

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 20

May 12-18, 2014

Acts 2:14-2:41; Acts 7:1-7:8

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

Week Twenty Readings

<p>5/12 Peter's Sermon at Pentecost Acts 2:14-2:41 (Cont'd)</p> <p>Pslm 90 Isa 40:1-40:15 Ezek 18</p> <p>The Fellowship of Believers Acts 2:42-2:47</p> <p>Luk 22:24-22:30 Healing a Lame Beggar Acts 3:1-3:10</p> <p>Matt 26:17-26:35 Prov 22:1</p> <p>5/13 Peter in Solomon's Portico Acts 3:11-3:26</p> <p>Mrk 9:30-9:50 Zech 13 2 Chron 17-20</p>	<p>5/14 Peter and John Before the council Acts 4:1-4:22</p> <p>Believer's Prayer for Boldness Acts 4:23-4:31</p> <p>Luk 12:22-12:56</p> <p>Holding all things in Common Acts 4:32-4:37</p> <p>Pslm 133 Prov 11:28-11:31 Phil 4:2-4:3 Prov 15:1; 15:4; 17:1 Prov 18:19</p>	<p>Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5:1-5:11</p> <p>Zech 5 Pslm 101 Prov 11:1; 11:3; 11:5-11:6; 11:18 12:5; 12:17; 12:19; 12:21-12:22 Prov 14:5; 14:12; 14:25 Prov 15:8; 15:9 Prov 29:1 Prov 16:13 Prov 19:5; 19:9 Prov 20:10 Prov 21:3; 21:6; 21:23 Prov 26:24-26:28 Pslm 15</p>	<p>5/15 Many Signs and Wonders Acts 5:12-5:16</p> <p>Apostles Arrested and Freed Acts 5:17-5:42</p> <p>Seven Chosen to Serve Acts 6:1-6:7</p> <p>Stephen is Seized Acts 6:8-6:15</p> <p>Luk 22:31-22:38 Luk 22:47-22:62 Prov 19:28</p>	<p>Stephen's Speech Acts 7:1-7:8</p> <p>Gen 12:4-16:16 Num 33,34 Prov 26:24-26:28 Pslm 15</p> <p>5/16 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:1-7:8</p> <p>Gen 26 Gen 34-36</p> <p>5/17 Stephen's Speech</p> <p>Gen 37-40 Prov 7:4-7:27</p> <p>5/18 Off</p>
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May 12

PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST (Acts 2:14-2:41)

As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. Over the coming chapters of Acts, it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit came and did the very things Jesus had promised as recorded by John in John 14-16.

READING PURPOSE: The contextual passages explore the justice of God, and the necessity of his mercy. The passages explain that God's mercy is driven by his steadfast love and is firmly rooted in God's justice and the repentance of a sinful people.

Psalm 90

Psalm 90 marvelously sets out God in his everlasting nature compared to people who live 70 or 80 years at best, and have trouble for most of that time. Compared to God, we are a sigh, a moment, or a mere dream flitting through a night's thought. The psalmist asks God to "teach us to number our days" for there is a wisdom found in seeing life's transitory nature, especially when compared to God's permanence.

Part and parcel with this is the burden of laboring under the sins committed in life. These sins incur the wrath of God, and bring forth natural consequences of "toil and trouble." The only answer to the miseries brought by sin is found in the steadfast love of the Lord.

Isaiah 40:1-40:15

This famous passage calls forth the comfort of God to his people in sin. God instructs the prophet to comfort his people with tender words that her iniquities are pardoned, and her days of judgment are passed. The passage has multiple verses laden with Messianic prophecies including the passage speaking of John the Baptist,

A voice cries: "in the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD" (Isa 40:3).

This passage is quoted by each gospel writer (Matt 3:3; Mrk 1:3; Luk 3:4; Jn 1:23). All but Mark make it clear that John the Baptist himself understood this passage as one fulfilled by his ministry. Luke goes even further indicating that John the Baptist referenced more than Isaiah 40:3, continuing his quotation through verse 5.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luk 3:5-6).

This passage would later form a backbone for scene one of Handel's Messiah as well as Martin Luther King's famous speech on the Washington Mall.

