

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 11

John 4:46-5:21

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

Week Eleven Readings

<p>Mar. 10 Jesus Heals Through Intercession Jn 4:46-54</p> <p><i>Context: Intercession for others is an old concept deeply rooted in the Old Testament.</i></p> <p>Gen 20 Ex 15:22-27 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>Dt 16:1-17 Ps 81 Isa 25</p>	<p>Mar. 11. Jesus Heals on the Sabbath Jn 5:2-17</p> <p><i>Context: Repeatedly Jesus confounded his opponents because he realized what values trumped the Sabbath commandments.</i></p> <p>Ex 31:12-17 Lk 13:10-17 Ex 35:1-3 Mt 12:1-8 Lk 6:1-19 1 Sam 20-21</p> <p>Mar. 12. Jesus Heals on the Sabbath Jn 5:2-17 Cont'd</p> <p>Lev 23:1-3 Num 15:32-36 Lev 25 Prv 27:3-10 Hag 2 Mt 12:9-21 Is 42:1-4 Mk 2:23-3:6</p>	<p>Mar. 13 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-21</p> <p><i>Context: The uniqueness of Jesus' claims on God as Father is silhouetted in New and Old Testament passages.</i></p> <p>Dan 3 Mk 3:7-12 Mt 16:13-20 Lk 10:1-12 Mk 8:27-30 Prv 18:1 Mt 8:1-4 Lk 10:17-24 Lev 13:1-46 Heb 1:1-5 Num 5:1-4 Ps 2</p> <p>Mar. 14 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-21 Cont'd</p> <p>Heb 1:6-9 Heb 1:13-14 Ps 45 Ps 110 Heb 1:10-12 Mt 22:41-46 Ps 102</p>	<p>Mar. 15 The Father and Son Jn 5:18-21 Cont'd</p> <p>Heb 5:1-6 Mt 16:21-28 Heb 7 1 Pet 1:1-21 Heb 2:1-4 Heb 2:11-12 Dt 31:14-29 Ps 22:22-24 Dt 18:15-22 Heb 2:13 Mk 16:19-20 Ps 18:1-3 Heb 2:5-8 Isa 8:16-22 Ps 8 Heb 2:9-10</p> <p>Mar. 16 Off</p>
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JESUS HEALS THROUGH INTERCESSION (John 4:46-54)

In this passage, John told of Jesus healing the son of an official. The official left his home in Capernaum and found Jesus in Cana, a distance of about 15 miles. The official asked Jesus to “come down” and heal his son. (“Come down” because Cana was elevated in the hills while Capernaum was seaside.) Jesus does not need to go to the young boy, who urgently needed the Master’s touch (John notes the urgency that the boy was “at the point of death.”) Jesus simply instructed the man to go home, that his son would live. As the man neared home, his servants intercepted him and told him his son was healed. The official asked the precise time of healing, and learned it was the moment when he had received assurance from Jesus.

Seeking divine help for another is not foreign in the Bible. It goes back and is deeply rooted in the ancient histories of the Old Testament. We have inserted three examples for context.

Genesis 20

Genesis 20 tells a story steeped in the culture and traditions of 4,000 years ago. Abraham is in Gerar, the land of King Abimelech and is worried about his safety. So Abraham tells the king that Sarah, Abraham’s wife, is really Abraham’s sister. Abimelech then takes Sarah as his own, but illness and disease strikes his family. Abimelech has a dream, and the dream is set up like a trial, with Abimelech as the defendant. God charges Abimelech with the death penalty (“you are a dead man because...”) for taking the wife of another. Abimelech provides his own defense (“Did he not say to me...?”). God then sentences Abimelech, assuring if he restored that which he took, *and* convinced Abraham to intervene on his own behalf, then God would spare Abimelech’s life and bring healing to his wife and children.

Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham adding more gifts as well, and Abraham intercedes on behalf of the wife and children bringing them restored health.

