

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 10

March 3–9, 2014

John 4:43-4:45

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 ten, along with the readings for week eleven appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Ten Readings

<p>March 3 - 9 Jesus in Galilee Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>(The Sermon on Mount Insert Cont'd) Context: John does not tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount. It is inserted here where John simply references Jesus teaching in Galilee. The passages adjoining each reading are the Old Testament sources that define much of what Jesus taught.</p> <p>3 Sermon on Mount Matt 7:1-7:5 Ezek 35 Luk 6:37-6:45 Matt 7:6 Prov 9 Prov 23:9 Phil 3:1-3:11 Matt 7:7-7:11 Luk 11:5-11:13 1 Jn 3:19-3:24 1 Jn 5:13-5:15 2 Chron 14-16</p>	<p>4 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:12 Luk 6:27-36 Matt 7:13-7:14 Ezek 46 Pslm 16 Prov 28</p> <p>5 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:15-7:20 Deut 13 Jer 14-16</p> <p>6 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:15-7:20 2 Chron 17-20</p>	<p>7 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:21-7:23 Jer 35 2 Kgs 16:1-17:5 Isa 14:24-15:9 2 Kgs 17:6-17:23</p> <p>8 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:21-7:23 Cont'd Hos 4-5 Hos 8-9 Matt 7:24-7:28 Luk 6:46-6:49</p> <p>9 Off</p>
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JESUS IN GALILEE (John 4:43-45) - THE SERMON ON MOUNT INSERT

John does not tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount. For the next several weeks, the Sermon on the Mount will be inserted here, where John simply references Jesus teaching in Galilee. The passages adjoining each reading are the Old Testament sources that define much of what Jesus taught.

Mar. 3 Matthew 7:1-7:5 with Ezekiel 35 and Luke 6:37-6:45

The tendency of many is to read the Matthew passage with a bit of comfort, thinking that it is not too hard not to “judge” another in the sense of announcing “judgment” upon one sin or another, knowing that God is the judge of sin. Jesus’ point, however, is not so restrictive. Matthew’s verb in Greek, *krino* (κρίνω) is often the legal idea of judging as in a court, but it also is used more generally for criticizing or finding fault with someone.¹ If we consider that Jesus is admonishing his disciples against being critical of others, the passage is suddenly not quite so comfortable!

We then see Jesus using a marvelous carpenter’s illustration. One can’t work in wood much without getting a speck of sawdust in the eyes. Jesus taught that being critical of the shortcomings of others (deservedly or not), bears hypocritically on the one who makes the judgment. For that one has a log in his/her own eye.

The Ezekiel passage likely does not make sense at first blush as a contextual reading for the Matthew judgment teaching. If unpacked a bit, though, the context becomes clearer. Ezekiel 35 contains two judgments by God, one against “Mount Seir,” a reference to the peoples occupying the land southeast of Judah, and one against Edom, another grouping of peoples in the same area. Both were historically enemies of Israel and Judah. The prophetic judgment arose out of the reaction of the adversaries to the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC.

Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment... (Ezek. 35:5).

The Ezekiel prophecy then announces the same reaction of God to the Judah’s enemies as Jesus does to those who are critical of others, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt 7:1). God’s judgment on Judah’s enemies will be in reaction to their judgment upon Judah. We resume the quotation from Ezekiel 35 with verse 6.

¹ “κρίνω,” Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (U. of Chi. 2001).

...therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you.

This judgment in Ezekiel 35 also reflects the added emphasis from Jesus' admonition as we read it in Luke's narrative. One's attitude to others in criticism and judgment will not only be returned, but be returned in "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luk 6:38). We see that in the conclusion to the selected response of God from verses 7 through 9 of Ezekiel 35.

I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation, and I will cut off from it all who come and go. And I will fill its mountains with the slain. On your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Matthew 7:6; Proverbs 9; 23:9; and Philippians 3:1-3:11

In Matthew 7:6, Jesus' taught not to give holy things to the unholy, likening it to throwing pearls before pigs. The earliest church writing outside of the New Testament, the *Didache*², related this passage to teaching closed communion, not giving the Eucharist to the unbaptized. However, there is nothing in Matthew's immediate context that restricts the teaching to communion.

For context to the passage, we have set out two readings from Proverbs. The point of Proverbs 23:9 is found in a verse. Proverbs 9 is a full chapter needing to be read together. In 23:9 is a simple admonition against speaking in the hearing of a fool. He will simply "despise the good sense of your words." They are wasted. They are pearls given to pigs.

² Scholars date the *Didache* between 50 A.D. and 100 A.D. The reason for the early dates is the references to church structure that seem to indicate that the "single Bishop for a region" had not been fully developed yet. The reasons for a late date are the apparent references (or awareness) in the *Didache* to Matthew's gospel. Of course, if conservative scholars are correct on dating Matthew's gospel early, then the *Didache* rightly takes its place as a very early document in at least the 50 to 75 A.D. time range.

Regardless of the dating disputes, scholars agree the *Didache* is a training manual for 1st century Christians written to give advice on morality and daily living as well as church practices. The *Didache* itself is not a book of dogma or doctrine. Nor is it a gospel. It contains very little on subjects of grace, justification, forgiveness or the life of Christ. The book contains very straightforward and simple instructions about life, closely akin to parts of the Sermon on the Mount.

In Proverbs 9, we read a contrast of wisdom and folly. Wisdom is constructive for a productive life. It is the foundation of home and work. It gives meaning and sense to things. Folly, on the other hand, is loud, seductive and vacuous. It appeals to the foolish who have no better sense than to be led by what sounds and feels good. Such people are unaware they are headed into destruction.

Between the contrast of wisdom (9:1-9:6) and folly (9:13-9:18) is an interlude of individual proverbs (9:7-9:12). These individual proverbs can be characterized in the 21st century as “commercial messages” that teach the same points, but leave behind the parallel structure of the opening section to the closing section of Proverbs 9.

In these individual passages, it is taught that correcting a scoffer is pointed as useless and dangerous, while working with wise people is productive. Wisdom begins with fearing God, something that comes from an understanding of who God is. As we understand God, we begin to understand life in such a way that it becomes full and meaningful.

Our last passage in the context of Matthew 7:6 is Philippians 3:1-11. Here Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to recognize the value of the holy in life. Using Jesus’ expression of a dog, Paul applied it not simply to those who live outside of God’s wisdom, abusing life rather than letting it flourish under God’s instruction. Paul also applied it to those who in their own arrogance and pride believe that they live a life of worth and merit on their own before God. Paul pointed out the key to holiness is relying upon the righteousness of Christ rather than one’s own efforts. No matter how good one lives one’s own life, real holiness is found in Christ and being in an intimate relationship with him.