The Isaiah passage is important beyond those commonly known or recited verses. It speaks to the ministry of Jesus and the "good news" that would come forth from Jerusalem of God's majestic and powerful redemption (Isa 40:9). Of course, the Greek Old Testament translation used by so many in first century Judaism used the Greek root we translate "gospel" for "good news" proclaimers in Isaiah 40:9. (*euangelizomenos* – εὐαγγελιζόμενος).

This passage fits into the Pentecost context as not only proclaiming the saving arm of God (Isa 40:10), but also as a shepherd, a title chosen by Jesus to explain his care of his people (Isa 40:11; Jn 10:11). This God has done as an act of his Spirit (Isa 40:13), the very same Spirit moving in Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 18).

Ezekiel 18

This passage in Ezekiel emphasizes the importance of sinners repenting before God, a response to sin instructed by Peter and taken by the people on Pentecost. Ezekiel points out that repentance brings forgiveness as a part of God's justice. That sins, even of the righteous, unaccompanied by repentance, bring death.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS (Acts 2:42-47)

There were 3,000 who put their faith in Jesus on day 1 of the Holy Spirit's outpouring and indwelling the believers. The lives of those thousands changed immediately, reflecting the new priorities of the saved. They moved in service and love for each other, finding a new basis of fellowship and commonness reflected in service and worship.

READING PURPOSE: The church's actions reflected immediate growth in the godly attitudes and priorities taught by Jesus.

Luke 22:24-22:30

In this passage of Luke, we have inserted the teaching of Jesus that in the kingdom of God, a kingdom comprising those who are saved believers, greatness is found in serving, rather than in being served. Similarly, leaders should be leading in serving. This was a foreign idea to the apostles at the time. Yet as we see the church unfolding in Acts, we see this becoming the habit of those indwelt by the Spirit. The Spirit of God brought

clarity and understanding, as well as the power to live differently. The Spirit changed the lives of those who believed, sanctifying them daily.

HEALING A LAME BEGGAR (Acts 3:1-3:10)

God used Peter and John to give a lame beggar more than the silver or gold he sought. They gave him his health, restoring his ability not only to walk, but to leap to the praise of God! This they did, not as “Peter and John – Christian Superstars,” but “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

READING PURPOSE: Peter and John knew the historical Jesus was alive and working, even though Jesus had died. Before his death, Jesus explained there would be an “after” where Jesus was again working and involved with his people.

Matthew 26:17-26:35

Immediately before his death, Jesus ate the Passover with his apostles. At that celebratory and commemorative meal, Jesus told not only of his death, but that he would eat it again with the apostles in his Father’s kingdom. Similarly, even though Jesus had been telling his disciples that as a good shepherd, he would not lose any of the sheep that the Father had given him, Jesus did foretell that for a time after his death the sheep would be scattered (Matt 26:31). But Jesus would be raised up and would precede the disciples into Galilee, a clear indication that the disciples would be following Jesus again.

May 13

PETER IN SOLOMON’S PORTICO (Acts 3:11-3:26)

Acts paints a captivating picture. People in the temple porch area rush Peter and John while the healed man couldn’t quit hugging them. Peter did not bask in the miracle performed, but used the moment to teach of Jesus. In a rather amazing way, we read of Peter explaining not only the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the Old Testament prophecies of what they were witnessing as well as the necessities of the people to turn from sin and put faith in Jesus. The amazing thing is that Peter and the others did not really understand these things one bit *before* the Holy Spirit indwelt them. In John 14-16 Jesus told his apostles, who clearly did not understand at the time, that the Spirit would remind them of his teaching, would instruct them in what *they* needed to know, and would convict the people of sin, righteousness, and judgment – all things clearly happening in the unfolding history recorded in Acts.

READING PURPOSE: With the accompanying readings, we see the same themes of sin, forgiveness and a trusting faith, all taught before by Jesus and the prophets.

Mark 9:30-9:50

Before his death, Jesus spoke to his apostles about the importance of teaching against sin. The greatest among them would be the leaders who *served*. In the process of explaining this, Jesus explained that service was not only to the high and mighty, but was to the young, the low, and the often ignored. The service was likened to salt, a preservative at the time. This service was to lead people *from* sin.