We should always be guarded in trying to understand these passages for at least two reasons. First, there are clear cultural differences, including wives as property rights rather than simply relationships, which we are not always fully understanding or appreciating. Second, this is a cryptic story that tells a point, but not one that tells full details. Likely there are plenty of extraneous facts that would make more sense of what occurred. Abimelech and Abraham had already had encounters, there was something that moved Abraham to fear, and while the story is told in a handful of verses, it likely transpired over months or more. (There was time for Abimelech’s wives and daughters to cease bearing children, something resolved after Abraham’s intercession).

The word used for Abraham praying for Abimelech (פלל - *pll*), is not used often in the Old Testament or in the books of Moses. It is used twice in Genesis 20, twice in Numbers (Nm. 11:2; 21:7), and twice in Deuteronomy (Dt. 9:20, 26). Each time it is used as intercessory prayer, one for another. Abraham and Moses are the two prophets interceding in these passages.

Exodus 15:22-27

This Exodus passage takes place after the Israelites have crossed the Sea of Rushes (“the Red Sea” is the translation used, but we should not conclude it is the same body of water called the “Red Sea” today.) The people had made it through the water, but the text sets up an interesting contrast. Pharaoh’s army drowned, being overwhelmed by too much water, while the Israelites seemed to be on the verge of destruction by a lack of potable water.

Moses interceded for the grumbling and complaining Israelites by turning the nearby bitter water into sweet water that could be consumed. Moses took the complaint to the Lord who instructed Moses to throw a log into the water to change it. God then told the Israelites through Moses that if they would honor and obey God as Lord, he would not let the diseases of the Egyptians come upon them. God rightfully declared himself, *Yhwh rf*’ (יהוה רפא), God the healer!

Numbers 12

This story is a gripping and personal account of Moses as intercessor. His brother and sister are put out with him, apparently in part over his marriage to a Cushite (likely an Ethiopian, but not entirely agreed to by scholars). The rift seems to flow deeper though, as his brother and sister are convinced Moses was no more special in his calling than were they. Moses does not rise up to defend himself, with the text adding that he was “very meek.” The Hebrew for “very meek” is *’nv m’d* (ענו מאד) meaning “meek” or “humble,” and scholars seem to take it as Moses not being self-assertive, noting God rising up in his defense.¹ Moses’ humble nature certainly stands in stark contrast in this story to the pride exhibited by his siblings Aaron and Miriam. The term is not used much in the Pentateuch, and in the prophets it is translated both as the “meek” and the “poor,” although not in a poverty sense, in the sense of someone who is hurting (a bit like us saying, “poor soul!” about someone who is having a great deal of difficulty.) From this the word can convey an idea of being “dejected” or “bowed down.”² It can even convey the idea of “depressed.” The story certainly seems like one where we can

¹ Budd, Philip, *Word Bible Commentary: Numbers* (Thomas Nelson 1984), at 136.

² “ענוי,” Kohler, Ludwig and Baumgartner, W., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Brill 2002).

understand a greater depth of the word. Moses was not simply an humble man, he was downcast over this trouble with his family. At this point, God rose up in Moses' defense, bringing challenge and disease upon Miriam. Aaron then interceded with Moses who in turn sought the Lord's intervention and healing. God healed Miriam, but still assessed a punishment of seven days.

JESUS ATTENDS A FEAST (John 5:1)

As John chapter five begins, Jesus returns to Jerusalem for a feast. We are not told which feast it was, and scholars do not readily agree that we can determine it. Our context readings are not tied to a particular feast, but mainly note the importance that feasts played in the life of observant Jews.

Deuteronomy 16:1-17

Here we have Moses setting out three feasts for the Israelites to observe, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. The Passover was to be observed "at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it" (Dt. 16:6). At the time of Jesus, of course, this was Jerusalem. Likewise the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated "at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it" (Dt. 16:11). The Feast of Booths is noted as simply "at the place that the Lord will choose" (Dt. 16:15).

Psalm 81

Psalm 81 is a feasting song, likely in celebration of the autumn festival the Feast of Booths (*sukkot*). It is a psalm (and feast) that celebrates the caring love and provision of the Lord for his people. This provision was readily apparent in the events of the exodus, and is no less apparent since. God is a God who seeks to provide those who turn to him with the "finest of the wheat" and "honey from the rock" (Ps. 81:16).