Matthew 7:7-7:11; Luke 11:5-11:13; 1 John 3:19-3:24; 5:13-5:15; 2 Chronicles 14-16

In this passage Jesus points out a marvelous and encouraging assurance. If we ask, seek, and reach out for (“knock”), we will receive. Many think it beyond God to be concerned with any one individual and the particular needs in one’s day. Jesus puts a human analogy onto the face of his promise. What parent refuses food to their asking or hungry children? What parent deceives their child, giving them something harmful under the guise of something good? No one -- at least no one in his or her right mind. So it is with God.

The contextual readings for this begin with Luke’s narrative of this teaching. Luke adds flavor, adding the analogy of our behavior with friends.

In 1 John, we have two sets of readings best taken together. In 1 John 3, we have an admonition that goes well with the teaching in Matthew, at least for many who fear

God's love does not reach to them in the depths of their own sinfulness. Many read the Matthew passage, but worry about how God will respond to them because they know themselves unworthy of his love. John offered the gentle assurance the believer should take "whenever our hearts condemn us" – "God is greater than our heart!" (1 Jn 3:20). We should have confidence that God will answer our prayers and give as we ask. Of course God is not going to give his son a serpent! We need to not be surprised if God does not give us what is outside his will. In fact, we should not want anything outside his will! This is echoed clearly in 1 Jn 5:13-5:15, specifically in verse 14,

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Our final contextual reading for this passage is from 2 Chronicles 14-16. It is the story of King Asa, a good king of pure heart, seeking God's help and serving God as best as he could. From this story we see the truth that we are not only assured of receiving when we ask, seek, and knock, but we are also challenged not to seek from any other source than the Lord!

For 36 years Asa walked in faith and the blessings of the Lord. He asked of God and God faithfully answered. Yet in his 36th year, things changed. Asa began acting out of his own wisdom and strength rather than from seeking aid from the Lord. To his own detriment, Asa sought help from the king of Syria and lost opportunities that God had for him. When confronted with this truth by "Hanani the seer," Asa punished Hanani. In the last two years of Asa's life, disease set on him. Chronicles reads in such a way as indicating that if Asa had sought the Lord's help, even then, he would have received it. Instead, Asa relied on his doctors who did absolutely nothing good for him until he died two years later.

Mar. 4 Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:27-6:36

Matthew 7:12 sets out what has become called The Golden Rule, frequently quoted as, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." The phrase is the positive inverse of a phrase found in the intertestamental book of Tobit that reads, "Do to no one what you yourself dislike." A prominent rabbi in Jerusalem slightly older than Jesus (Hillel – 32BC-AD7) is quoted as saying,

That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.³

³ Talmud, *Shabbat*, 31a.11-13 tells the story of Hillel in contrast to another prominent rabbi Shammai: "On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit that was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him,

Jesus used the phrase in a positive way, explaining that the maxim summarized “the Law and the Prophets.”

Luke recorded the same teaching, but added more of Jesus’ thought placing it into the context of loving one’s enemies, blessing one’s accusers, and pray for one’s persecutors. This is a reflection of God’s ethics of wanting the very best for people, even those particularly in need of God!

Matthew 7:13-7:14; Ezekiel 46; Psalm 100 and Proverbs 28

In this Matthew passage, Jesus points to the broad and wide gate that leads to destruction urging his disciples to take the gate less travelled – the narrow gate.

In context we set first Ezekiel 46. The context of this passage is not so much in the meaning of Ezekiel 46 as it is in the way it frames thinking about gates. In our 21st century mindset, we generally just picture some gate to a road, field or maybe a garden. Gates were different in Biblical times, and the entry to holy places like the temple were protected by gates. Certain gates were for the masses, whereas other gates were reserved for VIP’s (princes and certain priests).

To enter by a narrow gate was not simply something rare, it was something that was an honor. It is a selective gate, one for the chosen few.

Psalm 100 was undoubtedly known well to Jesus and his disciples as a praise and worship Psalm. The psalm not only calls forth praise for the people of the world, but also urges his people to enter his gates with thanksgiving, proceeding into his courts with praise. God is great and faithfully loves with a steadfast love. Why would anyone knowingly choose to enter any gate other than that of the Lord?

Proverbs 28 sets out a number of proverbs that reverberate around this theme. The chapter points out that the way of the wicked is one of fear, injustice, shame, pitfalls in life, isolation, and discontent. That is the where the wide gate leads. The narrow gate, however, is one of righteousness and wisdom. It leads to a confident boldness, justice, integrity, understanding, peace, glory, mercy , deliverance, blessings, satisfaction, and enrichment.

Mar. 5

Matthew 7:15-7:20; Deuteronomy 13; Jeremiah 14-16

In this passage, Jesus warns people against “false prophets,” those who proclaim holiness but live lives of ungodliness. These are people whom Jesus calls “wolves in

‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.’”.

sheep's clothing." Jesus explains that you can tell a tree by its fruits, and you can tell a true prophet similarly.

In context we read Deuteronomy 13 that taught Israel that even if a "prophet" arose who correctly forecasted some event, if that prophet taught rebellion against God and his laws, the prophet was not to be followed, but was to be put to death. No one should be teaching people to live against God or to follow other gods. These people were knowable by their fruits, the fruits including the teaching itself. Was the teaching of God and his holiness or of something else?

Jeremiah frequently contrasts the word of the Lord he has received, which God promised to oversee, with the false prophetic words given to the people. When Judah was enduring a drought, the "word of the LORD" came to Jeremiah exposing the drought as judgment. Rather than hear the peoples cries for water, God acts on their iniquities:

The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought... Thus says the LORD concerning this people: "They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins" (Jer. 14:1, 14:10).

In contrast to Jeremiah's faithful proclamation of God's word (which God faithfully oversees to a true conclusion), there were false prophets beguiling the people with lies:

Then I said: "Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" And the LORD said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds (Jer. 14:13-14:14).

God then spoke another word to Jeremiah proclaiming the terrible end of those who spoke false words of God:

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not come upon this land': By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed (Jer. 14:15).

As we continue to read Jeremiah 15 and 16 we see that God was not bashful about his judgment and what was coming to Judah. Jeremiah sought to intervene on behalf of the people before God, seeking God to change his mind and bring healing to the people and the land. In chapter 14, while hearing the "word of the Lord" about a drought in the

land, Jeremiah was moved to intercede on behalf of his people. God's response was certainly not what Jeremiah wanted to hear:

The LORD said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (Jer. 14:11-14:12).

