

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 3

John 1:14-34

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

Week Three Readings

1/13 Dwelt Among Us Jn 1:14	1/14 Beheld the Glory Jn 1:14	1/15 Moses & Law/ Jesus & Grace Jn 1:15-18	1/16 Moses & Law/Jesus & Truth Jn 1:15-18	1/17 John the Baptist & Elijah Jn 1:19-28	1/18 John the Baptist & Elijah Jn 1:19-28
Zech 2	Ex 33	Ex 19-21		1 Kg 17:1-7	1 Kg 21
Ps 84	Ex 40	Ex 32	Mt 4:1-2	1 Kg 18:1-20:43	2 Kg 1:1-2:14
Ps 43	Ps 67	Zech 12	Dt 8		Malachi 4
Phil 2:1-11	1 Chrn 16	Eph 2:1-10	Mt 4:3-6		
Lk 4:31-41			Ps 91		
			Dt 6:16-19		
			Mt 4:7-10		
			Dt 6:10-15		
			1 Sam 7:3-4		
			Mt 4:11		
			Lk 4:1-15		

John 1:14-34

BEHELD THE GLORY (John 1:14)

John points out that not only did Jesus become a tabernacle, dwelling with us as the presence of God, but in a real sense, as we behold Jesus, we are beholding God and his glory. This is a concept that has strong roots in a significant event in the life of Moses. Consistent with the rest of John, it is a clear illustration that Jesus was far beyond Moses. Moses pointed to Jesus.

Exodus 33

After the golden calf incident (Ex. 32), the Lord commanded Moses and the people to leave Sinai. In their journeys, Moses would erect the “Tent of Meeting” (Ex. 31:7). It was there that Moses would “meet with the Lord,” signified by a cloud coming down and guarding the entrance. Moses would converse with the Lord “face to face,” but that is not meant in a visual sense. It is in the sense that one will talk out loud and visit with a friend (Ex 33:9-11).

We see this because on one occasion, Moses asked God for the favor of getting to behold God’s glory.

Moses said, “Please show me your glory” (Ex 33:18).

God’s response not only tells us that Moses was not visually meeting with God, but it also gives the significant language John would use 1200 plus years later.

And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Ex 33:19-23).

God was not to be seen by anyone. Moses could not see his glory. This was true *until* the incarnation. For John tells us that as Jesus was the Tent of Meeting (a part of the tabernacle), in Jesus we were beholding the Glory of God!

Exodus 40

In this passage, the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was erected, and as it was finished,

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35).

This glory of God was the desire of Moses. It was not, however, something Moses would see. When God's glory entered the tabernacle, Moses had to stay outside.

This scene formed the basis of an old Hebrew blessing found in Numbers 6:25, but repeated in a number of Psalms including Psalm 67

Psalm 67

In the first verse of this song of blessing, the refrain is set forth,

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

John trumpets that this blessing is fulfilled in Jesus. In Jesus, God's face shines, his glory is seen, and God's "saving power among all the nations" is manifested.

1 Chronicles 16

In this Chronicles passage we see the tent still linked to the Ark of the Covenant. David pitched a tent for the Ark and once it was placed, David sang a song of praise. David linked the ark in the tent to God's "glory," "strength," and "splendor" (1 Chron. 16:24, 27-30).

MOSES AND LAW; JESUS AND GRACE (John 1:15-18)

Because John's gospel is so closely rooted to Old Testament thought, it is not surprising to find John draw a deliberate comparison between the great prophet and lawgiver Moses with Jesus, the Son of God, who is both prophet and priest, as well as king. Through Moses, God delivered the Law. Through Jesus, we receive grace and truth.

Ex 19-20, 32

Chapters 19-20 contain the tradition of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. This is not the full Law, but it is the most commonly known part of the Law.

The events surrounding Moses receiving the Law were frightful. The people cowered in fear as Moses went up on the mountain. The Lord spoke forth with thunder, flashes of lightening, and smoke. With the Law, came stories of compassion as well as judgment. There was a rigid covenant of obedience that would allow the Israelites to prosper in the land and be a beacon of light to other nations. This was also a covenant of judgment that taught the holiness of God contrasted to the self-centered sinfulness of humanity.

