingdom Jn 18:36</p> <p>Matt 13:10-13:17 Ezek 12 Matt 13:31-13:35 Ezek 17 Matt 13:44-13:52 Nah. 2 Matt 20:1-20:28 Matt 22:1-22:14 Mrk 4:26-4:34 Matt 25 Matt 18:1-18:6 1 Tim 6:11-6:16 Luk 13:18-13:21 Luk 18:15-18:17</p>	<p>5/1 God’s Authority Over Rulers Jn 19:1-19:16</p> <p>Ezek 30-32</p> <p>5/2 The Crucifixion Jn 19:17-19:42</p> <p>Matt 27:32-27:61 Heb 6:13-6:20 Heb 10:19-10:31 Prov 25:21-25:22 Mrk 15:33-15:41 Pslm 22:1-22:21; 22:25-22:31 Lev 16</p>	<p>5/3 The Resurrection Jn 20:1-20:29</p> <p>Matt 27:62-28:15 Mrk 15:42-16:20 Lev 23:9-23:14 Pslm 47 Pslm 107</p> <p>5/4 Off</p>
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JESUS' ARREST – (John 18:1-18:27)

John records Jesus' arrest adding a few more details than the earlier written gospels. The core reading in John 18:1-27 notes not only Judas's betrayal and the subsequent arrest, but also Peter's denial of Jesus. John's passage to Peter cutting off the right ear of the high priest's servant in the garden is an indication to many that Peter was left-handed. (A left handed wielding of a sword would cut off an opposing person's right ear.)

The context readings provide some additional insights and word play from Matthew's gospel, as well as historical information on the high priest's garb. The context also provides basic living ideas from Proverbs for applicability to everyday life.

Matthew 26:47-26:65

In Matthew's account of the betrayal and arrest, Matthew adds that Judas chose a kiss as the indicator of Jesus' identity. This may seem odd to many in today's era of flashlights, streetlights, and other readily available artificial lighting. But on a dark night, 2,000 years ago, it would be quite difficult to discern one person from another, if one did not know the identities to start with. As a friend, Judas would be allowed to approach Jesus close enough to give a cheek-kiss in greeting.

When the arrest was being made, Matthew spoke of Peter cutting off the servant's ear, but did not identify Peter; simply noting it was one of the Lord's disciples. Once the arrest was made, the disciples all fled *except for Peter*. Adding this to Peter's swordplay, we see two ways Peter stood apart, not denying the Lord, as had been foretold by Jesus, but standing up for him, as Peter adamantly asserted he would. From the arrest, Jesus was hauled back into Jerusalem to the high priest. Peter followed all the way to the courtyard, where he hung around, listening in. The witnesses against Jesus were too inconsistent to be credible until two accused Jesus of claiming the ability to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. When pressed to defend himself, Jesus finally answered the high priest's demand that Jesus identify whether he was the Messiah, God's Son.

Jesus responded affirmatively, declaring that not only had the priest declared it, but also that Jesus was the Son of Man, seated at God's right hand of power and set to return on the clouds in judgment.

At this the high priest tore his robes, an over-the-top reaction designed to indicate great righteous indignation. The robes were no simple toga as seen in the next contextual reading.

Exodus 28 and 39

In Exodus 28, we have the instructions from God about making the first high priest's robes, and in Exodus 39 we have narrative of the actual construction of those robes. The robes were not simply decorative. They were made special with special instructions adding to the symbolic significance of the role the high priest played. The high priest wore the Urim and Thummin on his heart to bear the judgment of Israel before the Lord (Ex. 28:30). Matthew's picture of the high priest rending his robe draws the image of the priest tearing away his symbolic representation of judgment of the people. In truth, the high priest abdicated such judgment and it was rightfully worn by Jesus in that room that night. Jesus became the high priest of the people, as we have read in previous contextual readings from Hebrews.

Another accouterment to the high priest's robes and attire was a gold plate bearing the phrase, "Holy to the Lord" (Ex. 28:36). This is another matter that sat ironically that night upon the high priest, for the one holy to the Lord was Jesus.

Matthew 26:66-26:75

Matthew's account of Jesus' last day continued with the judgment of death by the priest, followed by a more particular account of Peter's denials. Before night was out, i.e., before the cock crowed in the morning, Peter denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus had foretold.

The morning dawned and in Matthew 27 we read that Jesus was sent over to Pilate for judgment.¹ This was an unexpected way for Pilate to start his day! In the interchange

¹ 1st Century non-Biblical sources affirm Pilate as the Roman governor in charge over the crucifixion. Around 93-94AD, the Jewish historian Josephus (37-c.100), writing a Jewish history for the Roman records, wrote of the martyr James who was identified as "the brother of Jesus, who was called Messiah ["Christ"]." He also identified Christ as executed by Pilate. Josephus had more to say about Jesus as resurrected.

At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders. And the tribe of Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day.

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 3, verse 3. I am using the translation of Paul L. Maier, *Josephus: The Essential Works*, (Kregel 1994), at 269.