Surely Jeremiah did not take God's refusal to intervene too personally. The Lord was emphatic that it was not because Jeremiah was inadequate as an intercessor:

Then the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! (Jer. 15:1).

There were other times where Jeremiah was complaining to God because he perceived God **did not** bring proper retribution upon the evil. These were times where Jeremiah was calling down God's judgment

Jeremiah's complaining to the Lord included the treatment Jeremiah received from others due to his obedience in proclaiming the hard words of the Lord to the people. Jeremiah discusses these complaints with the Lord in Jeremiah 15:10ff, beginning,

Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me.

Jeremiah knew even in this misery where his hope must reside. Reading Jeremiah we get both a true prophet whose words and ministry aligned with God's mission as well as the false prophets who said what the people wanted to hear, regardless of whether it was true or right. These prophets did not bear real fruit, nor did their lives.

Mar. 6 Matthew 7:15-7:20 and 2 Chronicles 17-20

A second illustration of the difference in false prophets and those who truly spoke for God is found in this day's reading of 2 Chron. 17-20 and the story of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was a godly king in Judah who not only followed the Lord and his Law, but sent teachers throughout the land to teach the people God's Law. The fear of the Lord was upon the neighboring kingdoms and they made peace with Judah.

The Israelite king in the Northern Kingdom was Ahab, an ungodly king married to the wicked idolater Jezebel. Jehoshaphat and Ahab made a marriage alliance with their children (Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab) and it gave occasion for Ahab to ask Jehoshaphat to join him in warring against Benhadad at

Ramoth-gilead (see 1 Kings 20-22). Before they went into battle, Jehoshaphat asked Ahab to consult the word of the LORD. Ahab gathered 400 prophets, but none of them genuinely God's. The 400 all said exactly what their king wanted to hear, "Go to war!"

Jehoshaphat suspected something was wrong, for he again asked for the insight of a prophet. Jehoshaphat was not concerned with numbers (400), but was more concerned about getting a real prophet of the LORD.

Ahab noted that he had one such prophet, but was none too fond of him.

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil" (2 Chron. 18:7).

The king sent for Micaiah, and the messengers forewarned Micaiah that all the 400 prophets in one voice had assured the king of victory. Micaiah was asked to join the chorus. Micaiah's response was simple, "What my God says, I will speak" (2 Chron. 18:13).

In reading Micaiah's interchange with the king, one needs to read carefully to capture the sarcasm of Micaiah when he first stays "on message" with the 400 false prophets. The king presses Micaiah to tell the truth, and Micaiah delivers the bad news that the battle will be lost and Ahab die. Ahab had Micaiah arrested and held until the battle was over and Ahab returned home. Of course, Micaiah was speaking the word of the Lord and Ahab did in deed die from the battle.

Jehoshaphat, however, returned home safely.

Mar. 7 Matthew 7:21-7:23; Jeremiah 35; 2 Kings 16:1-17:5; Isaiah 14:24-15:9 and 2 Kings 17:6-17:23

In Matthew 7:21-7:23, Jesus spoke of the difference in claiming to know Jesus as Lord, and truly having Jesus as Lord, even among those who proclaim they are acting in Jesus' name. There is a long line of Old Testament passages that speak to the difference in claiming allegiance to Yahweh on our own terms, and truly following him.

Jeremiah 35 begins the context reading with the story of the Rechabites. Who were the Rechabites? We don't know!⁴ And it's really not relevant to the story. The story tells us all we need to know about them. The Rechabites were a tribe whose ancestral father

⁴ Scholars have offered numerous theories ranging from the Rechabites being a group of ascetic nomads to being roaming chariot manufacturers/repairmen. (r-ch-b is the Hebrew word for "chariot"). For an excursus on different theories and their respective strengths and weaknesses see Keown and Scalise, *Word Bible Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, (Thomas Nelson 1995), at 195.

Jonadab forbade to drink wine, build a home, plant a field, nor tend a vineyard. These were people who had moved into Jerusalem out of fear of the Babylonian army coursing through the country.

The Lord told Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into a temple area and give them some wine. Jeremiah did so, setting up the point of the story as well as its context for the Matthew passage. In the temple, with the Lord's true prophet offering wine, the Rechabites could easily have rationalized the command of their forefather and had wine, even claiming to do it in the name of the Lord, whose temple they were in and whose prophet made the offer. But the Rechabites did not do so. They insisted on keeping the command as given to them.

The Lord then made the point in this living parable to Jeremiah, and through him to the people of Jerusalem. The Rechabites carefully followed the instructions of their earthly father, but the Jews refused to follow the directions of their heavenly Father. The refusal of the Jews to follow God would be met with punishment while the holiness of the Rechabites would meet blessing.

The rest of the context readings flow together, although without good knowledge of the history of Israel around 740-700BC, it is difficult to follow. Attached as an appendix to this lesson is a discourse on the events and history for those interested in more material. It is also helpful for understanding the historical context of the Hosea readings that follow in the next section.

In brief, the world was in turmoil during the reign of King Ahaz in the northern kingdom of Israel. Tiglath Pileser had the throne in Assyria and was year-by-year expanding his territories. In Judah, King Ahaz was involved in more local problems. Israel and Syria to the north, Philistia to the northwest, Edom to the southeast, all came at various times wreaking havoc on Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly urged Ahaz to turn to God for direction in the turbulent times, but Ahaz refused. Instead Ahaz went to Assyria and sought its help, going so far as to dump the altar of Yahweh and rebuild a mock altar like that found in Damascus. Isaiah continued to prophesy into the situation showing not only the dominance of Assyria but its eventual demise as well.

So in the Kings passage we read judgment upon Judah while in the Isaiah passage there is judgment upon Assyria, upon Philistia and Moab. No one escapes the judgment of the Lord, even among those acting in his name. God is not interested in those who use him to achieve their earthly ends and desires. God wants the humble in heart who care to pursue him in true holiness as is continued in the passages for March 8.

This continues the historical era set out earlier turning to the prophet Hosea. The book of Hosea contains the prophecies of an Israelite from the Northern Kingdom named Hosea. We know little of him, learning only what we can glean from the verses of his prophecies. These verses, however, tell us some key information that is worth noting before we plunge into the book.

Some scholars call Hosea the “death-bed prophet of Israel.” Hosea is the last prophet of the Northern Kingdom that we know spoke God’s words of impending doom and warning prior to the destruction and fall of Samaria in 722/721 BC. Hosea’s name takes on important meaning. Hosea means “Salvation.” It is a root in the name of Jesus, which in its Hebrew form is the “Yah” of Yahweh, followed by the same root of Hosea. Hosea was the salvation of his wife Gomer in chapter three, expressing the heart and ultimately actions of God in buying back his people through Jesus, “Yahweh’s Hosea.”

