

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 15

April 7-13, 2014

John 9:1-12:50

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

Week Fifteen Readings

<p>4/7 Jesus Heals a Blind Man Jn 9:1-9:41</p> <p>Luk 4:16-4:25; 4:28-4:30 Luk 13:1-13:5 2 Kgs 18-20 Pslm 6</p> <p>4/8 Jesus the Good Shepherd Jn 10:1-10:21</p> <p>Matt 9:35-9:38 Num 27:12-27:23 Ezek 34 Isa 40:9-40:11 Zech 10 Pslm 16 Jer 23:1-23:18 Prov 27:23-27:27</p>	<p>4/9 Jesus Rejected at Temple; Received Elsewhere Jn 10:22-10:42</p> <p>Luk 5:12-5:16 Luk 4:42-4:44</p> <p>Jesus Raises Lazarus Jn 11:1-11:54</p> <p>Luk 10:38-10:42</p> <p>Jesus Anointed at Bethany Jn 12:1-12:11</p> <p>Matt 26:1-26:16 Deut 16:18-16:20 Prov 14:3 Prov 30:15-30:16</p> <p>The Triumphal Entry Jn 12:12-12:19</p> <p>Matt 21:1-21:5 Zech 9 Isa 62</p>	<p>4/10 The Triumphal Entry (Cont’d) Jn 12:12-12:19</p> <p>Matt 21:6-21:11 Matt 22:15-22:24 Matt 23:37-23:39 Matt 21:12-21:13 Isa 56 Jer 7-9 Matt 21:14-21:22 Jer 24</p> <p>4/11 The Triumphal Entry (Cont’d) Jn 12:12-12:19</p> <p>Matt 22:34-22:36 Num 15:1-15:36 Deut 15:12-15:23 Deut 18:1-18:14 Deut 20-22 Deut 6:1-6:9 Lev 19:18 Matt 22:37-22:40 Rom 13:8-13:10 Prov 22:26-22:27</p>	<p>4/12 Jesus’ Time had Come Jn 12:20-12:36</p> <p>Luk 18:31-18:34 Lam 4-5</p> <p>The Unbelief of Some Jews Jn 12:37-12:50</p> <p>Isa 53 Luk 13:6-13:9; 13:31-13:35</p> <p>4/13 <i>Off</i></p>
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JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN (John 9:1-9:41)

Few of Jesus' miracles are as detailed in the reaction as this one. Jesus gives visions to a man blind since birth. John detailed the ensuing events including multiple summons and interrogations by the Pharisees of the man and his parents. The Pharisees tried to intimidate the man, but he would not be cowed. He stood for the truth of what happened and defended Jesus, his healer. The story is a stunning contrast in the reactions of people to a magnificent work of God. It also places in opposition the way the faithful see the hand of God from the view of those who disbelieve.

Luke 4:16-4:25; 4:28-4:30

Jesus faced rejection in many places, including his hometown of Nazareth. This rejection story began with Jesus reading in synagogue from Isaiah 61. While certain people react positively, even lovingly to his message, as the story unfolds there are a group of listeners who become enraged. Jesus' claims to the role of a prophet on the level of Elijah or Elisha drive many to a self-righteous fury, seeking to stone Jesus (likely for his implied claim to being a prophet).

The account also gives insight into how a Jewish stoning took place. The passage reads that the crowd,

brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff (Luk 4:29).

A collection of ancient Jewish teachings called the *Mishna* gives insight into the process of stoning by first century Jews.¹

The Mishna provides that first one is hauled out to the place of stoning, at which point if the convicted party says, "I have something to say in favor of my own acquittal," the Jews must "bring him back" to the court.²

The Mishna then provides that when the convicted

was ten cubits [about 15 feet] from the place of stoning, they say to him, "Confess," for it is usual for those about to be put to death to confess. For whoever confesses has a share in the world to come (6:2A-B).

¹ The Mishna is a collection of sayings from 1st and 2nd Century A.D. that set out the law Jews practiced at the time. In a sense, it is a commentary or explanation of the Old Testament law as applied in Jewish society. The Mishna was put into written form by 200 A.D.

² *M. Sanhed.* 6:1A-B.

The stoning procedure continues,

[When] he was four cubits [six feet] from the place of stoning they remove his clothes (6:3A).