Isaiah 25

The context passages end with this chapter that speaks of God providing not only the requirement that the people feast commemorating and celebrating his provision, but also that God himself will set a feast for his people. A day will come, the prophet foresaw, when God would make a "feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow" (Is 25:6). And while the people feast on the food, God will swallow up death, and all its implications. God devours our troubles even as he gives us delights for our own consumption (Is. 25:7-8). Isaiah notes this is the Lord worth waiting on, the one who brings "salvation" (Is. 25:9).

Over and over we read of the problems Jesus had with certain groups because he worked miracles of healing on the Sabbath. Jesus never stopped the greater compassionate good of doing God's work on a day God had set aside for man's rest. Jesus was not flagrantly disregarding God's law, he was rather recognizing that there were times where the need for God's work was great and outweighed the purposes behind the Sabbath.

Ex 31:12-17; 35:1-3

Exodus 31:12-17 set out the instructions God gave Moses for the Sabbath. It was a sign for the Israelites to keep out of regard for the Lord, and understanding that God set a covenant with the people. The Sabbath also echoed the work of God in creating the world. There was a severe penalty associated with ignoring God's command, evidenced also by the command's reiteration in Ex. 35:1-3. It was not to be taken lightly. To the contrary, it was most serious.

This should have evidenced to the Jews around Jesus, the importance to God of alleviating human suffering. Think of it this way. If the Sabbath was so important, that one would die as a penalty of broaching it, then how much more important must it be to alleviate human suffering? It makes the Sabbath a 90 on a scale of 1 to 100. Alleviating human suffering doubtless comes close to a 100 on that scale. Of course, it goes without saying, the death of Christ set the ultimate value on alleviating humanity's suffering – now and eternally.

Luke 6:1-19; 13:10-17

Luke 6:1-19 gives more insight into Jesus and the Sabbath. In Luke's researched account, he added the teaching of Jesus that "the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (Lk 6:5). This is another aspect to the Sabbath issues that never occurred to the people. It does not diminish the issue of priorities discussed above, as is clear from Luke giving Jesus' example of David eating the bread of the Presence set out in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Yet the idea of Jesus as lord of the Sabbath is something else altogether. Notice the "lord" is not capitalized. Jesus is not using it in the sense of the "Lord" as a name or title. He is using it in the sense of "master." The Sabbath is the time made for man to rest in recognition of the work of God. Jesus was no ordinary man. Jesus was man, but also God. As such, the Sabbath is not binding upon God. God made the Sabbath; the Sabbath could never prevail over God. Sabbath is important because God decreed it so. God ALWAYS trumps Sabbath. Heaven forbid anyone think otherwise. So why wouldn't Christ be doing God's work every day?

So in the Luke passage, we read of Christ healing a withered hand on the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11), nestled right next to Jesus calling his twelve apostles and ministering to a multitude (Luke 6:12-19). Jesus did the work of God 24/7!

Similarly in Luke 13:10-17, we read of Jesus again encountering a needed healing on the Sabbath. This time the woman who came to him had a “disabling spirit for eighteen years.” The ruler of the synagogue was upset that the woman sought healing on the Sabbath, scolding her with a righteous indignation that she had six other days each week where she could seek help. Jesus turned the ruler’s scolding back on him by first challenging certain priorities (“You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?” Lk 13:15). Jesus then gave the explanation of the greater good; this was a “child of Abraham” who had already waited for 18 years, why should she have to wait another day? Those in judgment were ashamed as Jesus spoke, even as the rest of the people rejoiced!

Matthew 12:1-8 and 1 Samuel 20-21

Here we have set Matthew’s account of Jesus again using the example of David and his troops did eating the bread of the Presence. In this account, Jesus made the reference when he was scolded for his disciples plucking some wheat to eat while going through grain fields on the Sabbath. There was likely a two-fold concern that Jesus and his followers were breaking the law. First, by picking the grain, they could technically be “harvesting.” Second, by rubbing the hulls together in their hands to get the edible grain, they were arguably “threshing.”