In addition to Josephus, other Roman historians wrote of Jesus as the subject of worship among Christians. Tacitus (c.56 – c.117) wrote of the mass execution by Nero in July 64AD in the book called *Annals*, penned around 116AD. In his writing, Tacitus confirmed the death of Christ by

with Pilate, Matthew set out several word plays worth noting. Pilate had a practice of releasing a Jewish prisoner during the Passover feast, and when offering to do so, gave the crowd a choice of Jesus or Barabbas. The crowd cried for Barabbas, not realizing the poetic significance of their cry. “Barabbas” comes from two Aramaic words, “bar” meaning “son,” and “abba” meaning “father.” Ironically, when asked whom should be released, the crowd crying out for Barabbas were truly saying, “the son of the father!” So the lower case son of the lower case father was released while the capital S – Son of the capital F – Father was sent to his death.

A second play on words by Matthew is found in verse 25. Pilate was unsatisfied that Jesus should be put to death, and he washed his hands in symbolic innocence before the crowd declaring,

I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”

The people ignorantly responded with what would become a salvation cry in the church,

His blood be on us and on our children!”

Consider the following:

- **Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his **blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.
- **Hebrews 9:14** How much more will the **blood** of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.
- **1 John 1:7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the **blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

crucifixion (“the extreme penalty”) under Pilate as arising from Nero’s efforts to distract attention from his burning of Rome,

to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.

Tacitus, *Annals*, book 15, Ch. 44.

Proverbs 17:11-17:15; 17:20, 23, 27; 18:3; 21:28; 24:26-24:29

Proverbs are marvelous instructions for daily life. If people would read the proverbs, they would find common sense wisdom for day-to-day life. It is no less true for people during the time of Christ. We see lessons from the proverbs that speak to the day's reading and actions for Judas, Pilate, the high priest, the condemning masses, and more.

Proverbs 17:11-17:15 speaks against rebellion and returning evil for good (Judas), it speaks against condemning the righteous (Pilate, high priest, crowds) while justifying the wicked as an abomination before the Lord. A dishonest tongue falls into calamity (suicide), and accepting a bribe to pervert justice is wicked (Prov. 17:20, 23) (Judas). Whereas Jesus exemplified a Proverbs 17:27 man who restrains his words and kept a cool spirit as a man of understanding.

JESUS' ARREST: THE CUP (John 18:1-18:11)

Here in the core reading from John 18 we carve out the contextual readings related to the first eleven verses where Jesus spoke of his readiness to "drink the cup that the Father" had given him.

Matthew 26:36-26:39 and Habakkuk 2:6-2:17

After prayer, Jesus was ready to drink the cup that in his earlier prayer, Jesus had prayed would pass (Matt 26:39; Mrk 14:23; Luk 22:42). Prophetically, God's wrath was portrayed as a cup of wrath poured out upon the unrighteous. In Habakkuk 2:6-17 we read of God's woes to those who are evil, violent, unjust, shameful, and rebellious. They are sinners due to drink the cup of God's wrath with all the negative consequences. This is the cup that Jesus was ready to drink on behalf of all who rightfully should have drunk the cup to its dregs (including us).

Apr. 28

PETER'S DENIAL (John 18:12-18:27)

A closer focus on Peter's denial sets out contextual readings from Luke's account as well as two instructive psalms and a proverb.

Luke 22:31-22:38; 22:47-22:62

Satan was at work in Peter's life. Satan wanted to ruin Peter and his ministry, and rightfully so! Peter was God's tool in opening the church (Acts 2), spreading the gospel, and bringing the first Gentiles into the church (Cornelius - Acts 10). Jesus knew what was afoot and warned Peter, not only of Peter's coming weakness, but also Peter's follow-up repentance. Peter denied that he would ever be so weak as to deny Jesus, yet within 24 hours, he did that very thing. It cut Peter to the core.

Psalm 12

Peter thought himself master of his own tongue. He thought himself reliable with his own strength. He thought himself strong enough on his own to stand up to Satan and his devices. Peter was wrong. This psalm speaks to faithful and godly people vanishing as words become lies and speech becomes false flattery. Yet in that degraded state, there is the Lord with his pure words, guarding his people from the wickedness found everywhere.

Psalm 143

Psalm 143 would have been a great psalm for Peter after his denial of Jesus. While Peter was weeping “bitterly,” It would have served him well to pray the psalm asking for God’s mercy in the midst of Peter’s unrighteousness (Pslm 143:1-2). Peter knew first hand how Satan, the eney, had pursued him and crushed him, causing him great heartache and brokenness (Pslm 143:3-4). Peter could have prayed through memories of God’s (and Jesus’) faithfulness (Pslm 143:5-6), seeking God’s immediate help coming with the dawn (Ps. 143:7-8). Peter needed deliverance and teaching from the Lord, rescuing his soul from trouble (Pslm 143:9-12).

Proverbs 20:6

This proverb must have haunted Peter as he realized the accuracy of Jesus’ foretelling his faithless denial. It is one thing to proclaim steadfast love. It is another thing to deliver!