The initial act in the stoning actually involved pushing the convicted from what was in essence a cliff. The place of stoning was twice the height of a man so perhaps roof top height is a good image for us. “One of the witnesses pushes him over from the hips, so [hard] that he turned upward [in his fall]. He turns him over on his hips again [to see whether he had died]. [If] he had died thereby, that sufficed” (6:4A-D). We are then told of the process of throwing a rock down onto the heart in the event the fall did not kill the convicted. Should that fail to kill the person, then all the people were to pick up rocks and throw them down on him.

In the Luke story, Jesus escapes before he is pushed off the cliff.

Luke 13:1-13:5

Many people of Jesus’ day were convinced that anything inordinately bad that happened to them happened as a judgment for some sin of the victim. This was true for the blind man healed in John 9. It is equally true for some Galileans who were tragically killed when a wall (tower) fell on them. Jesus points out in this passage that those people were not greater sinners. They were no better or worse off than the “holy folks” in Jerusalem. This is a world where gravity will bring down a poorly built wall, regardless of who is under it! That is not to say, however, that human choice, sin, and God do not sometimes change the course of the world as we see in the next reading.

2 Kings 18-20

2 Kings 18-22 relates the story of Judah’s good king Hezekiah and his encounter with Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

The Prophet Historian writing 2 Kings gives a wonderful overview of the life of Hezekiah. He gives an epitaph to King Hezekiah’s reign in chapter 18 verses 1-7 before delving into the reign in greater detail. In those seven verses, we learn that Hezekiah took the throne at the age of 25 and reigned in Judah for 29 years. The Prophet Historian gives Hezekiah greater praise than he does for any other king who reigned in the southern kingdom of Judah. Not only are we told that Hezekiah did right as King David had, but the writer also emphasizes that Hezekiah even took down the high places of worship, cut down the poles used in idol worship, and even destroyed the bronze serpent of Moses which had been used in the wilderness. Kings then records:

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the

LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook (2 Kings 18:5-18:7).

The synopsis notes that Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and defeated the Philistines, peeling back their presence in the lower lands of Judah.

After this overview, the Prophet Historian in Kings then begins to give a more detailed accounting of some key moments in the life of Hezekiah. We can also read about these times from three other sources: 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36:1-39:8, and the various records of the Assyrian King Sennacherib now scattered in museums around the globe.³ Each of these sources records its information for different reasons to achieve different goals. In this lesson handout, it is helpful to integrate all four sources⁴ into one continuing narrative.

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had been an Assyrian vassal who not only paid taxes to Assyria as overlords, but also mimicked the worship of Assyria's gods. Ahaz jettisoned any vestiges of faith and practice in Yahweh, setting the people on a horrendous course of idolatry and sacrilege (2 Kings 16). Unlike his father, however, Hezekiah had his heart set on Yahweh. 2 Chronicles 29 describes Hezekiah's earliest actions as king. In his very first year, Hezekiah reopened the temple, restoring it for worship of Yahweh. He ordered the restoration of a proper Levitical priesthood and had the priests begin cleaning themselves for service even as they cleansed the temple.

Hezekiah did this recognizing that his father's sins and the sins of the people were responsible for God's wrath. No doubt having lived and observed not only the fall of Samaria, but also the prophetic teaching about that fall impressed Hezekiah. He explained to the priests:

For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God...Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us (2 Chron 29:6-29:10).

³ One key source is technically a Neo-Babylonian chronicle rather than one of Sennacherib or another Assyrian.

⁴ In doing so, it is important at times to consider the purposes of the various writers and the role their stories play. This will help us understand not only the whole story, but also the way certain things are written (especially some of the annals of Sennacherib).

After restoring Temple worship, Hezekiah ordered a long overdue celebration of the Passover. He sent invitations not just to the Judahites, but also to the residue of the ten tribes that either made it to Judah before the Assyrian onslaught of the Northern Kingdom, or had managed to escape deportation and remain in Israel (2 Chron. 30:1, 10-11). The Passover was celebrated in Mosaic form,⁵ with the people being taught anew how Yahweh had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh, how Yahweh had fought their battles, and miraculously provided for the people. From all over Israel and Judah, those in attendance “rejoiced” and “there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem” (2 Chron 30:26).