When challenged, Jesus recalled the actions of David in 1 Samuel where David was on the run from Saul. David received from the priest Ahimelech the “bread of the Presence,” which “is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away” (1 Sam. 21:6). Leviticus 24:8 indicates that the bread of the Presence was replaced on Sabbaths, helping us understand Jesus’ explanation. David was getting bread he was not entitled to, and likely doing it on the Sabbath. David needed the bread, and David on his holy mission as God’s anointed, trumped the general formality for the bread. This story fits Matthew’s frequent references to Jesus as the Son of David. Jesus was on a holy mission and was not to be subjugated to the normal formalities of ordinary life.

Jesus used a second analogy to make his point. Temple priests were technically involved in butchering on the Sabbath by cutting up the sacrifices they were offering (see Num. 28:9-10). Yet it was the right thing to do.

Leviticus 23:1-3; 25

In these two Leviticus passages, we have reinforced teachings about the importance of the Sabbath and how people should live in reverence. Leviticus 23:1-3 instructed the Israelites to keep it each week by doing no work. Leviticus 25 extended the Sabbath to an observance every seven years. The seventh year was to provide rest for the land

from sowing and harvest. Then the instruction is for a Sabbath of Sabbaths in what became known as the Year of Jubilee. Every seven times seven years (meaning forty-nine years), liberty was proclaimed throughout the land, returning property, releasing slaves, and aiding the poor and needy. These passages themselves offer a glimpse into the importance of the Sabbath. It was no simple rule to be checked off each time obeyed. It was a recognition of God, his provision, his deeds in the past, his love in the present, and his assurance in the future. In light of this, it would be a denial of the Sabbath if Jesus *didn't* use it to effectuate God's will!

Haggai 2

Along with Zechariah and Malachi, Haggai is most likely one of the last three minor prophet books time wise. The prophecies in each book occur *after* the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity.

After Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C., the Jews had remained in captivity while Jerusalem lay in ruins until the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. allowed for the Jews return and the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others prophesied this return. The return and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the temple are written about in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Haggai contains four short oracles connected with the restoration of the temple in 520 B.C. The dates the oracles were given are precise down to month and date (as related to the reign of Darius I). Haggai delivered the oracles over a span of about three months and we read the last three in chapter Haggai chapter 2. We know little about Haggai beyond his involvement in this rebuilding chore. Haggai's historical activity is noted in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

In light of the prophecy in Haggai 2, the people should always have been alerted for the time where God was going to be doing something far greater than Israel and Judah had ever experienced. The second oracle (2:1-9) was words of encouragement for those who thought the foundations of the rebuilt temple were shabby compared to those of Solomon's temple. Haggai declares the words of Yahweh about the new temple that "in a little while...I will fill this house with glory" and "the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house."

This prophecy is stout with special words being used. "Glory" was a special word used to refer to the presence of God. It was God's "glory" that passed before Moses. It was God's "glory" that rested upon the Ark of the Covenant. It was God's "glory" that filled the tabernacle and the temple. Of course, never was the "glory" of God more fully revealed than when Jesus Christ, God himself came down and inhabited the earth, walking and teaching in the Temple.

The third oracle (2:10-19) is an example of the law to teach a spiritual lesson about how obedience before the Lord is the key to holiness.

The final oracle (2:20-23) concerns a personal message for Zerubbabel, the Governor of Judah. Haggai explains that Zerubbabel is a sign or guarantee that the Messiah would one day descend from David. This was the day that Jews were looking for, and Matthew's usage of the David account by Jesus is one in a list of events that should have told the people who Jesus was.

Matthew 12:9-21, Isaiah 42:1-4 and Mark 2:23-3:6

Matthew finished the storyline noting that Jesus healed the man with a withered hand on a Sabbath and then withdrew, but not without healing those who followed. Matthew specified that Jesus was fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah 42:1-4 as the servant of God. Jesus was not walking contrary to God's will; he was fulfilling it. Mark gave the same storyline in Mark 2:23-3:6, adding a few extra insights. Mark informs us that the real reason Jesus was opposed was from a "hardness of hearts" (Mk 3:5), which Jesus found upsetting. This became a reason that a group of Pharisees and Herodians began to plot how to destroy Jesus. It is likely a reason Jesus withdrew at the time, making it even more meaningful that even as he withdrew, he continued to heal all who came to him, warning each not to go telling. Jesus did not heal for earthly fame. He healed out of compassion for those hurting and in need.