Apr. 29

JESUS BEFORE PILATE (John 18:28-19:16)

John gives more details about Jesus’ interchange with Pilate than the other gospel writers. They discussed kingdoms of this world and of God. Jesus spoke of his role as a witness to truth, something Pilate turned into a philosophical question. In the midst of it all, Pilate was uneasy about judging Jesus and was basically cowed into by the Jewish voice.

The context readings reflect back on the long history God had with his people, the history of the Exodus as well as the consecration of priests, before finishing with Luke’s passages of Jesus before Pilate.

Psalm 78

This psalm recounts the marvels God had done in the history of Israel. The deeds from old were due to be told to the children for all generations. It was to serve as a real life lesson that God lives, that God cares, that God watches, and that God delivers. God nurtured the faithless Israelites through their wilderness experience, providing food, water, and protections. The people did not respond with devotion or belief, but rather with sin in deed and in heart. God's reaction to the sin and rebellion was one of compassion. He had times of judgment that were necessary, but always less than deserved, and always for the ultimate good of the people and God's good purposes.

Exodus 29 and Luke 22:63-22:71

As God set up the Aaronic priesthood, he did so with a period of ritualistic consecration of the priests. They were not simple designated priests; they were dedicated through purifying sacrifices. They had sacrificial blood on their bodies and clothes. It was a 1,200-year foreshadowing of the blood that Jesus would wear as he became the sacrifice that allowed every believer to be a priest before God. The Luke reading joins the others gospels in recounting Jesus suffering and being beaten even before the actual crucifixion.

Apr. 30

JESUS KINGDOM (John 18:36)

When Pilate quizzed Jesus on whether Jesus was in fact claiming kingship, Jesus did not deny the title. Jesus pointed out that he had no kingdom in this world, but his kingdom was away from the world Pilate knew. Matthew's gospel has much to say about the kingdom of heaven and we use it as the principal contextual reading supplemented with some relevant Old Testament passages.

Matthew 13:10-13:17 and Ezekiel 12

Should one wish to see the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom not of this world, one would need to escape this world and its visibility. Alternatively, one can learn of the kingdom by learning in faith from the teachings of Scripture. Matthew 13:10-17 has Jesus explaining this to his followers. Jesus spoke in parables that the unfaithful neither understood nor sought to understand. Jesus' followers were not much better at understanding the parables, but at least they stayed near Jesus and tried to learn, asking him about them. Jesus contrasted those who had ears but never heard the true message. This is not an innocent ignorance, but something that proceeded from a rebellious heart.

We get more insight into the language Jesus used by reading the contextual passage from Ezekiel 12. God had instructed Ezekiel to symbolically "go into exile" in front of the people for a day, digging through a wall and making quite an ordeal of it. This was to symbolize Judah's Babylonian captivity, in hopes the people would quiz the prophet

over his strange actions and thus come to accept the truth of his prophecy. Ezekiel set out the people's ignorance as one with "eyes to see, but see not" and "ears to hear, but hear not" adding the important reason -- "*for they are a rebellious house!*" The problem with rebellion is it blinds one's eyes to God's truth, including his teaching on his kingdom.

Matthew 13:31-13:35 and Ezekiel 17

This Matthew passage contains the parable of the kingdom of heaven like a mustard seed. This incredibly small seed grows into a large tree that provides nests for birds. Another parable equated the kingdom of heaven to leaven that leavens an entire recipe of bread.

Parables were not new to the first century followers of Jesus. Ezekiel used parables, as did a number of Old Testament prophets. In Ezekiel 17 we read the parable of two eagles and a vine pertaining to kingdoms. The parable spoke of Judah's downfall as the king (Zedekiah) broke his vassalage oath made to the Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar in the name of YHWH. God would use Nebuchadnezzar to bring Zedekiah and all of Judah down. Yet even as this prophecy of destruction was issued, Ezekiel also brought forth the message that God, the one who brings low, can and will take that which is low and lift it up. God would restore his people and bring forth another kingdom.

Matthew 13:44-13:52 and Nahum 2

In this section of Matthew 13 we read several more parables about the kingdom of heaven, relating it to a hidden treasure or fantastic pearl worth selling everything to acquire. Jesus also compared it to a net gathering great numbers of fish, both keepers and worthless ones. Jesus explained that at the end of the age, there would be a separation of those evil from those righteous.

The language of God's judgment calls out the judgment of God against the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh in Nahum 2. We give some extra detail for this section of the reading because of the general unfamiliarity of most with the prophecies of Nahum.

While Nahum does not date his prophetic ministry directly, several passages clarify the time of his declarations. Nahum 1:12 speaks of Assyria as still at a peak of its power and size:

Thus says the LORD, "Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away."

This helps date the prophecy to sometime before Assyria began to lose substantial territory. By 625, Assyria had lost the area surrounding Babylon and eastward, so some

date prior to that is reasonable. Also of use in dating is Nahum 3:8ff, which compares the coming fall of Nineveh to the fall of Thebes (Egypt) in the past:

Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her? ... Yet she became an exile... and all her great men were bound in chains.