Zechariah 13

In this prophetic chapter, we read of things that would occur “on that day,” a phrase used over and over as predictive of the “last days,” the days of the kingdom beginning at Pentecost. Zechariah uses this phrase 16 times in his final three chapters.

“On that day,” a fountain would open in Jerusalem for cleansing and washing away of sins (Zech 13:1). This we see in Peter’s declaration and teaching of faith in Jesus, the one whose blood flowed as a fountain cleansing all from sin.

“On that day,” idolatry would be cut off, unclean and false prophets removed and exposed, and shame would follow those who wrongly prophesy (Zech 13:2-6). Some see here a special prophecy yet to be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ, an event that occurs at the end of the age, or the end of the “last days.” Others see this as an event already unfolding as Peter and John go into the temple in Acts 3 and later, proclaiming the truth of Jesus in the face of worship of idols in the form of human traditions, human interpretations of God’s truth, and human systems. Similarly, the truths of Peter’s prophetic teaching is seen as heralding the beginning of this prophesy of eliminating the falsehoods and presenting the truth.

This chapter also reflects the Matthew 26 proclamation of Jesus read in the prior days reading, “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Zech 13:7; Matt 26:31). Zechariah speaks of 1/3d of the land left alive while 2/3rds perish. While some see this as a literal number to be seen at the end of the age, others see this as an indicator that most will not follow the teaching of the Lord, while a lesser amount, but a substantial amount nonetheless, will. These will go through difficulty, being “refined as silver” and “tested as gold,” referencing the fiery trials that purify silver and God’s people. This will be seen clearly in the tribulations about to occur for the followers of Jesus.

Zechariah 13 concludes with the testimony that many will call upon the name of God and will receive God’s answer: “They are my people!”

2 Chronicles 17-20

This story has already been covered in the years readings through its sister account in Kings. We include it here not so much for the historical focus as we do for the impact of Chapter 20.

The story is of Judah's good king Jehoshaphat who reigned from Jerusalem. God blessed the reign of Jehoshaphat, and took care of him, even as Jehoshaphat continually sought God for wisdom and direction in his reign.

In Chapter 20, we read of the crisis that arose when foreign armies of the Moabites and Ammonites came to battle Judah. Jehoshaphat was scared. His reaction in fear was simple – turn to the Lord. Jehoshaphat declared a fast in the land, and turned to God in prayer. As Jehoshaphat led, the people followed. Not only the men, but the women and even the children, stood before the Lord seeking his protection and deliverance.

The Spirit of the Lord, the same Spirit that began indwelling all believers from Pentecost onward, selectively came upon a priest in the assembly instructing the people that the battle was the Lord's, they needn't fear. God would save the people without any need for fighting (2 Chron 20:17). Jehoshaphat and the people bowed in faithful and grateful worship.

Early the next morning, the faithful king Jehoshaphat lined his armies up, not to fight, but to worship! He told them to have faith in the Lord and the prophetic word given and off they marched singing praise of God and his steadfast love. God used another army to ambush the soldiers arrayed for battle, causing division and infighting among the mixed national interests originally allied, and the fighting coalition fell apart. Victory was the Lord's.

There is power in faith and salvation from God!

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE COUNCIL (Acts 4:1-4:22) and

THE BELIEVERS' PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS (Acts 4:23-4:31)

Peter and John were held before the council, examined over the miracle performed. The council was stunned at the boldness and insightful defense and explanation given by Peter. Peter, after all, was an uneducated fisherman who was speaking with abilities and understanding far beyond what could be expected (something Jesus said would happen once the Holy Spirit indwelt the apostles). Peter proclaimed Jesus as resurrected Lord and author of the miracle, to the chagrin of the council. The council thought it best to hope the idea of a resurrected Jesus might simply die out, and instructed Peter and John to mention it no more. The reaction of Peter, John, and the other believers was simply to pray for even greater boldness to proclaim loudly the Lord they had seen in physical resurrection, confirmed by the Spirit empowering their new walk.