Numbers 15:32-36

This passage is inserted into the context for several reasons. First, it shows the reason some Jews may have been so concerned over breaking the Sabbath. Second, it shows the seriousness of the Sabbath commandment to the Lord. But it is this very seriousness that shows the overwhelming concern Jesus had for those who were hurting or sick and in need. God valued that over anything that was inherent in the holiness of the Sabbath.

Proverbs 27:3-10

We have added these proverbs into this reading for the ideas they convey in light of the story of the Pharisees interacting with Jesus. Consider each in light of the foolishness of the Pharisees (Prov. 27:3); the wrath and anger the Pharisees exhibited (Prov. 27:4); Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees (Prov. 27:5-6); the insensitivity of the Pharisees to those hurting (Prov. 27:7); and the role of Jesus in the lives of those needing help (Prov. 27:8-10).

John includes in his gospel strong references and teaching about Jesus as the “unique” or “only begotten” Son of God. John did not think this up on his own. John was recording Christ’s teachings and the events that occurred during Jesus’ ministry. John 5:18-21 set out this teaching after the events of the Sabbath, events that added up to not only breaking the Sabbath, but of equating himself to God who established the Sabbath.

In response, Jesus told the people that his actions were simply a reproduction of the actions of the Father. The Father had Jesus working the Father’s will on earth. The time was coming when the Father would do even greater work, being the one who raises the dead, the Father would see that Jesus also gives life to whomever he willed.

Daniel 3

In the third chapter of Daniel, we read of God’s power to deliver his followers, even from the wrath of a king. This is a well-known and spectacular story of God saving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar made a massive idol on the plains of Dura and ordered most everyone who was in government service to come before the statue and bow in worship. Failure to show obeisance would result in death by fire. Jealous government ministers saw this as a chance to eliminate Daniel’s friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The ministers told the king that the three refused to worship the idol. The king called the three in and gave them one more chance to obey and show obeisance. The three told the king not to even waste time setting up the opportunity, they would sooner face his fire than deny their God.

Enraged, the king ordered the fire revved hotter than normal and the three were tied up and thrown into the furnace. Looking into the furnace, the king discovered that not only were the three without even a single mark, but their bonds were gone and there was a fourth presence in the furnace who was in appearance “like a son of the gods” (Dan. 3:25). This was not a light statement by the king. Archaeologists have uncovered other examples of this phraseology in a closely related time period. In Southern Turkey (Karatepe), an inscription dated a bit earlier reads of a king Azitawadda who cursed any who removed his legacy proclaiming that they should be “wiped out” by Ba’al, El, and “the whole group of the sons [children] of the gods.”³ The king knew that this was not a simple case of asbestos clothes on the three Jews; something divine had taken a special interest in the three. One cannot help but wonder if the king did not look upon his created statue as a bit silly at this point!

The three were brought out of the furnace with not so much as an odor of burn, and Nebuchadnezzar, who started the chapter ordering all to worship his created idol now

³ Pritchard, James D., *Ancient Near-Eastern Texts*, (Princeton 1969), at 654.

ordered all to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! What happened to the jealous government ministers seeking the firing (pun intended) of the three? They had to suffer the three getting promoted!

We note two special aspects to this passage that add to its context for the day's reading. First, Nebuchadnezzar saw the men walking in the midst of the fire. In other words, God did not save the three *from the* fire; he saved them *in* the fire. John Goldingay says it well in his commentary,

The life of blessing and success that is their destiny is reached, not by way of costless and risk-free triumph but by the way of the cross. They are free, looking as if they are enjoying a walk in the garden.⁴

Second, the idea a “son of the gods” accompanying the men was not only language and ideas of the king, but Scripture repeatedly speaks of God himself stepping into situations of hardship and difficulty to be with his followers. Perhaps most famously we remember the assurances of Psalm 23, especially verses four and five:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 8:1-34; Leviticus 13:1-46; Numbers 5:1-4; and Mark 3:7-12

In this stretch of contextual readings, we see the building blocks of the Christology developed in the church over the years after the resurrection of Christ. In the gospels, we see a basic understanding of God's provision in his Son and the idea of an anointed coming from God to aid and assist God's people. This came from certain Old Testament passages. But it took the Holy Spirit and the events of the cross and resurrection to unfold more fully the import of certain Old Testament Scriptures and the work of God in Christ.