In Exodus 32 we see the reaction of the people to The awesome events of Moses receiving the Law. Moses and God were not running on their timetable, so they gave up on them and decided to make their own Gods. Aaron, Moses' brother, helped the people fashion a golden calf.

God of course knew what was going on and told Moses the people were to be destroyed, and God would make the great nation from Moses. Moses interceded for the people, and God relented from his judgment. Moses went down the mountain to straighten things out, taking the tablets with the Ten Commandments written by the hand of God.

Once Moses saw what was happening, as opposed to simply hearing God say things were bad, he reacted with anger and indignation. He threw the tablets down, breaking them. He ground up the golden calf and made the people drink it. He then drew a line in the sand and gathered those on his side, unleashing them in judgment on those opposed. About 3,000 people were killed. The next day, Moses returned up the mountain, seeking to atone for the sins of the people.

Zech 12

In this prophetic passage, Zechariah spoke of a time coming when God would take judgment out on Jerusalem yet with a twist. The judgment would turn as Judah effectuates a deliverance. Then in verse 10, we read,

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn (Zech 12:10).

John saw this prophetically speaking of Jesus, something we note in John 19:33-37 as well as Revelation 1:7. Even the Jews during the time between the Old and New Testaments saw this passage as messianic (referred to both in the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud¹).

This coming one who was pierced was coming in a spirit of grace and mercy, a comment John echoed in 1. In 1:16, John said in Jesus we received “grace upon grace,” and then in 1:17 he spoke of the “grace and truth” that came through Jesus.

Eph 2:1-10

Paul seized the same language repeatedly when he spoke of our salvation that came from Christ by grace. In Ephesians 2 we read it as a constant theme, always linked to Christ.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together *with Christ—by grace* you have been saved (Eph 2:4-5).

Again Paul linked grace and Christ just two verses later,

So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith (Eph 2:7-8).

This was not exclusive to the section of Ephesians in our reading this day. In chapter 1:6, Paul wrote of the “glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” In 4:7 he spoke of the “grace given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

MOSES AND LAW; JESUS AND TRUTH (John 1:15-18)

Matthew 4:1-11 with Deuteronomy 6:10-19, 8; Psalm 91; 1 Samuel 7:3-4; Luke 4:1-15

In these passages we read about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness along with the related Scriptures.

¹ This extensive material was not issued in writing until about AD200; however, the written Talmuds were copies of much older sayings and teachings of many rabbis on many subjects.

Matthew 4 begins setting the scene with Jesus fasting forty days and nights. This time period equates in number (days instead of years) with the time the Israelites spent in the wilderness for succumbing to temptation and fear, and refusing to believe that God could truly be God for them in conquering the Promised Land.

After forty days, the tempter comes to Jesus in the most direct temptation account since the Garden of Eden. The first temptation is not one with Satan jumping out in a red devil suit shouting out “Hey, here is one from left field to get you to sin!” The first temptation is very subtle. It deceptively seems friendly. After all, what could be nicer than offering a starving man bread? In a sense Satan said, “well, we obviously have a few things to discuss, but I know you’re hungry. So first, let’s get that out of the way. Then we can get down to business. If you’re the Son of God, all you need to do is turn these stones into bread!”

Jesus reacted by going to Scripture. He cited the Deuteronomy 8 passage that reflected on the 40-year wilderness testing by God. The fuller context of Jesus’ reference is instructive.

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (Dt. 8:1-3).

Jesus’ response moved Satan to try the second temptation, this time mixing it with Scripture. Satan throws the challenge out for Jesus to prove he really was who he thought he was.

Satan wanted Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the temple and let angels save his life. Satan quoted Psalm 91:11, 12, which read,

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Reading the Psalm would require quite a reach to conclude it allows one to attempt suicide knowing God would not let it happen. This is no different than people

today not going to get medical treatment under the guise, “If God wants me healed, he will heal me.” Jesus responded with another passage from Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6, verse 16.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers.

Massah was the name given to the area where Moses struck the rock to bring water for the grumbling Israelites. The Hebrew name reflects the Hebrew word *masah* (מַסָּה), which means testing or proving. It pointed to the absurdity of the Israelites, for whom God had performed ten miraculous signs to get their release from Egypt, for whom God had parted the Red Sea, for whom God had defeated one of the world’s strongest armies drowning the Egyptians in pursuit, as they tried to get God to prove himself by giving them water. Jesus knew better than to tempt God.