It was after this time of intense worship, learning, and building up of faith that the people went throughout the land breaking idols and the poles, pillars, and altars used in the worship of idols (2 Chron 30:1). The people were renewed in their faith and practice. They began tithing, and honored not just the Lord, but also his priests and people. Surely these were exciting times for Judah. No doubt the people were motivated by the recent upheavals and the Assyrian juggernaut that had destroyed the northern homeland, decimated the population of ten tribes, and subjugated almost all of the known world. In the midst of this was the promise to Moses,

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth (Deut 28:1).

Somewhere in this time, Hezekiah put his faith into practice. He quit paying his annual taxes to Assyria. As we read through the Assyrian annals, it seems that Hezekiah did not rebel alone, but he led a coalition of other small nations, including Syria (“Hatti” in Assyrian records), Tyre and Sidon, and to some extent Philistia.⁶ The Chronicler makes a point of tying Assyria’s reaction into the time period after Judah’s worship and turning

⁵ The people did not fully keep the Passover as ordered by Moses. Their errors, however, were unintentional and the Lord honored Hezekiah’s prayer, “May the good LORD pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness” (2 Chron. 30:18-19).

⁶ The Biblical text explains that Hezekiah “struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city” (2 Kings 18:8). Assyrian records show that Hezekiah took over the Philistine city of Ekron, imprisoning its king and getting the remaining Philistines to join his Assyrian rebellion:

The officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron who had thrown Padi, their king, (who was) under oath and obligation to Assyria, into iron fetters and handed him over in a hostile manner to Hezekiah, the Judean, took fright because of the offense they had committed.”

Translation by Cogan, Mordechai, *The Raging Torrent, Historical Inscriptions From Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, (Carta 2008), at 114.

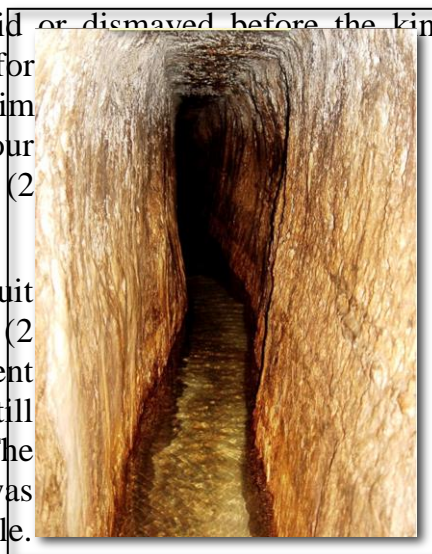
to the Lord, giving the reader pause that things do not always work exactly as we expect them to!

After these things and these *acts of faithfulness*, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself (2 Chron 32:1).

Hezekiah saw that an Assyrian invasion was likely and he increased security measures for above normal war readiness! Certainly, it must have occurred to Hezekiah that his act of obedience had resulted in a crisis, not a readily apparent blessing.

Hezekiah began preparing for war by setting up the defenses of Jerusalem. He stopped up the water sources outside the defensive walls, and set up water for those inside (ready to endure a siege). In 2 Chronicles 32, the Chronicler records other measures taken by Hezekiah in this crisis. He re-fortified important walls that had been broken down. He added an additional wall, and made “weapons and shields in abundance” (2 Chron 32:5). He re-organized his army and spoke encouragement and godly wisdom to his people:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chron 32:7-8).



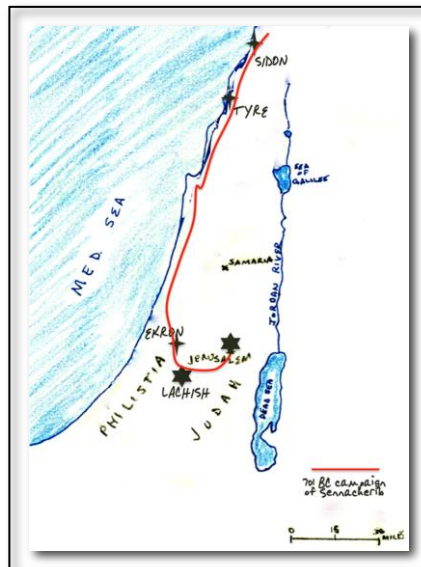
Among the preparations was the building of a conduit to bring water into the city and deposit it into a pool (2 Kings 20:20). James Hoffmeier relates the excitement of the 19th century discovery of this tunnel, which still carries water through the limestone hill of Ophel.⁷ The tunnel is roughly the length of 6 football fields and was dug by workers working from both ends to the middle. An inscription was found on the wall of the tunnel detailing how the tunnel was dug. While the script does not mention Hezekiah by name, it is written in the early Hebrew script that dates to the reign of Hezekiah. If you go to Israel, pay the money and walk this tunnel! Think of the workers working in fear of an invasion, recognizing the need for water to withstand a siege!