Chapters four through eight illustrate the depths of God’s love that it continued even through Israel’s sin, where there was,

...no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land (Hos. 4:1).

Instead there was,

...swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; [while] they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (Hos. 4:2).

God’s response is, in part, that the people were suffering from “a lack of knowledge.” This lack was not, however, from an unavailability to get knowledge. A remarkable thing about Hosea, which many scholars agree is a book coming out of the Northern Kingdom experiences of an 8th century prophet, is that the book shows awareness of the Torah as well as the books of Joshua and Judges (cf., Hos. 9:9 and Judges 19-21). For example, in Hosea 12:3ff, we read of Jacob taking Esau by the heel in the womb, of Jacob wrestling with the angel, Jacob’s dreaming encounter with God at Bethel, and more. Repeatedly, Hosea references God delivering the Israelites from Egypt and the Exodus story. Hosea even speaks of Adam’s original sin (Hos. 6:7). It was not that knowledge of God was *unavailable*; it was rejected and forgotten!

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hos. 4:6).


Instead of seeking God’s will in his revelation, they were seeking it from sticks! This was trading their holy covenantal relation with God in a way no different than a spouse trading their marriage covenant and becoming a prostitute!

My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore (Hos. 4:12).

In the midst of these accusations, Hosea uses a legal term of indictment, ריב (*rib*⁵). God’s “contention” (in the ESV) is his “lawsuit” or “legal complaint” against the priests. They had the law. The Priests were in charge of applying the law, teaching the law, and living by the law. They failed on all accounts. There was “no knowledge of God in the land.” Instead there was blatant breaking of multiple commandments. The same legal language is used not just for the priests, but also for the people:

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy (“lawsuit” – *rib*) with the inhabitants of the land (4:1).

Consider the indictment in Hosea 4 weighed just against the Ten Commandments:

Ten Commandments		Israelites
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No other gods 2. No graven images 3. Do not take God’s name in vain 4. Keep the Sabbath 5. Honor Father and mother 6. Do not kill 7. Do not commit adultery 8. Do not steal 9. Do not bear false witness 10. Do not covet 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Other gods (4:12-14) 2. Graven images (4:12, 17) 3. Do not even know God’s name and swearing wrongfully (4:1, 2) 4. Deny all knowledge of God and his creation and Sabbath (4:1, 6) 5. Sin with Father and mother (4:5) 6. Murderers (4:2) 7. Adulterers (4:2) 8. Stealing (4:2) 9. Lying (4:2) 10. Breaking all bounds (4:2)

In light of these atrocities, it is not surprising to see Hosea echo Amos’s dire prediction,

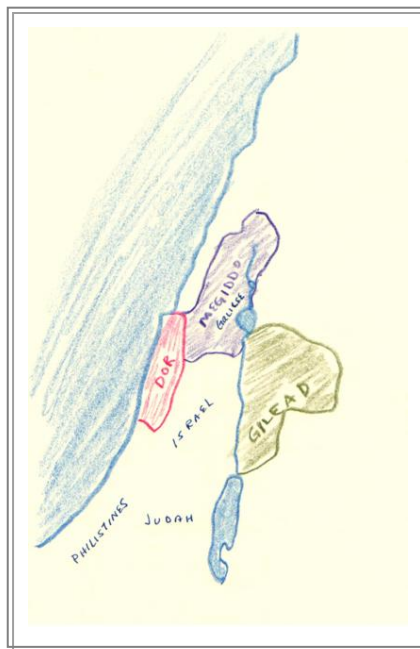
They shall not remain in the land of the LORD...they shall eat unclean food in Assyria... My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations (Hos. 9:3, 9:17).

⁵ As we recall our Hebrew lessons from earlier in this class, the “beyt” letter at the end of this word does not have a dot (a “dagesh”) in it, so is pronounced like a “v.” For consistency with the class’s Hebrew, we are transliterating it *rib*, but it is actually pronounced *riv*.

Hosea saw this beginning happening, even before the final fall of Samaria:

Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey wandering alone; Ephraim has hired lovers (Hos. 8:8-8:9).

This passage could refer to the payment of Menahem of 75,000 pounds of silver to Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kings 16:17-16:22), or the incursion of Tiglath-Pileser into the northern part of Israel. When T-P first conquered northern portions of Israel, he divided his new territories into three provinces. The province that was the way to the sea he called "Dor." The northernmost province including Galilee he called "Megiddo." The province east of the Jordan was called "Gilead." These provinces are referred to in Isaiah 9 as land that "in the latter time" God would make glorious. Isaiah called the three provinces, "the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1).



These Old Testament context passages demonstrate the seriousness of God's commitment, as well as the difference between simply calling the LORD God, which Israel did, and truly seeking him as Lord and God.

The passages leave everyone with the challenging words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-7:27 and Luke 6:46-6:49. Everyone gets to choose. We can be wise, hear the words of Jesus and build upon the rock of faithful obedience that flows from believing him true. Or we can be fools and ignore his words, seeking our own way in this world and living a life destined for failure.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 10

1. How many times a day do you say something negative about someone? Are we willing to "go to work on that," and learn to stop?
2. How can we mesh seeking from God with those times where our prayers go unanswered? How might it make a difference if we seek God's will rather than our own?
3. Where do we find it hardest to obey God? How might that be a reflection of shortcomings in our faith?