Assyria itself had conquered Thebes in 664/663, so we can easily conclude that Nahum must have declared these prophetic words *after* that date.

The prophecy of Nahum was a bold prediction! Nahum boldly proclaimed the downfall of the world's greatest superpower. Nahum did not do so vaguely or with ambiguity. His words are clear and concise. As noted above, Nahum confirmed that even though Assyria was "at full strength," they would soon "be cut down." Even more so, Assyria would "pass away." Assyria had existed for over 1,500 years! The Assyrian culture is one of civilization's oldest. Assyria's most recent re-emergence as a superpower had occurred almost 300 years earlier. Their activity was prominent in Judah's mindset as well.

Nahum prophesied during a time when the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, was exacting tribute from the nation. Ashurbanipal had exacted this tribute since taking the throne in 669. Before him, his predecessor Earshaddon (681-669) had exacted tribute from Judah. Before Earshaddon, his predecessor Sennacherib (705-681) had sacked all of Judah except Jerusalem and exacted a great deal of plunder and tribute. Sennacherib's two predecessors, Sargon II (722-705) and Shalmaneser V (727-722) had not only exacted tribute, but were responsible for ending the Northern Kingdom/Samaria and for deporting their citizens. Before those two, the Assyrian ruler was Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727) who invaded the region and exacted tribute. Even before him, we know the prior two Assyrian kings, Adad-nirari III (811-783) and Shalmaneser III (858-824) were exacting tribute from Israel at least. In other words, save for the rare moment here or there, the Israelites had been subject to Assyria for hundreds of years. The bold proclamation that this nation was soon going to pass away was *shockingly* bold.

In the American legal system, there is a concept every first year law student learns called, "foreseeability." The doctrine is that one is liable for damage from one's own negligent actions when harm or damage is "reasonably foreseeable." Generally, juries decide what is foreseeable and what is not. There are rare occasions, however, where the consequences are so remote that the judge takes the decision out of the jury's hands and holds that there is *no* foreseeability as a matter of law. I suspect in the case of Nahum's prophecies, the court would do that very thing. What Nahum saw coming, was not foreseeable by a reasonably prudent person! Even today it is hard to believe. Andre Parrot was not only the Director of the Mari Archaeological Expedition (Mari is another Ancient Near Eastern site), but he was also a professor at the *Ecole du Louvre* in Paris and the Curator-in-Chief of the French National Museums. In writing on the fall of Assyria, Parrot explained,

It is hard to understand why the fall of Assyria was so complete and so rapid. Never had the empire been so great or seemed so mighty. And indeed it was mighty. For one hundred and twenty-five years it had been sustained by continuous endeavor which had never relaxed. For six generations the throne had passed from father to son so that the kings, assured of that permanence on which the power of a dynasty depends, were able to survive all crises and to bring to completion a remarkable achievement...the enslavement of the world.²

Nahum emphasized the importance of this to Judah, explaining that this would end Assyrian conquests into Judah for good:

...never again shall the worthless [Assyria] pass through you (Nahum 1:15).

Just as important, one would think, to the king (and all of Judah) as the fact that the LORD would bring Assyria to naught, was *the reason* God was taking this action. Certainly I would want to know the reasons for God's actions to aid me in figuring out how to live my life!

Nahum begins his oracle against Assyria and its capital city of Nineveh setting out the reasons for the coming judgment. Even though God is slow to anger and patient toward his people and for the sake of his name, God is fiercely wrathful and certain to take action on his enemies and against evil.

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies (Nahum 1:2).

The avenging hand of the LORD doomed the Assyrians. These people had lived in evil, bloodshed, and lying corruption. Their capital city of Nineveh represented all that was the "kingdom" of Assyria. It was a "bloody city," that was "full of lies" and the "plunder" taken by force from others (Nahum 3:3). Assyria was like a prostitute betraying others with charms to get their valuables (Nahum 3:4).

² Parrot, Andre, *Nineveh and the Old Testament*, (Philosophical Library, Inc. 1955), at 71-2

Like the Egyptian capital Thebes before them, the Assyrian capital was destined for defeat. To any who had seen Nineveh, which would have included the Judahite kings that came to Nineveh annually to pay their tributes, this prophetic oracle must have seemed almost outlandish. Nineveh was the largest city in the known world.³ As the French scholar Andre Parrot wrote of Assyria at this time,



Assyria had never known a more brilliant epoch. Its palaces housed the hoarded wealth of the subject nations. Behind its double line of ramparts Nineveh seemed to be invulnerable. She continued to make the world tremble...⁴

Nahum details a vision of the battle for Nineveh that paints the scene in vivid color and graphic detail. The charging chariots with sunlight glinting off them are painted in words,

The chariots come with flashing metal... The chariots race madly through the streets... they gleam like torches; they dart like lightning (Nah-um 2:3-2:4).

The opposing army's shields and clothing would be blood red, giving the impression of great slaughter:

The shield of his mighty men is red; his soldiers are clothed in scarlet (Nahum 2:3).