⁷ Hoffmeier, James, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, (Oxford 2008).

The readiness was important for as soon as he could finish his work against a Babylonian uprising, the Assyrian king Sennacherib turned his attention to Hezekiah's organized rebellion. In 701 BC, he started his march southwest toward Judah and the other rebellious kings.

Before reaching Judah, Sennacherib took over the lands and leaders of Hatti, Sidon (the Sidonian king, Sennacherib claims, was so awed by the splendor of Sennacherib and his army that "he fled overseas far-off."⁸), and Philistia. Every step along the way, Sennacherib overwhelmed his enemies. Before long, Judah was the sole member of the Anti-Assyrian coalition still standing.

Sennacherib then began his invasion of Judah.



The Prophet Historian writing Kings gives the general statement that,

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them (2 Kings 18:13).

Sennacherib's records go into more detail:

As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I besieged 46 of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number. Using packed-down ramps and applying battering rams, infantry attacks by mines, breeches, and siege machines (or perhaps: storm ladders), I conquered (them). I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil.⁹

The Assyrian army went to Judah's second major city, Lachish. At this important defensive point, guarding the route northeast into Jerusalem, Sennacherib wrought such destruction that he made a relief of his battle scenes a centerpiece on the wall of his palace in Nineveh.

At this point, Hezekiah panicked. He decided he had chosen the wrong course of action and went to work to avert war on Jerusalem. Hezekiah sent a messenger to Sennacherib

⁸ Translated by Cogan, *op cit.*, at 112.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 114-115. We should note that these records are ripe for exaggeration as their purpose is to make the king look as good as possible. The numbers of captives deported exceed the best population estimates at the time. There is a good bit of scholarship describing this practice of magnifying in memorializing the king's achievements. See notes of Cogan at 112, 120.

while the cleanup efforts at Lachish were going on. The messenger conveyed Hezekiah's apology:

"I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear."
(2 Kings 18:14).

Sennacherib then demanded so much that Hezekiah had to strip the treasury and the temple, sending silver and gold to Sennacherib at Lachish. Lachish gives the figures of materials given by Hezekiah as larger, including the same 30 talents of gold, but Sennacherib claims the silver was over twice what is listed in the Bible. (As discussed in footnote 9, scholars recognize the exaggeration that was commonplace and expected in these types of records). Sennacherib also claimed as tribute cloth, weapons, chariots, soldiers, and more. Based on the Biblical texts, this was likely Sennacherib listing his spoils of war as payola or tribute to make it look like he had a strong victory over Hezekiah.

In spite of the tribute and apology Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib, his crisis was not over. Sennacherib then sent three officials to Jerusalem with "a great army from Lachish." Here Hezekiah, the faithful king who led the people in their greatest times of obedience since the kingdoms had divided, was at a crisis of utmost seriousness. His own life was on the line, but more than that, his family, his city, and his country were hanging by a thread. It is one thing to prepare for war; it is another altogether to view the opposing army outside your gate!

The Prophet Historian almost sounds like a modern war correspondent as he reported:

And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Washer's Field. And when they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder (2 Kings 18:17-18:18).

Sennacherib sent three messengers, "the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh" with the army and a personal message for Hezekiah. Each of these is an officer title within the Assyrian army. The Tartan "is generally recognized as the commander-in-chief."¹⁰ The Rab-saris was the king's chief eunuch who commanded the royal army.¹¹ The

¹⁰ Tartan comes from the Assyrian *turtānu*. Matilla, Raija, *The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, (Univ. of Helsinki 2000), at 153 explains the roles of all three officials.