Satan then went to Plan C. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and offered them in return for Jesus’ worship. Jesus sent Satan away quoting from both Deuteronomy 6 again, as well as from 1 Samuel 7:3.

And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear (Dt. 6:10-13).

And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the Lord only (1 Sam 7:3-4).

Jesus came into his ministry, not based on any falsehood or deception. He walked in steeped in Scripture and truth. It was the hallmark of his ministry, in contrast to the deception of the Tempter. John will make this point repeatedly in his gospel writing later about Jesus referencing Satan as the “father of lies” (Jn 8:44), and pointing out that he (Jesus) was the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6).

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND ELIJAH (John 1:19-28)

At this point in John 1, John returns to the thread began in John 1:6-8 about John the Baptist (called simply “John” for the gospel writer while the fuller “JTB” is used for John the Baptist). Here we have John recounting the ministry of JTB, including the issue of whether John is “Elijah.”

JTB was born of a priestly father and mother who was in the priestly line. He undoubtedly had many acquaintances and contacts among the priests, so it is not surprising that once JTB’s wilderness preaching reached a significant and effect level, some priests and Levites were sent to check out his thoughts and intentions (Jn 1:19).

JTB was quizzed over whether he considered himself the Messiah.² He replied he was not the Christ, at which point he was asked whether he was the prophet Elijah. JTB denied this also. The questioners needed some answer to whom JTB thought he was, so when pressed further, JTB claimed for himself the personage prophesied in Isaiah 40:3, the voice of one crying in the wilderness to make the path straight for the coming Lord.

The priests and Levites did not get this reference, and they pushed further, quizzing JTB on why he was baptizing if he was neither the Christ nor Elijah. John replied with a promise that one was coming who had such great value and worth that JTB was not even worthy to tie his sandals.

1 Kg 21; 2 Kg 1:1-2:14

In these Kings passages we read of Elijah and his ministry.

The events of 1 Kings 21 are in the time of wicked King Ahab. Ahab wanted a vineyard owned by an Israelite not willing to sell. Ahab’s wicked wife Jezebel set

² the Greek word for “anointed” is *christos* – χριστός, and most Bibles translate it as the Anglicized word “Christ” rather than “annointed.” The Hebrew word for anointed is “messiah,” which is translated into English as “Messiah.” Hence the words “Christ” and “Messiah” are Greek and Hebrew versions of the same word, “Anointed One.” John uses the words interchangeably in John 1:41

the owner up on trumped up charges of treason against God and king, resulting in his wrongful conviction and death. Ahab then took the vineyard.

God sent the prophet Elijah to Ahab to condemn Ahab for his sin, and Ahab repented before Elijah. God recognized the genuine repentance and relented from the penalties as announced in the initial prophetic judgment.

In the 2 Kings passage, the king Ahaziah seeks a word from the Lord, but Elijah does not wish to go before the king, preferring to simply send word that the king will die from his malady. The king insists on Elijah's presence three times sending groups of 50 men to physically escort Elijah. The first two groups are killed by lightning and fire from the sky. The third group comes with a different captian, who repents for his actinos before Elijah begging for mercy. Mercy is extended to him and his troops and Elijah accompanies them to the king.

Elijah then travelled to the king and delivered the bad news personally. After this, Elijah's time on earth ended, but not by an ordinary death. Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot, leaving a clear idea for the Jews that Elijah might one day return! This produced a tradition that Elijah would return to earth to herald the new king (Messiah) and his kingdom. Some understood this in prophecies like that in Malachi 4.

Malachi 4

Malachi 4 is the last Old Testament chapter in the ordering of Scripture used in the church today. Therefore it comes right before Mathew 1 and the birth of Jesus.

In Malachi 4, the great day of the Lord is announced when the "sun of righteousness" will rise "with healings in his wings" (Mal 4:2). Malachi promised that "before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes," God would send "Elijah the prophet" to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal 4:5-6).

JTB was not some reincarnation of Elijah, nor was Malachi speaking of the actual person Elijah returning. There was prophet coming, the Isaiah one who would "prepare the way for the Lord," and this was to be done in the spirit of Elijah. So we have JTB refusing to identify himself as Elijah in this John passage, even though scripture recognizes JTB as the one who came in the spirit of Elijah, as prophesied in passages like Malachi 4.