READING PURPOSE: Jesus had prepared his apostles for this moment. Though they did not realize it at the time, he was teaching them the very things they would need.

Luke 12:22-12:56

In this passage, Jesus taught his followers not to be worried about life's unfolding events. What they might eat or wear, or whether they live or die, should not be their concern. The real concern needs to be *how* they live. Living a life of service to God and fellow people is the real area where they should focus. In a passage insightful for the later daily reading in Acts, they were instructed to sell possessions to provide for the needy. They were to be ready for service, "dressed for action," for God was putting them to work. The work would not be easy, nor would all follow it. The apostles were warned that there would be division and hardship, "three against two and two against three." Like the prophetic word in Zechariah 13 read in the prior day's reading, these are not necessarily "real numbers" of actual ratios, but rather the idea or point of division. Jesus had taught Peter and John, long before Peter and John needed the lesson. God was in control!

HOLDING ALL THINGS IN COMMON (Acts 4:32-4:37)

In this passage in Acts, we read that the church sold their possessions and held material goods in common. This was not an instruction that the church followed in perpetuity; rather it was the immediate way the church lived at a time where they thought Jesus' return would truly be any day. Jesus had told the church he would come back, and as we often do even today, the church interpreted that in terms of their own lives, not considering God's cosmic scheme and extended plans.

READING PURPOSE: There is a real beauty to the pictured fellowship of sharing and nurturing each other in Acts 4:32-37. The heart and attitude of caring is important and godly as we see in the contextual readings.

Psalm 133

Unity of believers is "good" and "pleasant." The psalmist equates it to bounty (precious oil), beauty in nature (dews on Hermon), and blessing (life forevermore)!

Proverbs 11:28-11:31

These proverbs show the counter of the Acts 4 experience. Some do not share with the needy out of love and greed for their possessions. For others, however, it is because they feel they *need* their possessions for themselves. They have developed a faith in possessions over a righteous sharing as helpful. The real growth and joy of life will be by those who use their wealth in deeds of righteousness rather than protection against personal want.

Philippians 4:2-4:3

Decades after the Acts 4 time, Paul wrote the Philippian church a letter where, among other things, he spent time urging several women to treat each other better. They needed

to find the commonness and fellowship right before the Lord. The rest of the church was urged to work toward helping these two women find this missing fellowship. Harmony and sharing are hallmarks of Christ and should also be hallmarks of his people.

Proverbs 15:1; 15: 4; 17:1; 18:19

The Proverbs speak a lot of the need for getting along and how we better achieve this goal. We should speak softly to each other rather than harshly (Prov 15:1). We should live righteously and let it permeate through our homes (Prov 15:4). Peace should trump strife at our most basic level – in our daily home life (Prov 17:1). We should try not to offend those around us, for it creates longstanding obstacles to harmony (Prov 18:19).

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (Acts 5:1-5:11)

Some might think that post-Jesus there is no longer a concern about sin, deceit, dishonesty, and other unrighteousness. That is far from the case as we see in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. God did not change at Calvary. Sin did not become “okay.” It is still a very real curse that has very real consequences and does very real damage in the lives of the sinner as well as the world around us. The differences of Calvary are eternal, in the sense that God’s redemption promises eternal fellowship, and temporal, in the sense that God now gives his Spirit and with that, an ability to grow and conquer sin.

READING PURPOSE: For many this is a tough story, seemingly incongruent with the God of mercy and grace shown in Jesus. The contextual readings put into context the seriousness of the sin. Ananias and Sapphira were not simply “refusing to give what was theirs to others.” They were stealing from God, setting off a disease that required dealing with.

Zechariah 5

This chapter of Zechariah set out a judgment for the sin that was theft and dishonesty, all perpetrated in the name of God. This is the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. While claiming to be God’s and doing things in his name, they were holding back what was his, lying about it in the process. In Zechariah 5, we see the seriousness of the sins of “everyone who steals” as well as those who “swear falsely by my [God’s] name” (Zech 5:3). Judgment does proceed forth for such sin.