Week Eleven Readings

<p>Mar. 10 Jesus Heals Through Intercession Jn 4:46-4:54</p> <p><i>Context: Intercession for others is an old concept deeply rooted in the Old Testament.</i></p> <p>Gen 20 Ex 15:22-15:27 Num 12</p> <p>Jesus Attends a Feast Jn 5:1</p> <p><i>Context: Feasts were joyful and solemn occasions marking reliance upon God and his faithfulness.</i></p> <p>Deut 16:1-16:17 Pslm 81 Isa 25</p>	<p>Mar. 11. Jesus Heals on the Sabbath Jn 5:2-5:17</p> <p><i>Context: Repeatedly Jesus confounded his opponents because he realized what values trumped the Sabbath commandments.</i></p> <p>Ex 31:12-3:17 Ex 35:1-35:3 Luk 6:1-6:19 Luk 13:10-13:17 Matt 12:1-12:4 1 Sam 20-21 Prov 27:3-27:10</p> <p>Mar. 12. Jesus Heals on the Sabbath Jn 5:2-5:17 Cont'd</p> <p>Matt 12:5-12:8 Lev 23:1-23:3 Lev 25 Hag 2 Matt 12:9-12:21 Isa 42:1-42:4 Mrk 2:23-3:6 Num 15:32-15:36</p>	<p>Mar. 13 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-5:21</p> <p><i>Context: The uniqueness of Jesus' claims on God as Father are silhouetted in both other New Testament as well as Old Testament passages.</i></p> <p>Isa 1:6-1:7 Dan 3 Matt 16:13-16:20 Mrk 8:27-8:30 Matt 8:1-8:4 Lev 13:1-13:46 Num 5:1-4 Matt 8:5-8:34 Mrk 3:7-3:12 Luk 10:1-10:12 Prov 18:1 Luk 10:17-10:24 Heb 1:1-1:5 Pslm 2</p>	<p>Mar. 14 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-5:21 Cont'd</p> <p>Heb 1:6-1:9 Pslm 45 Heb 1:10-1:12 Pslm 102 Heb 1:13-1:14 Pslm 110 Matt 22:41-22:46</p> <p>Mar. 15 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-5:21 Cont'd</p> <p>Heb 5:1-5:6 Heb 7 Heb 2:1-2:4 Deut 31:14-31:29 Deut 18:15-18:22 Mrk 16:19-16:20 Heb 2:5-2:8 Pslm 8 Heb 2:9-2:10 Matt 16:21-16:28 1 Pet 1:1-1:21 Heb 2:11-2:12 Pslm 22:22-22:24 Heb 2:13 Pslm 18:1-18:3 Isa 8:16-8:22</p> <p>Mar. 16 Off</p>
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DISCOURSE ON THE FALL OF ISRAEL

We can always see and interpret things from a worldly perspective. That does not mean, however, that there is not also a perspective of faith. The idea that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17) does not mean that there is not an earthly perspective of the gift's origination.

This lesson we begin our study of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. As we do so, we will consider and analyze the fall from two perspectives: the secular one and the one of faith. For just as with the baseball swing, and so many other events, we are able to see earthly explanations for events. Yet in Kings, we see not only the earthly events and explanations, but we also see the spiritual insight of the Prophet Historian who wrote with a purpose greater than simply reciting history.

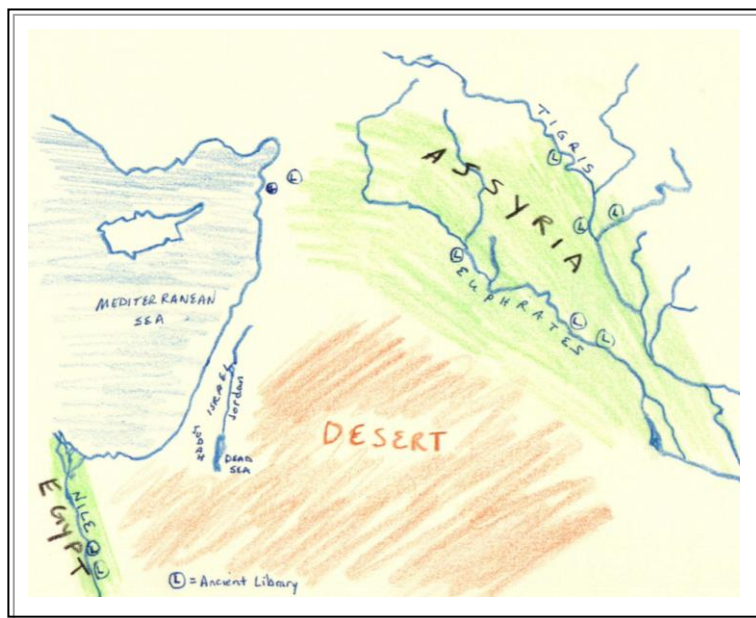
Our goal this first week is to set into perspective the earthly and spiritual perspectives, providing a background for the more in depth considerations in lessons to come.

THE SECULAR PERSPECTIVE

Why did Israel fall? More specifically, why did Israel fall over 100 years before the fall of Judah? What happened? A secular scholar can analyze the evidence and come up with a number of interrelated reasons why. The reasons would likely entail issues of geography (and geology), of political maneuverings, and, of course, of military strength. We consider each of these briefly.

Geography/Geology

Remembering our geography, Israel was in the distressing position of existing between two areas historically producing civilization's first superpowers. To the north Israel was the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers ("Mesopotamia"⁶). This area had produced large powerful civilizations for millennia taking advantage the year round availability



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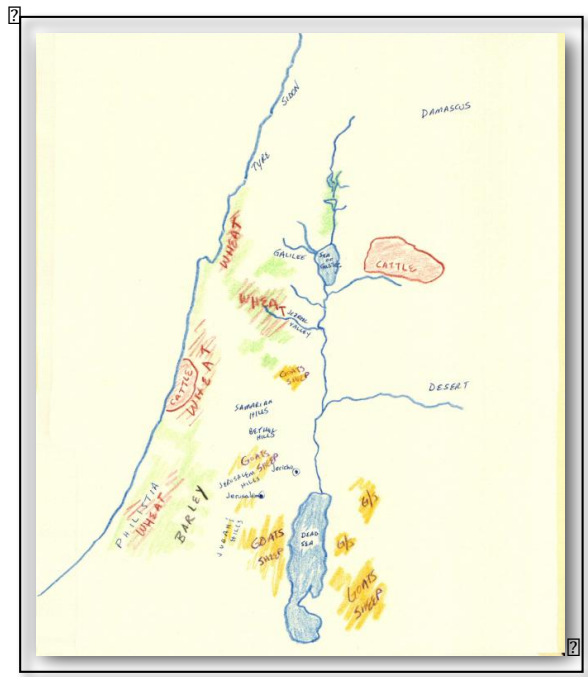
fresh water and arable land. This meant for stable societies that stayed put and grew productive having readily available foodstuffs. To the south, the situation was similar with the superpower of Egypt, built around the sustaining force of the Nile and its adjoining land. An interesting indicator of these early and large civilizations are the libraries that have been found in the Ancient Near East. There is clear evidence of vast collections of written materials in Mesopotamia and Egypt for over a millennia before any such evidence elsewhere.

The land between these two superpowers was adequate for tribal existences, and smaller societies, but it was not of such geology that large civilizations could easily be fostered and sourced there. Much of it was desert in the east. The west was bound by the Mediterranean Sea. Between the desert and the sea was land that was home to the Canaanites, the Israelites settlers after the exodus, the Philistine settlers from the Greek sea peoples, and many minor tribal kingdoms (Edom, Moab, Ammon, Syria/Damascus, Tyre/Sidon, etc.) There were also wandering tribes more affiliated with the location of their flocks than any particular town or city.