The city would fall and its treasure taken:

... the siege tower is set up. The river gates are opened; the palace melts away... Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! ... Desolate! Desolation and ruin! ... Wasted is Nineveh (Nahum 2:5-2:10; 3:7).

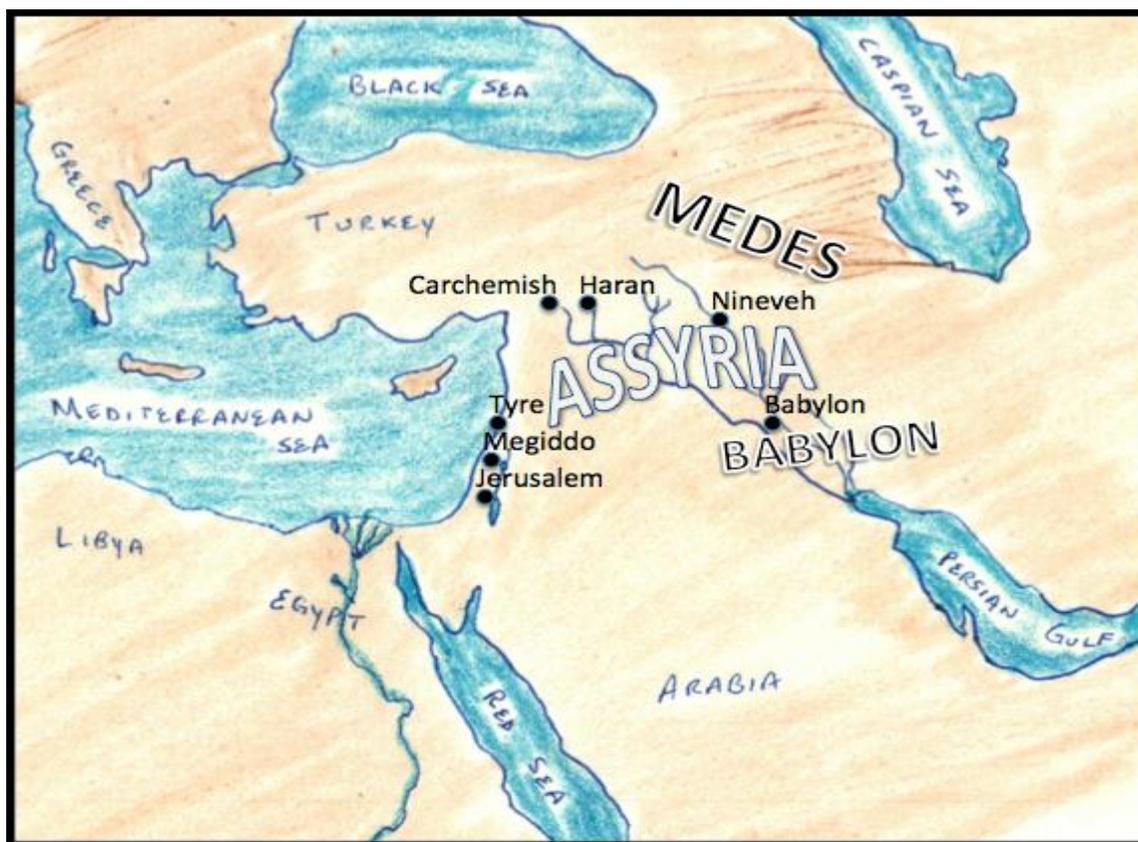
Archaeology has shown how thoroughly correct Nahum's prophecy was. A famed archaeologist Austen Henry Layard was born in 1817. At that time, there was no

³ Russell, John Malcolm, *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum*, (Yale 1997), at 24.

⁴ Parrot, Andre, at 29. The photo of Nineveh's walls now reconstructed are from Roaf at 187.

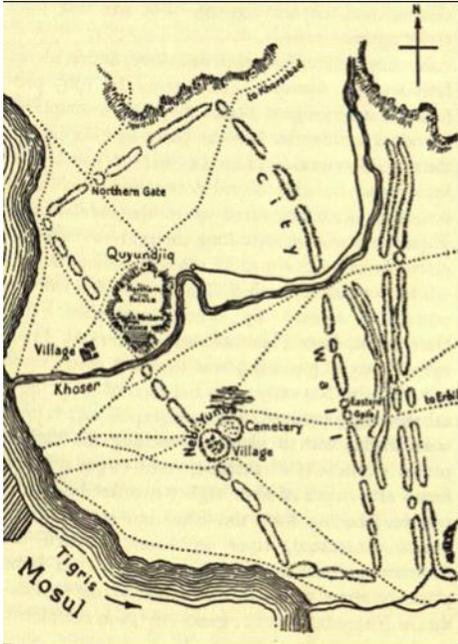
“proof” that the Biblical city of Nineveh ever existed. Other than an early medieval reference to a battle around the area of Nineveh in 626, there was no ruin, no artifact, or other tangible evidence of Nineveh. There was not even any direct evidence the Assyrian Empire existed as set forth in Scripture. That all changed with Layard.⁵

Layard was in his late twenties when he uncovered the ruins of Nineveh. In the 1840's and 1850's, multiple discoveries of the Assyrian Empire's ruins brought forth to academia a whole new discipline of study – Assyriology. This time period saw the discovery of thousands of cuneiform tablets from the library of Ashurbanipal, the decoding of cuneiform, as well as the discovery of Assyrian palaces and reliefs, and the acquisition by a foreign library of most of these valuable archaeological remains.