¹¹ From the Assyrian *rab ša-rēši*, *ibid.*, at 161.

Rabshakeh was the “Chief Cup Bearer,” but his role was not one of supplying the king with his morning juice! He was another army commander.¹²

These high positioned officials with their army came within hearing range of Jerusalem’s defensive walls, calling out for Hezekiah. Hezekiah did not come to hear their message. Instead, he assumed a position equal to the king of Assyria, he sent three messengers of his own! The Assyrians then delivered their message of intimidation:

And the Rabshakeh said to them [Hezekiah’s three officials], "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. But if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?' (2 Kings 18:19-18:22).

If you were reading this in Hebrew, then you would be struck by the repeated use of the word *batach* (בָּטַח) translated “trust” or “confidence.” They are asked “on *what* do you trust?” and “in *whom* do you trust?” Trust is a key word in Hezekiah’s crisis management system. The writer of Kings in overview used this same Hebrew word when he said of Hezekiah, “He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel” (2 Kings 18:5). The Assyrian generals challenged the trustworthiness of not only Pharaoh, but also Yahweh! It is mildly impressive, although not surprising, that the Assyrians knew the name of Hezekiah’s God. The way they challenged Hezekiah’s trust in Yahweh, however, speaks the difference between knowing Yahweh’s name, and knowing Yahweh! The Assyrians asserted that Yahweh would not honor Hezekiah’s trust because Hezekiah had torn down the high places of worship! Hezekiah knew the exact opposite to be true!

Hezekiah’s messengers were acutely aware that the intimidating threats of the Assyrians were not only meant to rattle Hezekiah, but could also rattle the defenders of Jerusalem. They urged the Assyrians to speak Aramaic rather than Hebrew adding, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it” (2 Kings 18:26). This suggestion had the opposite effect. The Assyrians were clearly trying to start some kind of on-shore mutiny. The Rabshakeh continued the taunt in Hebrew:

"Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?"

¹² From the Assyrian *rab šāqê*, *ibid.*

He then tried the carrot and stick routine (actually he placed the stick first and then the carrot!):

"Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die. And do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'" (2 Kings 18:28-18:35).

Again, the Assyrians as polytheists did not realize that the monotheistic Hebrews would not be challenged by the idea that other gods failed to rescue their people, so surely the God of Judah would fail. The Judahites knew that Yahweh God was the only God so no other god was available to help the other people. The people did not answer the Assyrians, following instead Hezekiah's instructions to stay silent.

Hezekiah's messengers returned and reported the message of the Assyrians. Hezekiah was distressed. He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, a sign of mourning and humility. Hezekiah went into the temple and sent word to the prophet Isaiah, seeking Isaiah's prayers. The men went to Isaiah who sent them back to the king with words of encouragement:

Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'" (2 Kings 19:6-19:7).

The Rabshakeh returned without results to Sennacherib, who having finished at Lachish, was now fighting against the Judahite town of Libnah. Sennacherib sent his general back with a further message, again explaining that no other gods have offered other nations protection, so Hezekiah should not trust that his God is any different. The Rabshakeh returned to the siege at Jerusalem and presented the latest word from Sennacherib in the form of a letter. The crisis now heightened.

Hezekiah reached crisis level in his life. The letter conveyed what was coming, from an army that had not known defeat, with the latest and greatest in technology, with superior manpower and resources, and with all the confidence that accompanies such advantages. The only thing Hezekiah had that the Assyrians were missing was the Lord!

Hezekiah took this letter and did not send it to Isaiah asking Isaiah to pray. This time, Hezekiah went into the temple and prayed himself! His prayer was direct and strong:

"O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (2 Kings 19:15-19:19).

In response to this prayer, the Lord sent Isaiah to Hezekiah with prophetic words of prophecy confirming the Lord's protection and the downfall of Sennacherib. In the night of Hezekiah's greatest despair, as the reassuring message came forth, the Lord sent his angel into the Assyrian camp and killed a great number of soldiers. That did it. Sennacherib left and went home.¹³

Upon his return to Assyria, Sennacherib had much to say about Hezekiah. He was not able to claim Hezekiah as conquered, so instead put his best political spin on things. Sennacherib bragged about holding Jerusalem in siege for a few years! Sennacherib's prism now found in the Israel Museum reads:

As for Hezekiah, the Judean... he himself I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with armed posts, and made it unthinkable (literally "taboo") for him to exit by the city gate."¹⁴

In a writing known for its puffing and exaggeration, the best Sennacherib can do is claim he put Hezekiah in time-out for a while! This is where his annals then begin recounting the booty and spoils of war Sennacherib brought back claiming they were tribute paid by Hezekiah.