⁶ Mesopotamia is a composite word of "meso" from the Greek word for "in the middle" or "between" (μεσηγύ) and "potamia" from the Greek for "river" (ποταμός).

This land between the superpowers was useful land, even though it was not a natural producer of a large and powerful civilization. The land controlled trade routes from Egypt and Mesopotamia. John and James Monson call the Promised Land “The Land Between.”⁷ Then showing with incredible 3-D maps, the land as a bridge spanning the transportation routes for trade with and between the Superpowers. The Land Between was also a transportation option for moving trade inland from the Mediterranean Sea as well.

The land of Israel and Judah was diverse, including verdant valleys, lowlands (the “Shephelah”), and hills. There was also desert land with little more than scrub. Parts of the land received regular rain, while other parts were extremely arid. There were several productive lakes of good size as well as the Dead Sea, which, while it produced nothing living and no drinkable water, did provide a constant source of needed salt. (The Dead Sea was approximately 25% salt compared to 7% in the Mediterranean Sea.⁸) The Jordan River flowed into the lakes as another source of clean water. In the higher elevations, snow could fall.



This land produced different crops, depending on the type of soil and exposure to rain. The land produced wheat and barley. It provided grazing for cattle, sheep and goats. There was fishing and orchards of grapes and olives. The crops were dependent upon rainfall, however, for any irrigation was very limited, with the water bodies being in the Rift Valley without any real means of pumping them up to higher elevations. This contrast to the Nile, which regularly overflowed its banks, was noted early to the Israelites relayed by Moses in Deuteronomy:

For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven (Dt. 11:10-11).

⁷ Monson, James, *Regions on the Run: Introductory Map Studies in the Land of the Bible*, (Biblical Backgrounds, Inc. 2009). The maps are accessed at www.biblicalbackgrounds.com

⁸ Lawrence, Paul, *The IVP Atlas of Bible History* (InterVarsityPress 2006), at 50.

The rainfall was (and still is) highly dependent on location. In the winter, moisture comes in with the winds blowing from the Mediterranean Sea. As the moisturized air blows in and hits the hills, the resultant rise upward produces rain. This rain dumps hard and fast. Once it falls, the land further east gets hardly any rainfall. So in Jerusalem, for example, 24 inches falls annually, but just 13 miles away in Jericho, the annual rainfall is just 6 ½ inches!⁹

A key to understanding the different treatment of Israel and Judah come from the distinctions in geography and geology. Israel was the land with the more verdant and prosperous valleys. It had access to the fresh water lakes and most of the Jordan River, meaning access to fish. The northern land of Israel had greater rainfall and produced both wheat and barley while Judah could grow only barley. Similarly while the southern area of Judah could handle goats and sheep, the northern country also handled cattle. Israel had more access to transportation routes, making it a more accessible country. Judah was the opposite, as a hilly country that it made transportation difficult and keeping it relatively inaccessible.

Israel was a valuable treasure more easily invaded. Judah possessed more natural protections and did not have the inherent value to a conquering nation that Israel did. Strictly from a geographic and geologic perspective, Israel was the more natural country to fall, especially to a northern superpower like Assyria.

Politics

Any examination of the political factors will include internal as well as international politics. Internally, the politics of Israel always seemed in a state of flux. Israel began around 932 BC through a rebellion led by Jeroboam I (1st dynasty). Jeroboam's son Nadab managed to assume the throne, but he lasted only two years before he was assassinated and the dynasty of Baasha began (2nd dynasty). Baasha's son Elah was next on the throne, but also lasted only two years before his commander killed him (3rd dynasty). That coup d'état lasted for seven days until yet another family took the throne. This fourth dynasty started with Omri and lasted for four generations before another general (Jehu) overthrew and murdered king Joram (5th dynasty). This new general reigned as king through four of his sons before the sixth dynasty arose through another coup d'état. This internal turmoil continued right to the end of Israel. After Jehu's last son was killed, the murdering Shallum reigned as king for a month (2 Kings 15:10, 15:13). Shallum was then killed by Menahem (7th dynasty) who managed to hold the throne for ten years, putting his son Pekahiah on after him (2 Kings 15:14, 15:17, 15:23). Pekahiah reigned for two years before being murdered by his captain Pekah (8th dynasty). Pekah reigned for twenty years before his murder by Hoshea (9th dynasty), who became the final king of Israel.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 52.

These were not simple “one guy kill one king then take his place” coups. They were mean, brutal, and bloody. Around 749 BC when Menahem slew Shallum, not all of Israel readily submitted to Menahem. He sacked the town of Tirzah with a brutality that is both chilling and sickening:

At that time Menahem sacked Tiphseh and all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on, because they did not open it to him. Therefore he sacked it, and he ripped open all the women in it who were pregnant (2 Ki. 15:16).

In order to “help him confirm his hold on the royal power,” Menahem then turned to the Assyrian King Pul (an Assyrian name for Tiglath Pileser III) paying 1,000 talents of silver (about 34 tons!) taxing the wealthy men of Israel 50 shekels (about 21 ounces) a piece (2 Kings 15:19).¹⁰

This instability surely created a constant source of distrust and strife that kept Israel from developing into the power it could have. Certainly during the times of stability (e.g., Omri/Ahab; Jehu/Jehoahaz/Joash/Jeroboam) the prosperity of the country peaked. Israel was often too busy fighting internally to be in a position to battle internationally. Hebrew University’s Yohanan Aharoni notes that Menahem’s tax of 50 shekels and payment of 1,000 talents,

...impoverished the nation, so weakening the royal house that it fell within a few years’ time.¹¹

It is apparent that Menahem’s payments and vassalage to Assyria, with its subsequent weakening of the prominent families in Israel prompted the rebellion of Pekah against Menahem’s son, Pekahiah. Pekah took advantage of public sentiment and fronted the conspiracy that killed the king. (Today we would impeach the President or vote him out of office. Then they just killed him.) This illustrated the interplay between the internal politics and the international political situation.