In its days, Nineveh stood on the left bank of the Tigris River where the smaller Khoser River intercepted it.

⁵ A thrilling narration of Layard's life and discoveries was written by UP correspondent and New York Times writer Arnold Brackman. *The Luck of Nineveh* (McGraw Hill 1978).



The Khoser actually flowed through the town⁶ through openings in the city's walls with floodgates north of town to control the river. Those floodgates may have been a principal cause for the rapid demise of Nineveh. Nineveh's fall in August, 612 came unusually rapidly, and some suspect that the opening of the flood gates after an unusual water build up could have sent a torrent of water that would have crashed the walls and gates of the city that bordered the river. This would either weaken them for siege machines, or open up avenues of intrusion for the invading armies. This was seen in Nahum's oracle of Nineveh's fall referenced earlier from Nahum 2:5,

the siege tower is set up. The river gates are opened; the palace melts away.

The archaeological remains confirm the desolation set out by Nahum. The palaces were sacked and burned. Battle details were better understood once a cuneiform tablet was deciphered in 1923. The tablet explained,

[In the fourteenth year] the king of Akkad ["Babylon"] mobilized his army... they went along the bank of the Tigris and ... in Nineveh... From the month of *Simanu* to the month of *Abu*, three times they battled(?)... a mighty assault he made upon the city. In the month of *Abu*, [the x day, the city was taken]... a great slaughter was made of the peoples and nobles. On that day Sin-shar-ishkun, king of Assyria, fled from the city (?)... Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off. The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap.⁷

Some Assyrian forces did escape and fought for several more years but by 609 BC, as prophesied by Nahum, Assyria was no more.

Nahum shows us all God's readiness to raise up and bring down kingdoms as he wills.

Matthew 20:1-20:28; 22:1-22:14; Mark 4:26-4:34; Matthew 25; Matthew 18:1-18:6

⁶ The above picture is from Parrot, at 22.

⁷ This standard translation of the tablet was by C. J. Gadd and published under the title *The Fall of Nineveh, The Newly Discovered Babylonian Chronicle*. The tablet itself is in the British Museum, No. 21, 901, and Gadd's translation as included in this lesson is from the reproduction by Luckenbill, Daniel, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, (Greenwood Press 1968), Vol. 2, at 417ff.

These gospel passages set out more of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom. In Matthew 20, Jesus taught about the kingdom as one that is really a gift from the master, rather than something people earn (Matt 20:1-20:16). Shortly thereafter, James and John's mother came to Jesus trying to get her sons primo positions in the kingdom, something she clearly had no business trying to do (Matt 20:20-20:28). Sandwiched in between these two kingdom stories are three very important verses. Matthew included a time where Jesus told his twelve that he would soon be crucified and raised on the third day. This is the price Jesus would pay for the kingdom. It was the price not only of a master, but of one who seeks to serve (Matt 20:28).

The Mark 4 passages recount Jesus' parable of the kingdom as seed scattered that grows without people realizing it. This also has Mark's account of the mustard seed from the earlier reading in Matthew 13.

Matthew 25 has two long parables about the kingdom, one using ten young maidens to teach the need for wisdom and preparation for the kingdom. Those who do not realize it will come at an unknown hour and who therefore do not prepare for it will miss it! The second parable of the Talents teaches the need to live responsibly now in light of the future kingdom. The chapter closes with Jesus teaching that the kingdom is real and serious. It comes at the end of the age and things will be sorted out right at that time.

Matthew 18:1-6 is a final insert on the greatest in the kingdom of heaven being the one most childlike. Humility wins the day in God's kingdom, not arrogance and self-importance.

1 Timothy 6:11-6:16

This is a closing in Paul's letter to his young protégé in the faith, Timothy. Paul urged Timothy to pursue godly traits, fighting the fight of faith and taking hold of eternal life. As Jesus made his good confession before Pilate, Timothy was to stay free from reproach and await the appearing of Jesus in his kingdom, the "blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords" – the one dwelling in "unapproachable light."

Luke 13:18-13:21; 18:15-18:17

These final verses contain Luke's recounting of Jesus telling the parables of the mustard seed and leaven. The readings end with Jesus again asserting that the kingdom belongs to the children and those who enter with childlike faith.