So in Matthew 16:13-20 we read Peter's famous acclamation of Jesus as “the Christ [“Messiah”], the Son of the living God.” Peter knew God was sending an “anointed” (translated “Christ” for the Greek word “anointed”). Mark relates the story in Mark 8:27-30. He does not give Matthew's details, which is not surprising if church history is correct in its many references from the earliest church writers in the second century that

⁴ Goldingay, John, *Word Bible Commentary: Daniel*, (Thomas Nelson 1989), at 74.

Mark wrote Peter's gospel message.⁵ To set out Peter's reception of Christ' incredible blessing and dialogue about the "rock" (Mt. 16:17-19) would not readily comport with the humility Peter taught (1 Pt. 5:6). So while some thought Jesus was a manifestation of John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets, Peter affirmed Jesus as Christ.

Matthew 8 relates the stories of Jesus healing a leper, the servant of a centurion, Peter's mother-in-law, and more. Jesus calmed a storm, and then came upon two men with demons in the countryside of the Gadarenes. These two demons cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God?" (Mt. 8:29), indicating that the demons were well aware of Jesus' real identity beyond his human nature. Similar episodes happened at other times with demons, as noted in Mark 3:7-12.

Interjected into this contextual reading are the passages from Leviticus 13:1-46 and Numbers 5:1-4 to explain why Jesus told the healed leper to "go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them" (Mt. 8:4). It is worth noting that the idea of "leprosy" contained in these passages is not simply our medical diagnosis of leprosy today. The Hebrew word (*tzr't* - צרעה) refers to any number of skin diseases.⁶

Luke 10:1-12, 17-24 and Proverbs 18:1

In this Luke passage, Jesus divided 72 of his followers into pairs of twos and sent them out to do kingdom work, healing the sick and proclaiming the kingdom of God. The followers did as commissioned and returned, amazed that even demons were subject to them. Jesus explained Satan's defeat, but told his followers the real reason for rejoicing was not what they had accomplished, but that their names were written in heaven.

⁵ The early church was unanimous that Mark authored the second gospel, by relating Peter's preaching of the gospel. The fuss of the early church was over whether Mark wrote it with Peter's permission, acquiescence, at Peter's request, or even after Peter's death. Thus Papias (c.60-130) wrote that, "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatever he remembered." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14-17. Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215) also confirmed Mark as recording Peter's proclaimed gospel message, but not at Peter's request, just with Peter's awareness. "The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it. When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.5-7. Irenaeus wrote that Mark recorded Peter's gospel after the death of Peter. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8. Origen (c.185-c.254) thought that Peter had instructed Mark to write the gospel. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.

⁶ The seminal resource on this is generally cited as Hulse, E.V., "The Nature of Biblical leprosy and the use of alternative medical terms in modern translations," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 107 (July-Dec. 1975): 87-105.

Jesus then retreated into prayer rejoicing before God and thanking God for working through the followers. Jesus acknowledged in prayer that the Father had uniquely handed all things over to Jesus as God's Son, and as God's Son, Jesus is able to hand things over to others.

We linked this story up with Proverbs 18:1, which speaks out against isolation and in favor of companionship. One person alone will have a tendency to seek the desires of that one person. But when we are in a group, even as the pairs Jesus sent out, we reckon with more than personal desires.

Hebrews 1:1-5 and Psalm 2

The first two chapters of Hebrews speak directly to Jesus as the Son of God, tying in Old Testament passages as both support and explanation. Hebrews begins affirming that long ago, God had spoken at many times and in many ways by the prophets, but now God had spoken through "his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). As the Son, Jesus reflected God's radiance and the "exact imprint" of God's nature. Jesus made purification for the sins of the world, and then sat down at God's right hand, signifying by his sitting that his work was finished. As God's Son, as one who accomplished the salvation of humanity, Jesus is greater than any angelic being. This fact was foretold in Psalm 2, which the writer of Hebrews connected as one of the times God spoke of Jesus "by way of the prophets."