Psalms 101

This psalm is one that contemplates the evildoer and dishonest person. Comparing them to the steadfast love of the Lord, the psalmist resolves both to live with integrity, and to remove the dishonest from his house. The faithful are lifted up while the deceitful are winnowed out.

Proverbs 11:1; 11:3; 11:5-11:6; 11:18; 12:5; 12:17; 12:19; 12:21-12:22; 14:5; 14:12; 14:25; 15:8; 15:9; 16:13; 19:5; 19:9; 20:10; 21:3; 21:6; 21:23; 26:24-26:28; 29:1

There are a wealth of Proverbs dealing with money and dishonesty. We have put a large number into this reading, and even these are just illustrative of the fuller group of readings contained in the Bible on this subject.

God expects honesty in financial matters (Prov 11:1). Integrity is important in financial matters and in all walks of life (Prov 11:3-5). It is rooted in controlling what one wants (Prov 11:6). One should use integrity in earning money as well as spending it (Prov 11:18). Getting money through dishonest means leads to death (Prov 21:6).

Righteousness begins with our thoughts (Prov 12:5). It extends into our words, where honesty is a core indicator of the heart (Prov 12:17; 14:5). If we speak truthfully, we build eternally rather than deceit that is worthy of nothing lasting (Prov 12:19). Honesty may not always seem like the prudent course to people, but it is. Dishonesty may seem best at critical moments in life, but there are ways that seem more workable but actually lead to death (Prov 14:12, 25). Keeping control of one's words changes the course of life, keeping one from countless troubles (Prov 21:23; 26:24-26:28).

This is important not only in life, but in our relationship with God (Prov 15:9). Honesty aligns one with God. Lying sets one in opposition to God (Prov 12:21-22). The proverbs assure us that liars do not go unpunished (Prov 19:5, 9). Falsehood, particularly in financial matters, is an abomination before God (Prov 20:10). God has always been more concerned with honesty and righteousness than in sacrifices or part-time exercises in giving (Prov 21:3).

We don't know the history of Ananias and Sapphira, but we can fairly assume that their theft and lying were not a one-time event. It was likely a course of conduct that was part of their normal practice. One wonders if they were familiar with the proverb that "He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing" (Prov 29:1). They needed to follow the proverb to commit their work truly to the Lord and see their plans succeed (Prov 16:3).

Psalm 15

In addition to the many proverbs that speak of the importance of honesty in all things, especially money, there are passages like Psalm 15. In this psalm, the one dwelling with God is noted as the one who is above all else honest, from his heart through to his actions. This is a person who despises dishonesty, and is willing to suffer financially in order to keep his integrity and word.

May 15

MANY SIGNS AND WONDERS (Acts 5:12-5:16)

APOSTLES ARRESTED AND FREED (Acts 5:17-5:42)

SEVEN CHOSEN TO SERVE (Acts 6:1-6:7)

STEPHEN IS SEIZED (Acts 6:8-6:15)

As we continue our read through Acts, the focus shifts to Stephen, a holy man selected to aid in the service of the church leadership to its members. Stephen was doing great works in the name of Jesus and was brought to the attention of the authorities. They seized Stephen and set in course a pattern of martyrdom that marked the early church for centuries to come, even to today in certain parts of the world.

READING PURPOSE: We set in contrast Stephen's reactions as one filled with the Holy Spirit and the conviction of Christ's resurrection to those of Peter *before* the indwelling of the Spirit and the experience of a physically resurrected Jesus who overcame the grave.

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

Peter thought he would follow Jesus to death if necessary, but Peter the fisherman was not able to do so. He denied Jesus not once or twice, but three times. This was not what Peter would do after Pentecost. Once faced with the reality of a resurrected Savior, and imbued with the conviction of the Holy Spirit, Peter, like Stephen and so many others, willingly went to their earthly death, confident of the victory over the grave that provided a life beyond.

Proverbs 19:28

Those false witnesses against Stephen were wrong. Their deeds were evil and produced evil consequences. The amazing thing is the way God worked through all the evil to bring about victory in his kingdom.