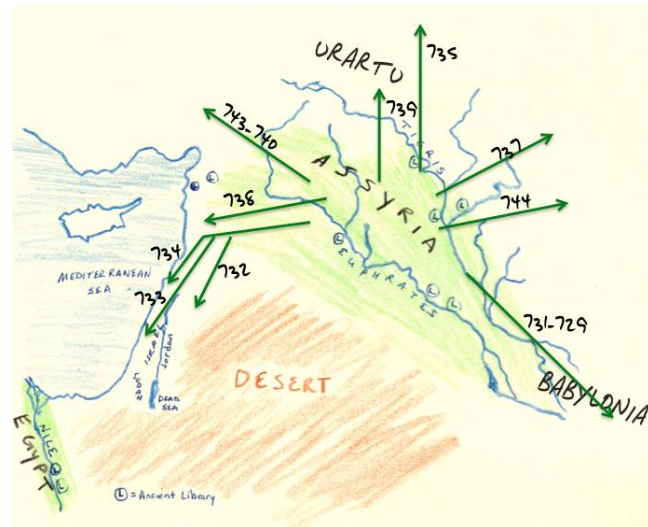
As king, Pekah joined forces with Rezin, the king of Syria, and formed an anti-Assyrian coalition. Judah gave no support to this effort, so Pekah and Rezin invaded Judah, seeking to set an Israelite (“the son of Tabeel” – Isa. 7:6) on the throne in Jerusalem. If successful, this would galvanize a third nation to oppose the growing might of Assyria. Even as Pekah warred with Judah to expand his borders and support in the south, he was losing significant and fertile territory to the north. The Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III (“T-P”), who reigned from 746-727 BC, captured much of Israel’s northern lands around

¹⁰ The Assyriologist Donald Wiseman writes that the 1,000 talents “were calculated on the number of males of military age at the current Assyrian value of a slave (50 shekels).” Wiseman, Donald, “Assyria”, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1997), Vol. 1, at 335.

¹¹ Aharoni, Yohanan, *The Land of the Bible, A Historical Geography* (Westminster 1979), at 370.

Galilee, taking innumerable Israelites into captivity and exile at that time (2 Kings 15:29).

The international scene found Assyria's power rising fast and strong during the reign of T-P. While Assyria had languished in the decades before, fighting internal rebellions fostered by outbreaks of plague and the bad omen of a near total eclipse¹², T-P reestablished firm control over the central and outlying regions of Assyria. T-P then began regular campaigns past Assyria's traditional boundaries into Israel and surrounding countries, but with a difference. Whereas earlier Assyrian exertion's of extra-border strength was bent on exacting tribute, T-P sought to permanently expand Assyria's borders through absorption of conquered peoples. T-P organized his conquered lands into provinces, assigning Assyrian governors and transferring local populations (at least of the upper strata of people) and replacing them with foreigners deported from elsewhere.¹³



Almost each year, Tiglath-Pileser campaigned to expand and strengthen his kingdom. The green arrows and corresponding dates are based on his records still extant for study.

This added an extra layer of politics for Israel. The Chronicler supplements the information in Kings explaining that Uzzariah's grandson Ahaz had taken the throne in Judah, following "the ways of the kings of Israel" (2 Chron. 28:2). He made and worshipped metal idols, and even "burned his sons as an offering" (2 Chron 28:2). The Chronicler then tells that when Israel's Pekah and Syria's Rezin attacked Ahaz and Judah, while they were not successful at replacing Ahaz, they did damage Judah, and a number of Judahites were taken captive to Damascus. The Jerusalem palace also suffered, losing two of Ahaz's sons (including the next in line for the throne) and the palace commander. Not just Syria, but even Israel took Judahites back to Israel as slaves, however, through the intervention of a prophet, those captives were returned promptly.

¹² In just a seven-year period, between 765 and 759 BC, Assyria suffered multiple internal revolts and saw two severe outbreaks of the plague, with undoubtedly devastating results on the population.¹² Another very rare occurrence in Nineveh happened during the reign of Jeroboam II. On June 15, 763 BC, a near total eclipse of the sun occurred from 9:33 a.m. to 12:19 p.m.¹² For more, see Old Testament Survey lesson 36 Part 1 (Jonah) downloadable at the class website, www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

¹³ Aharoni at 369.

It was in this struggle that Judah's King Ahaz wrongly turned to Assyria, rather than the Lord for help. Ahaz's world (a/k/a kingdom) was falling apart. Losing territory to Israel and Syria from the north was just part of the story. Ahaz also lost territory to Edom in the south and to the Philistines in the west. Tiglath-Pileser heard Ahaz's cry for help and his offer to pay tribute, but saw it as weakness. Rather than help Ahaz, T-P simply took the tribute payment and came against Judah as well as Israel, taking even more from Ahaz. The Chronicler summarizes:

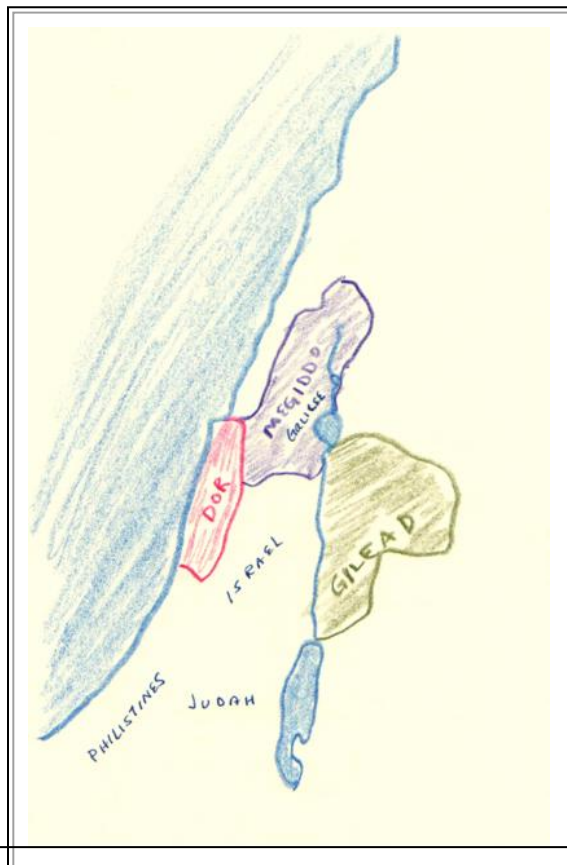
At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help... So Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came...but it did not help him (2 Chron. 28:16,10-21).

Instead of turning to God, Ahaz mimicked the worship of his captors, becoming less faithful to God and shutting the doors to temple worship.¹⁴ In the international arena, T-P was running unchecked. Archaeologists have uncovered inscriptions from T-P's records that allow a good reconstruction of his expansionism.

Back in Israel and Damascus, the anti-Assyrian coalition crumbled. T-P destroyed Damascus in 732 BC, and dissolved Syria, transplanting its citizens elsewhere. T-P also credits himself with removing Pekah from the throne and replacing him with Israel's last king Hoshea.

Military Strength

The military might of T-P and the Assyrian empire far outweighed the strength of Israel, Judah, Syria, or any combination of the three. T-P was able to draw from a vast network



When T-P first conquered northern portions of Israel, he divided his new territories into three provinces. The province that was the way to the sea he called "Dor." The northernmost province including Galilee he called "Megiddo." The province east of the Jordan was called "Gilead." These provinces are referred to in Isaiah 9 as land that "in the latter time" God would make glorious. Isaiah called the three provinces, "the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1).