Psalm 2 speaks of the reign of God's Son. The nations and people may rage against him, but no one can stop him or his work. The Son will reign over all, and anyone with any sense will serve the Lord, rejoice in him, and take refuge in his care.

Hebrews 1:6-9 and Psalm 45

Hebrews then continues to speak of the greatness of Jesus as Son using Psalm 45. Psalm 45 is a "Messianic Psalm" that was written with praise of an earthly king in mind, but also a greater prophetic praise for a coming king of kings. The Psalm spoke of one who is "anointed" (which is the meaning and basis of "Messiah" in Hebrew and "Christ" in Greek), who takes God's throne "forever and ever," loving "righteousness" and hating "wickedness."

Hebrews 1:10-12 and Psalm 102

As the Hebrews writer continues to march through the Old Testament prophetic words with Christ as the object we read Hebrews quoting from Psalm 102, which is a prayer for one afflicted. It contrasts the affliction of one on earth with the Lord who is enthroned forever. The earth's people and their afflictions are temporary, but not the Lord. The works of his hands last forever. Even as earth changes and perishes, the Lord will change his people and secure them forever. First and foremost, this speaks to the

eternity of Jesus Christ, man and God, yet it also speaks to his work on our behalf and our eternal care as well.

Hebrews 1:13-14; Psalm 110; Matthew 22:41-46; Hebrews 5:1-6; and 7:1-28

The writer of Hebrews again contrasts Jesus with the angels noting that the angels are ministering spirits to those of us who inherit the salvation wrought for us by Jesus. To the angels, God has not subjected the enemies, but to Jesus. This is explained as fulfilling the prophetic promise in Psalm 110 that the Lord will rule his people and will intercede on their behalf, with any enemy getting between God and his people being destroyed. This is a psalm the writer of Hebrews will return to later as it speaks of the Messiah as a “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” The same Psalm (110) was used by Jesus himself when confronting the Pharisees in Matthew 22:41-46. Jesus confounded the Pharisees by asking them to explain how David could call his offspring his “Lord”?

Hebrews 5:1-6 is the teaching that Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, quoting again from Psalm 110. We pause here to consider Melchizedek in his wider Biblical frame. 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.⁷ 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

⁷ Next lesson will deal with the insights we get into the life of Abraham from archaeology and other ancient near eastern studies.

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.⁸

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:

⁸ Dykes, J. Oswald, *Abraham, the Friend of God: A study from Old Testament History* (London: Nisbet & Co. 1877) at 107.

1. “Melchizedek” as a name carries significance. The name is a composite of two Hebrew words, “*Melek*” meaning “king” and “*sedeq*” meaning “righteousness.” 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.⁹ This is tied to Jesus who himself called Jerusalem, “the city of the great King” (Mt. 5:35). It was in Jerusalem that Jesus spoke of the Temple as his “Father’s house” (Lk 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 (Lk 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 (Mt. 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

⁹ 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.

crucifixion. Scholars call this prayer “the High Priestly Prayer” recognizing Christ intervenes as a High Priest. The title added to Jesus’ name is “Christ” (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 5:6 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” (Lk 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. 7:1-15).¹⁰

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).

Hebrews 2:1-4; Deuteronomy 31:14-29; 18:15-22; and Mark 16:19-20

In light of who Jesus is, and in view of the incredible salvation he has wrought, Hebrews 2:1-4 charges each to pay close attention. For if, as Deuteronomy 31:14-29 and 18:15-22 is correct, and if sin before God automatically results in alienation and condemnation (just like putting one's hand in fire automatically results in a burn), then how shall any escape the condemnation if they ignore or neglect the salvation available through Christ? This salvation was won, and the early church meant this in the idea that after finishing, Christ "sat down at the right hand of God" (Mk. 16:19-20).

Hebrews 2:5-8 and Psalm 8

Here the writer of Hebrews links up the implications of Psalm 8 more directly to Jesus. Psalm 8 asks what is so special about man that God has made him and valued him so

¹⁰ 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.

highly, but Psalm 8 then adds in parallel fashion, the same about the “son of man.” Hebrews seizes on this to point out the emphatic truth that Christ was lowered by becoming a man, but such subjugation was temporary. For Christ was highly exalted (see, e.g., Phil 2:5-11), and all things were subjected under *his* feet.