May 15-17

STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:1-7:8)

We begin several weeks of reading in support of Stephen's speech to the authorities in defense of his ministry and in proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Stephen told Old Testament stories to the authorities. Luke provided a synopsis in his narrative. We give the greater storyline through the contextual readings.

READING PURPOSE: For Stephen and the early church, Jesus and Christianity were not divorced from the Old Testament. Jesus was not the Son of a new God. God had not changed with the incarnation. God was working toward Jesus' transforming moment for humanity from the very beginning. We will see this as we explore the fuller narratives behind Stephen's speech.

Genesis 12:4-16:16

Abram was a fellow, an ordinary man living in a prominent ancient city of Ur. He likely lived as his father, grandfather, and great grandfather had. But one ordinary day, Abram was turned into an extraordinary individual. He received a call from the Lord.

God told Abram that he was to leave the land of his fathers with the promise that God would make a new nation from him, giving an inheritance to his offspring that would last and through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. This was an early promise of Jesus, God's Messiah.

Abram was not a perfect man. We see that in the way he worked to protect himself and Sarai while in Egypt. He was told where his offspring's land would be (Gen. 12:7), but circumstances would not allow him to stay there (Gen. 12:10). He was a man with family troubles (Lot) yet in the midst of all this, God's hand was on him and God's blessing touched his family and life. Lot was captured, requiring Abram to march in rescue. Even this dangerous interlude in life brought with it God's blessings as pronounced by God's special priest Melchizedek. (See excursus at end of this lesson).

Abram did not have any children, but God continued to proclaim boldly that Abram's offspring would outnumber the stars. Abram was an old man, and he had no natural reason to believe God's promise, but Abram knew God, and in that knowledge, Abram had reason to believe. He did believe, and that belief God counted as his righteousness, a truth that would resonate through the ages, through Calvary and into Paul's pen into the church's theology four thousand years later.

Numbers 33-34

In the middle of the contextual readings of Abram, we insert the later readings from a period over four centuries after Abram's (aka Abraham) death when the territories promised by God were divided up among Abram's offspring in fulfillment of God's promise.

Genesis 26, 34-40

Returning to the Genesis narrative, we read of God's promise passing from Abraham to his son Isaac in Genesis 26. From Isaac, the promise passed to Jacob, whom God renamed "Israel" (Gen 35:10).

Jacob has 12 sons, who are destined to become the twelve tribes of Israel. The sons of Jacob, however, did not consistently treat each other with brotherly love. They had no problem killing Joseph, although they ultimately sold him into slavery rather than leaving him to die. These evil deeds were not undoing God's plans and promises. They were folded into God's plans in ways where God wrought his deliverance and plan in the midst of the scheming of the brothers, as we will see in the continued readings next week.

Joseph found himself working as a slave in the house of the Egyptian Potiphar. All things seemed to finally be going Joseph's way when Potiphar's wife began taking an adulterous interest in Joseph. Joseph refused her advances, only to find himself imprisoned by the lies of the scorned woman. While Joseph's decisions of purity predate the Biblical proverbs, they still provide a marvelous illustration of the points made in Proverbs 7.

Proverbs 7:4-7:27

This proverb section deals with the wisdom in refusing to countenance adultery. The foolish and senseless flirt with adultery, entertaining it in heart and mind. This is foolish, as the road leads to death. The adulterous situation is not one that stays put while one ganders its way. The situation has a life of its own, and it reaches out and grabs those tempted with promises and seductions of happiness and excitement. When one gives in; however, they are the human equivalent of an ox going to slaughter or a bird caught in a nest. The wise will not go near, much less entertain the idea of adultery.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 20

1. Is repentance a part of your walk with God? Do you find time to confess sins and seek to turn from them into God's righteousness? How does the Holy Spirit work to empower you to grow in holiness?
2. Do you see God working in your life to grow you into a greater likeness of Jesus? What role do you play in this growth process?
3. Has God taught you things you would need in your life, at times when you never saw that the need might arise?
4. HONESTLY, how do you characterize your own life when it comes to being truthful? How about in matters of money?