¹⁴ The prophet Isaiah spoke bluntly to Ahaz about his mistake. Ahaz was warned that his real problem was not Pekah or Rezin. Assyria was the real concern! Ahaz gave Isaiah the brush-off. When Isaiah urged Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign, Ahaz mumbled an excuse of not wanting to put the Lord to the test. Isaiah then proclaimed a great prophecy of the Messiah Immanuel as a sign the Lord would give of his own initiative (Isa. 7).

of cities and compose an army that went forward with campaigns almost every year of his near twenty-year reign. T-P's record keepers recorded these campaigns and archaeologists have many of the records available for study today.

These records reconstruct T-P's successful marches against Babylon and the Chaldean chiefs to the southeast, Urartu to the northeast, the Syro-Hittite states to the west, as well as his success against Damascus, Israel, and Judah to the south. In modern parlance, T-P took his kingdom from the north of Iraq, conquering the rest of Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and much of Turkey. Israel was no match for this army or empire.

In conclusion, from a secular perspective, Israel was battling limitations of the land of Israel, both geographically and geologically. Israel was torn internally, and it was victim to a massive superpower bent on expansion from the north. A secular perspective explains the fall of Israel quite reasonably. The perspective of faith, however, shows something greater at work. It is to this perspective we now turn.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAITH

Scripture, through the voices of the prophets, directly relates the political fall of Israel to the spiritual fall of Israel. This was not simply "Monday morning quarterbacking." Back during the reign of Jeroboam II, while Assyria was struggling with internal issues and Israel was expanding and prospering like never before, Amos had predicted the coming cataclysm. Set against the prosperity of Israel, the unfairness of her treatment of the poorer segments of society, and the injustice of her courts, Amos delivered the warning of the Lord:

Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth! (Amos 5:6-5:7).

The Israelites were urged to change their course:

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5:14-5:15).

Failure to do so was foretold to bring the final deportation to the northern empire beyond Damascus:

"Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream... I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts (Amos 5:23-5:27).

Amos even specified that the wealthy scions of the land would head first into exile:

"Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away." (Amos 6:4-6:7).

Into this same period, God sent the prophet Hosea, with his difficult life giving meaning and a message to Israel. Hosea was told by God to take "a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom" (Hos. 1:2). Hosea married the adulterous Gomer and their first child was named "Jezreel," the name of the town where Jehu slew Israel and Judah's king along with other royal family members. This name prophesied God putting an end to the kingdom of Israel (Hos. 1:4). The second child was named "Lo-Ruhamah," which meant "no mercy." This was because the time was coming where God would "no longer have mercy on the house of Israel" (Hos. 1:6).

Hosea's life was a prophetic parallel to the nation of Israel. When Israel entered into the Sinai covenant, the process was one akin to marriage. The procedure itself mimicked the process of a marriage in that day. The people were the bride and Yahweh was the Bridegroom. The covenant was "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). In a sense God was actually doing the very thing illustrated in the home life of Hosea. With God's instruction to "take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom" came the reason, "for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" (Hos. 1:2). God was taking a people with an adulterous heart who would persistently desert him for other lovers. The Israelites started such adultery with the golden calf while Moses was on Sinai and it persisted on and off throughout Israel's existence.

The people abused God and his gifts as an adulterous wife does her husband.

Hosea explained,

Plead with your mother...that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst. Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom. For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully (Hos. 2:2-2:5).

In Hosea chapter three, God instructs Hosea to return to Gomer and love her in spite of her adultery and prostitution, just as God loves Israel in spite of her rampant and

adulterous idolatry. Chapters four through eight illustrate the depths of God's love that it continued even through Israel's sin, where there was,

...no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land (Hos. 4:1).

Instead there was,

...swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; [while] they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (Hos. 4:2).

Hosea echoed Amos's dire prediction,

They shall not remain in the land of the LORD...they shall eat unclean food in Assyria... My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations (Hos. 9:3, 9:17).

Hosea's cry was a warning, one that Israel ignored to its own detriment. The last verse of Hosea contains the prophet's final plea,

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them (Hos. 14:9).

The Prophet Historian who wrote up the Kings accounting of Israel's fall, set out the same insight,

And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced. And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this." (2 Kings 17:7-17:12).

Kings emphasized that Israel was not without warning. God did not sneak judgment upon them. He had sent Amos, Hosea, and the like:

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in

accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." (2 Kings 17:13).

Israel's reaction was not what it should have been. Rather than turning from sin, Israel turned deeper into sin.

But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them. And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger (2 Kings 7:14-7:17).

This is what brought the judgment of the Lord and the fall of Israel:

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only (2 Kings 7:18).

CONCLUSION

One can look at the fall of Israel and see in it a purely secular explanation. Assyria was stronger, was seeking to expand, and Israel made some stupid political mistakes, aligning itself with Syria in rebellion. With Tiglath-Pileser III seeking to expand, making war his annual springtime hobby, what chance did the small bridge of Israel have? Much like the baseball homerun, there are simple facts present which can be seen to dictate the results.

Yet the spiritual truth is much more profound, and adds a dimension through faith that should speak to us today. God constantly works through the world as he works in the world. Our tendency is to credit God simply in those areas where we have gaps of knowledge and an inability to offer any other explanation. This is a tragic view as not only setting faith to disappear (when and if the knowledge gap is closed through new understanding), but also in failing to see God's hand in weaving the fabric of everyday life. When Jesus urged us to pray daily for God to give us bread, he was not suggesting that a loaf would magically appear out of nowhere on our porch each morning. The prayer conveys, at least typically, that God will work in and through the world to bring forth the bread needed and prayed for.

This is not to say God cannot work miraculously apart from the explanations of the physical laws of the universe. Certainly the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ speak to this (as does the raising of Lazarus, the feeding of the 5,000, etc.). Yet we must recognize it no less the hand of God when events unfold in certain ways in fulfillment of his will and word.

This certainly raises difficult ideas that move one to contemplate the majesty and mysteries of God. Does this mean that history unfolds differently if Israel had turned from their sin and lived rightly before God? Would the Assyrian map simply expand all around Israel? Would all of history been different and T-P lose his power before deporting the Israelites? These questions we cannot answer, and to some degree are moot. Our response is fairly simple. We are to live right before God, trusting him with the consequences. We set one foot in front of the other, seeking his will on earth as it is in heaven. In this walk, as we acknowledge him, we trust him to make our paths straight.