Hebrews 2:9-10; Matthew 16:21-28; and 1 Peter 1:1-21

The writer gives the fuller explanation of his psalm 8 usage in Hebrews 2:9-10. Jesus was crowned with glory due him after his suffering what was due us! That is the nature of the interceding high priest. It is the amazing salvation. Even while on earth, Jesus had prepared his followers that this was the way things were unfolding. In Matthew 16:21-28, Jesus prophetically explained his own death and the implications for his followers to walk the same path, following him in humble obedience to whatever God sets before them in this life. Peter sets out the same, but from his perspective in 1 Peter 1:1-21, explaining that the prophets could foresee God at work in the anointed, but they were unable to see it in fruition as we have. They longed to know “what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Pt. 1:11). Instead, they simply got to recognize that they were prophesying for generations to come, that others might see and understand Jesus as Messiah.

Hebrews 2:11-12; Psalm 22:22-24; Hebrews 2:13; Psalm 18:1-3, and Isaiah 8:16-22

We conclude d this section of Hebrews with verses 2:11-12 where Psalm 22:22-24 is referenced and quoted in part as signaling Jesus’ sanctification work, calling mere humans his brothers. Jesus sees us as “children” given by God and thereby worthy of his love and care (Hb. 2:13, Ps. 18:1-3). Hebrews then references Isaiah 8:16-22 speaking of us as the “children whom the Lord has given me.” In Isaiah 8, this passage is folded into a prophetic word that is to be bound and sealed while God’s people wait for the face of the Lord to shine forth from the house of Jacob. Isaiah and his readers had to wait, but only until Jesus came forth! Amen! We now see what was prophetically promised – salvation and sanctification as children in the house of the Lord!

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 11

1. Are there specific people God has in your life that you can intercede for? How *practically* would you go about it? And then, *will* you go about it?
2. Can you see ways God’s love challenges you to adjust your priorities to align them with his?

3. We read multiple times of Jesus completing his work and sitting down at the right hand of God. What are the implications to you that Jesus has *finished* his work?

Week Twelve Readings

<p>Mar. 17 The Son as Judge Jn 5:22-29</p> <p><i>Context: Jesus has been given authority to judge. What does that entail?</i></p> <p>Lk 10:13-16 Ps 50 Isa 16 Ps 75 Joel 3:1-12 Joel 3:17-21 2 Tim 4:1-8 Prov 12:2; 11:27; 15:3; 20:22</p> <p>Mar . 18 Witnesses to Jesus Jn 5:30-47</p> <p><i>Context: Jesus was attested to by Scripture as well as his works and the people of his day.</i></p> <p>Dt. 19:15-20 Mt 17:1-13 Mk 9:2-13 2 Pet. 1:16-21 Lk 7 Malachi 3 Mt 11 Jer 27-28</p>	<p>Mar. 19 Witnesses to Jesus (Cont'd) Jn 5:30-47</p> <p>Jer. 30 2 Tim 3:14-17 Lk 11:14-32, 37-54 Jude 1:1-16 Dt 5</p> <p>Mar. 20 Jesus as Provider Jn 6:1-15</p> <p><i>Context: God (Jesus) meets human needs, not simply spiritual ones.</i></p> <p>Mt 14:1-21 Mk 6:30-44 Lk 9:1-17 Nm 9 2 Kgs 4</p>	<p>Mar. 21 Jesus echoes God as Master of Nature Jn 6:16-21</p> <p><i>Context: God has always controlled nature, not the other way around!</i></p> <p>Mt 14:22-36 Mk 6:45-56 Ex 13-14 Jsh 1 Jsh 3-4 Mk 4:35-41</p> <p>Mar. 22 Jesus – God’s Manna Jn 6:22-40</p> <p><i>Context: Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of Life, a term that had significant contextual meaning for the Jews.</i></p> <p>Ps 105 Ex 16 Eph 1 1 Tim 1</p> <p>Mar. 23 Off</p>
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