Week Twenty-one Readings

<p style="text-align: center;">5/19 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:9-7:19</p> <p>Gen 41-44</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/20 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:9-7:19</p> <p>Gen 45-48 Gen 49:2-49:7 Gen 49:13-50:26</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/21 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:17-7:34</p> <p>Ex 1:1-2:25 Ex 3:7-4:20</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/22 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:35-7:43</p> <p>Ex 24 Amos 5:21-5:27 Deut 1:1-3:20 Deut 4:44-4:49 Deut 6:20-6:25 Deut 6:10-6:15 Deut 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/23 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:35-7:43</p> <p>Amos 5:21-5:27 2 Kgs 15,16 Prov 16:12 Prov 20:8 2 Kgs 21, 24 Jer 36</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/24 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:44</p> <p>Ex 26,27 Ex 30:11-30:38 Heb 9:1-9:10 Heb 9:15-9:28 Deut 3:21-3:29 Deut 31:1-31:13 Deut 33,34</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>5/25 Off</i></p>
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EXCURSUS ON MELCHIZEDEK

In Genesis 12, the LORD called Abraham (then called Abram) to leave his home and go where God would make a great nation of him. Abram left Ur, taking his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their people and possessions heading to the land of Canaan. During a famine, Abram and his group went to Egypt. Upon their return to Canaan, there were disputes among the herdsmen of Lot and Abram, so Lot went one way and Abram the other.

By Genesis 14, there is a battle between the kings in Lot's area and another group of kings. Lot's kings lose, and Lot is captured, along with his family and possessions. One person escaped and found Abram, telling him about what had happened. Abram gathered the 318 trained men in his household (meaning all those who worked for and with him, not simply his relatives) and went on a rescue mission.

Abram was successful and brought back Lot and the others, along with their possessions. Here we have the first encounter for our discussion:

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abram] at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Gen 14:17-20).



Writing about this in 1877, Dr. J. Oswald Dykes noted,

It is thus there steps upon the scene one of the most mysterious personages of Holy Writ...not only a worshipper of the true God, but a man of such priestly sanctity, that beneath his hand the patriarch himself bows to receive the blessing of God, and through him the patriarch prefers his grateful offerings to Jehovah.¹

Since before the completion of the New Testament, the church has seen in Melchizedek a representation of Christ. As we break apart this story, we see much of why the church saw this speaking of Christ packed into the few verses:

1. “Melchizedek” as a name carries significance. The name is a composite of two Hebrew words, “*Melek*” meaning “king” and “*sedeq*” meaning “righteousness.”

¹ Dykes, J. Oswald, *Abraham, the Friend of God: A study from Old Testament History* (London: Nisbet & Co. 1877) at 107.

In the form used in the name, it means, “My king is righteous.” This echoes heavily of the New Testament attributes and name of Christ, the King of Kings, who was called “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14, 7:52). Not only is Christ our king righteous, but as Paul emphasized, when we are in Christ we actually become the “righteousness of God” (see, e.g., 2 Cor 5:21).

2. Melchizedek not only had a righteous king, but he was himself the “King of Salem.” The Hebrew uses *melek* again, this time tying it to the word “Salem.” The word Salem is better known in its modernized form of “*shalom*.” It means “peace.” Thus we have the King of Righteousness also being the King of Peace. Of course the church long understood Isaiah 9:6 to be prophetic about Christ as a child as it phrased his name to include the title, “Prince of Peace.”

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*.

3. Further importance is drawn from the fact that many scholars believe that “Salem” was an older name for the city of Jeru-salem.² This is tied to Jesus who himself called Jerusalem, “the city of the great King” (Matt 5:35). It was in Jerusalem that Jesus spoke of the Temple as his “Father’s house” (Luk 2:49). Over Jerusalem we read of Jesus weeping and lamenting with a play on the meaning of the city as the “foundation of peace.”

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for *peace*! But now they are hidden from your eyes (Luk 19:41) .

Finally we should add that John in his revelation saw the “new Jerusalem” coming down from heaven prepared as a bride for her husband—Jesus (Rev 21:2,9-10).