May 1

GOD'S AUTHORITY OVER RULERS (John 19:1-19:16)

Pilate was very uncomfortable judging Jesus. Something about Jesus and the way he conducted himself had Pilate concerned. The concern grew when Pilate was told Jesus

had “made himself the Son of God” (Jn 19:7). Try as Pilate might, he could have no real substantive conversation with Jesus to satisfy his concerns. Pilate told Jesus to talk, since Pilate had authority to release or punish Jesus. Jesus’ answer was that Pilate had only the authority given him “from above.” That God gave authority to earthly rulers is the theme for the contextual readings from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 30-32

YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, was unique and set apart in Israel, but was never to be understood as simply the God of Israel. Part of God’s holy uniqueness was that he ruled and reigned beyond the borders of Israel. In a time where people set aside certain locations for worship, thinking those were locations where divinity reigned as opposed to locations where he was missing, such was not the case with *YHWH*. *YHWH* chose Jerusalem and the temple as a special place, but it was always *YHWH*’s choice, for *YHWH* truly reigned everywhere.

That is why we have passages like Ezekiel 30-32 where YHW God pronounces judgment over Egypt, its rulers, and its gods. *YHWH* was not a simple mountain god reigning in Jerusalem. *YHWH* reigned and ruled over all creation, all nations, and all kings. All authority came from *YHWH*. No king reigned in secret.

May 2

THE CRUCIFIXION (John 19:17-19:42)

In the crucifixion, we have one bookend of the turning point for humanity’s eternal destiny. John gives the account decades after the other gospel writers, giving him a chance to add some additional details. The gospels give the history of the crucifixion, drawing upon Old Testament prophecy to do so. In Hebrews, we read more of the theology explaining the historical narratives.

Matthew 27:32-27:61; Mark 15:33-15:41; Psalm 22:1-22:21; 22:25-22:31; Hebrews 6:13-6:20; 10:19-10:31

Matthew’s account spends time discussing the mocking of Jesus while hanging on the cross. The mockery came from the high in society (prominent Jews) as well as the low (the robbers hanging with Jesus). Matthew and Mark also gave Jesus’ cry quoting from Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Psalm 22 is a tremendous Psalm to read with the crucifixion. It begins as Jesus quoted it,

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Pslm 22:1).

If we read to the end of the Psalm, and if we consider why this Psalm was echoing in Jesus’ mind, we read of the victory that is coming:

it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it (Pslm 22:20-22:21).

Matthew also told of the temple curtain tearing from top to bottom.

The contrast of location of the scenes in Matthew's narrative should not be missed. On the ground, the people revile Jesus who is lifted up on the cross. From above, God rips the temple curtain, signifying the change in the priestly system.

Hebrews 6:13-6:20 places the temple into a theological context of the narrative explaining that Jesus has gone behind the temple curtain, going into the inner place where a high priest could minister before God.⁸ Hebrews 10:19-31 explains the ramifications of this to the believer. Jesus has not only opened a way through the temple for all believers to approach God, but has washed believers clean in the process so that the approach can be made in confidence and holiness.

Proverbs 25:21-25:22

This proverb is added for the narrative of Jesus being offered the sour wine for his thirst. May God bless the soul of the one who did this for our Savior.

Leviticus 16

In Leviticus 16, we have the procedures set out for the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies, a process the writer of Hebrews explains Jesus did for all people. Before entering, a sin offering / blood sacrifice must occur for the sins of the people as well as the Priest entering. Not even the High Priest could come before God with sin. Before entering the presence of God, special clothing was worn, clothing deemed pure and clean. The priest was to bathe before putting on the clothes, signifying the need for full cleanliness.

This passage is carried into context by the Hebrew's passage in two ways. First, we now see Jesus in the Leviticus 16 procedure as the sacrificial animal, truly taking away the sins of the people and the sins of those coming before the presence of God. Jesus is also seen entering into the presence of God on behalf of the people. But the writer of

⁸ There were two temple curtains, and the inner curtain separated the Holy of Holies. Matthew does not indicate which curtain was torn. It might more likely be the outer curtain since it would be more readily seen. However, if the inner curtain was torn, that would certainly be well-known as it would have been discussed by most all priests. Knowing which curtain really makes no difference. The point is the temple system and the separating walls (curtains) are abolished in Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Hebrews explained that Jesus had done something More. Jesus also prepared the way for believers to enter before God. We can readily see the parallels of a believer as Jesus set out baptism (the washing) and becomes the sacrifice whose blood is sprinkled over the people for forgiveness of sins. In Galatians, Paul also writes of Jesus as the garment that people wear showing their purity before God (Gal 3:27).

THE RESURRECTION (John 20:1-20:29)

According to early church tradition, John wrote several decades later than Matthew, Mark or Luke. It makes sense then that John would include some more resurrection details than the other gospel writers. By the time John wrote, for most people, the resurrection was a second-generation event. Most eyewitnesses were dead. Reading the earlier resurrection accounts of Matthew and Mark give the important details that were used by those in ministry with those gospels.