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE LAMB OF GOD (John 1:29-34)

In this interesting passage, John points to Jesus and proclaims him the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Many who read this immediately turn to the Old Testament idea of the sacrifice for the Day of Atonement.

Yet on the Day of Atonement, while there are lambs offered for sacrifice, it is the male goat that is the “sin offering” (Num. 29:7-11). In the more detailed instructions of Lev. 16, the Israelites were told to offer a bull for the sins of the priests followed by two goats for the sin offering of the people.

Lev 4-5

If we consider the general sin offerings instructed under the Law (Set out in Leviticus 4), we again have a bull for the sin offering of the priests, a bull for the sin of the “whole Israelite community,” a male goat for unintentional sins of a community “leader,” a female goat for unintentional sins of an ordinary Israelite, and a *female* lamb as the ordinary sin offering.

To us, the differences may seem either irrelevant or indistinguishable, but to a people who have had various sacrifices for various reasons since birth, it was as normal and understood as road signs are to a driver today. No experienced driver confuses a stop sign with a speed limit sign.

Even in Leviticus 9, where a male lamb is offered as a “burnt offering,” it is not the sin offering. The sin offering is a goat.

There are male lambs offered as general burnt offerings, as offerings for “guilt” for ceremonial cleansing for one defiled by a skin disease (Lev. 14). One under a Nazarite vow sacrifices a male lamb if that person is defiled by coming into contact with a dead person or at the conclusion of the vow as a burnt offering (Num. 6). When the tabernacle was dedicated, male lambs were offered as “peace offerings, but again the sin offerings were male goats (Num. 7). This pattern is repeated in the other “sacrifice instruction” passages in the Old Testament.

Ex 12:1-28

The Passover is a big exception to this pattern. In the Passover, for all Israel, the lamb sacrificed was a male, without blemish. It was the blood of this lamb that was painted on the lintels and over the doorways. The blood of the male lambs caused the angel of death to Passover the houses with those under the blood of the lamb. Those without the male lamb’s blood faced the “judgments” of the Lord.

Mt 3

Matthew 3 presents Matthew's synopsis of John the Baptist's ministry. Matthew points out that the work of Jesus was of Supreme importance and holiness. It was a work of and with the Holy Spirit. It was a work of repentance. Even the best most perfect sacrifice, without the right heart of the penitent, is no real sacrifice. It's just a killing.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare the reactions of the Israelites to the Law (the golden calf episode) with the reactions to the grace and truth found in Jesus.
2. In what ways can you see Moses as a foreshadowing of Christ? How was Jesus like Moses, but on a grander scale?
3. What safeguards does the believer have to protect one from the deceptive assaults of Satan?
4. What are the parallels between the sacrifice of Jesus and the lamb slain at the first Passover? How are the Israelites like believers today?

Week Four Readings

1/20 John the Baptist & the Lamb of God Jn 1:29-34

Context: Focus on the different types of sacrifice. Jesus is called the "lamb," not a bull, a dove, or a goat (all of which were used for various sacrifices).

Ex 12:1-28
Lev 4-5
Mt 3

1/21 Jesus Begins His Ministry Jn 1:35-39

Context: As Jesus began his ministry, the other gospels inserted several key events following Jesus' baptism. Several gospels reference Old Testament passages that should be considered in context.

Mk 1:9-13
Isa 64
Lk 5:1-11
Mt 4:12-25
Isa 9:1-5
Lk 3:18-22
Mk 1:14-20
Isa 42:18-25

1/22 Jesus - Messiah Jn 1:40-42

Context: "Messiah" means "anointed." Historically the kings of Israel were "anointed," and the Old Testament gives us examples of the special place for divinely appointed, anointed royalty.

1 Sam 8:1-10:16
2 Sam 5:1-5
Ps 21
Ps 72

1/23 Nathaniel's Call Jn 1:43-51

Context: The calling of Nathaniel echoes heavily the Genesis story of Isaac. Reading these Genesis chapters should help everyone try to find the echos.
Gen 27-30

1/24 Nathaniel's Call Jn 1:43-51

Gen 31-33

1/25 A Celebration of Marriage Jn 2:1-12

Context: The Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and marital love. Consider the wedding at Cana in that light.
Song of Sol 1-4

1/26 Off