4. Melchizedek brings out bread and wine for Abram. These same elements form the communal supper for Christ and his apostles (Matt 26:26-29).
5. Melchizedek was a “priest,” a label that demands note because Christ was also a Priest. In John 17, Christ is praying for his followers in anticipation of the crucifixion. Scholars call this prayer “the High Priestly Prayer” recognizing Christ intervenes as a High Priest. The title added to Jesus’ name is “Christ”

² A number of scholars see “Jerusalem” as a composite of *Jeru* and *Salem* meaning the “foundation of peace.” Scripture seems to equate biblical Jerusalem with the city of Salem in passages like Psalm 76:1-2 “In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.” See, Davidson, Benjamin, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, (Hendrikson 2007) at 346; Berlin and Brettler, ed’s, *The Jewish Study Bible*, (Oxford) 2004) at 34-35.

(Hebrew “*Messiah*”) meaning “anointed.” In the Old Testament, three groups of people were anointed for service to God, prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus as Messiah/Christ was all three. He was prophet, priest and king of God Most High. Over and over the writer of Hebrews makes this point (Heb 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:5, etc.). In fact, as we will make the point later, Hebrews 5:5 makes it clear,

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (quoting Psalm 110:4).

6. Melchizedek was a priest of “God Most High.” “Most High God” was a term used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to Jehovah God. In Luke 8:26-33 when Jesus was casting out the Legion of demons from a man of the Gerasenes, the demons recognized Jesus as “Son of the Most High God.” Similarly when Mary was hearing from the angel prior to the incarnation she was told,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the *Most High* will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luk 1:35).

Paul and his missionary team were similarly called by one who had a spirit of divination, “servants of the Most High God” (Acts 16:17).

Melchizedek as priest of God Most High was clearly a foreshadowing of Christ.

7. Melchizedek blessed Abram by “God Most High.” This is carried forward to the relationship between Christ and the church because it is in Christ, Paul taught, that the church has been blessed with “every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3, 6).
8. Abram tithes to Melchizedek. Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of all he recovered. This is seen to reflect the charge of God’s people to tithe to God, recognizing that all things come from his hand. As Leviticus set out the law and principle,

Every **tithe** of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD (Lev 27:30).

This altogether brief encounter is more magnified when we consider that Melchizedek is mentioned in only three places in Scripture: (1) here in Genesis 14, (2) in Psalm 110, and (3) in Hebrews 5-7.

The writer of Hebrews understood these same ideas and used both the Genesis and Psalm passage to explain some of the implications of Melchizedek for the church (some of which we quoted earlier):

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "***You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.***" In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ***being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek*** (Heb 5:5-10).

Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become ***a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*** (Heb 6:20).

Then in Chapter seven, Hebrews goes into greater detail, even recounting the events between Abram and Melchizedek:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people; that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case, tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.

For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." (Heb 7:1-17).³

It follows immediately after this story where Melchizedek blesses Abram that God appeared to Abram promising his "reward shall be very great" (Gen 15:1). God then promised Abram a son for an heir and offspring that are as innumerable as the stars in heaven. Abram believed the LORD and his faith was "counted to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6).

³ In Edward Fudge's article, *Leaven: A Journal for Christian Ministry*, 17/4 (4th Qtr. 2009), p. 193, he drew the point of Hebrews further:

Both Jesus and Melchizedek occupy the dual role of king/priest, but our author focuses on their qualification to be appointed priest. Appointment to the Levitical priesthood required bloodline (Nehemiah 7:63-64), birth date (Numbers 4:46-47) and a flawless body (Leviticus 21:16-20). Melchizedek had no priestly father, mother or genealogy (Hebrews 7:3). His priesthood was not term limited by beginning or end but was rather perpetual (Hebrews 7:3). The only basis for Melchizedek's priesthood was his own character.

In the same way, Jesus' priesthood does not depend on family tree or legal term, but rather on his holy character and obedient life. His qualification for appointment as priest was not a perfect body ("a law of physical requirement") but a sinless life (Hebrews 7:16). Because Jesus was completely free of sin, death could not hold him. His priesthood is energized and sustained by the inherent dynamic of an indestructible life. For the same reason, God could swear that Jesus would be priest forever and know that he would never change his mind.