Matthew 27:62-28:15

Matthew gives the account of guards getting placed at the tomb. This aspect to the resurrection has always been troublesome to those who consider the events fiction or manufactured by Jesus' followers. The guards would have been under extreme penalty for failure to keep their post. After the resurrection, we are told that the priests offered them money to give an excuse. The excuse is almost laughable. The guards recounted that they had fallen asleep, and that Jesus' followers had stolen his body while they were sleeping! This, of course, makes no sense. How would the guards have known who took the body if they were asleep? For that matter, how would the guards have known *what* happened if they were asleep? The story was still the explanation at the time of Matthew's gospel.

Mark 15:42-16:20

Some see that Mark names an additional woman witness (Salome) not mentioned in Matthew and cry out that the accounts conflict. Of course, this does not mean the accounts conflict, rather it means that some are the accounts as 21st century western thinkers rather than first century middle-eastern writers! No gospel writer says that *only* Mary Magdalene, or another Mary were the only people there. Each writer writes from what they know. Matthew may have heard from each Mary and included their stories. Mark, who wrote Peter's gospel, may have also had the insight from Salome and so included her. Alternatively, each may have included those who were readily available or known to their respective audiences. We do not know for certain one way or the other.

One thing we can note. As a lawyer I have learned when eyewitnesses give the exact same account, not allowing for differences in perspective or focus, those are the times where the stories become suspicious on authenticity. A telltale sign of people

fabricating stories is precision with one another on details. Liars work to get it perfectly right.

Leviticus 23:9-23:14

Here we have another Old Testament reminder of sacrifice, this time related to the offering of first fruits. This is a spring offering and feast that occurred on the Sabbath following Passover. This would have been the feast set for the resurrection Sunday of Jesus. It was accompanied by the sacrifice of a male lamb without blemish, and signified a dedication to God.

Psalm 47

This psalm of praise is placed with the resurrection story to give the reader a chance to praise the God who sits on his throne over all nations bringing victory to his people!

Psalm 107

This Psalm also calls on the people to praise the Lord. Praise is called forth from four groups, signifying all people of the earth. In poetic fashion, we can find ourselves in one or more of these groups often in life.

Group one are those in the deserts of life – barren, hungry, thirsty, and alone. These God leads to satisfaction, food, water, and life (Ps. 107:4-9). Group two are those bearing the consequences of rebellion before God. After turning to God in repentance, he cuts them from their shackles and leads them forth in victory (Pslm 107:10-107:16). Group three are also foolish sinners in need of rescue. God comes forth out of his steadfast love and heals them from their distress (Pslm 107:17-107:22). The final group are caught up in the business of life, sometimes riding high, other times pitched low. This group also finds in God one who stills the wild ride, bringing peace to each (Pslm 107:23-107:32).

The Psalm ends with a recap, offering the truth that in God, life's rescue is complete. Life has meaning, hope, and destiny. That is a lesson of the resurrection.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 18

1. Can you relate to Peter or the other apostles that abandoned Jesus when the times got tight? How?
2. When did you last take the time to thoughtfully reflect on the sins in your life? Have you given thanks for the forgiveness that came from the high price paid by Jesus?

3. The old song says, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.” What is the significance of Jesus’ kingdom in your life and what would you give to gain it? What do you think you need to give to gain it?

Week Nineteen Readings
Jn 20:31 – Acts 2:41

<p style="text-align: center;">5/5 Jesus – Miracle Worker Jn 20:30-20:31</p> <p>Matt 9:1-9:8 Matt 9:18-9:20 Num 15:37-15:41 Matt 9:21-9:34 Ex 22:18 Matt 12:22-12:45 2 Chron 8-9 Matt 15:21-15:39 Matt 16:5-16:12 Matt 17:14-17:21 Mrk 9:14-9:29 Lev 15 Matt 17:24-17:27 Matt 20:29-20:34</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/6 Jesus – Miracle Worker (Cont'd) Jn 20:30-20:31</p> <p>Mrk 1:21-1:45 Lev 14:1-14:32 Mrk 2:1-2:7 Isa 43 Mrk 2:8-2:12 Luk 5:17-5:26 Luk 17:11-17:19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/7 Jesus – Miracle Worker (Cont'd) Jn 20:30-20:31</p> <p>Mrk 5 Mrk 3:20-3:30 Mrk 7:24-7:37 Mrk 8:1-8:26 Mrk 10:46-10:52 Luk 8:22-8:56 Luk 14:1-14:6 Luk 18:35-18:43</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/8 Peter Reinstated Jn 21:1-21:19</p> <p>Pslm 130 Pslm 131 Pslm 13 Pslm 85</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/9 The Promise of the Holy Spirit and Ascension Acts 1:1-15</p> <p>Pslm 132 Isa 19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Matthias Replaces Judas Acts 1:12-1:26</p> <p>Mrk 14:1-14:11 Ezek 8 Mrk 14:12-14:72 Prov 18:18</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/10 The Holy Spirit Comes Acts 2:1-2:13</p> <p>Luk 18:31-18:34 Lev 23:15-23:22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost Acts 2:14-2:41</p> <p>Joel 2:12-2:32 Mrk 12:35-12:37 Zech 1:1-1:6 1 Chron 11-12, 17</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/11 Off</p>
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