¹³ In a matter of years, he was killed as Isaiah prophesied. While worshipping, two of his sons came in and "struck him down with the sword." Later annals of Babylon gave a bit more detail:

The month Tebeth, day 20, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, his son killed him in a rebellion.

(Cogan, at 115).

¹⁴ Cogan, at 115.

It is no wonder in another place (the “bull colossi”), Sennacherib described Hezekiah in surprisingly blunt terms:

I destroyed the wide district of Judah; the stubborn (and) mighty Hezekiah, its king, I brought into submission.¹⁵ [At least “time out!”].

These profound works of God are seen clearly by the faithful, but Sennacherib was blind to the truth of what happened, and he was left to recount things from his limited worldly perspective.

2 Kings 20 brings mortality and human frailty back to the picture of Hezekiah’s life. Hezekiah faced death again, this time from physical disease, and again sought the Lord for help. Isaiah brought God’s word to Hezekiah, adding 15 years to Hezekiah’s life. The storyline ends with Hezekiah foolishly revealing his treasures to envoys from Babylon, no doubt showing off. Not a good thing! Even the faithful fall short.

Psalm 6

We ended the reading for the day with Psalm six, a psalm seeking God’s deliverance from death’s door. It is still a common plea, even for those without a daily walk with the Lord. When life is something we think we can handle on our own, we handle it. But when life becomes something beyond our control, we then seek the divine. Wisdom is surely found in seeing and seeking God each moment.

Apr. 8

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD (John 10:1-10:21)

Jesus drew upon a common reality in the lives of the Jews in his day when he spoke of his role as a shepherd. The reality was found not only in the culture of the day, with shepherds commonplace, but also in the Jewish Scriptures, which used the shepherd motif as well.

Matthew 9:35-9:38

Before addressing some Old Testament passages with the Shepherd motif, we read the Matthew 9:35-9:38 passage where Jesus’ compassion saw the lost, hurting, helpless masses as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus urged his followers to not only help the helpless and lost, but to pray for more workers to do the same.

¹⁵ The “bull colossi” was a massive bull with a human head placed as a guard in the king’s palace in Nineveh. After being removed, it is now on display at the British Museum. This translation is by Cogan, at 126.

Numbers 27:12-27:23

In this passage we read about the exodus ending. Moses knew he was not going with the Israelites into the Promised Land, and before they went off, he asked God to appoint another leader. Moses did not want the people “as sheep that have no shepherd” (Num 27:17). So God appointed Joshua to continue as shepherd for the people.

Ezekiel 34; Isaiah 40:9-40:11 and Zechariah 10

The people knew there were different kinds of shepherds. Jesus was specific in John 10 that he was a “good shepherd” (Jn 10:11). This set Jesus into a framework best understood by Ezekiel 34.

In Ezekiel 34, we read of the sheep analogy for the people of God. The leaders were dismal shepherds, living off their sheep to their own advantage, with no regard to the true value of the sheep. Those poor shepherds let the sheep scatter, refused to help the sheep in need, strengthen the weak, or heal the sick. God, however, would not let that be the end of the story.

God himself promised to stop the bad shepherds and *himself* come to seek out the lost sheep.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak (Ezek 34:15-16).

Isaiah also prophesied God coming to shepherd his sheep, calling it “good news” (aka “gospel”).

This same theme is expressed in Zechariah 10, where the leaders of Judah are called shepherds of the people, the people being the sheep of the Lord. The leaders failed to see their accountability to God for how they led. Leadership is a stewardship responsibility for the lives of people, special and precious in the sight of God. Again, we read of God promising to intervene and bring justice and true care to his sheep.

Psalm 16

This psalm of praise exalts God for his care and protection. It serves a dual purpose in the day’s readings. First, it underscores God’s care for this people, “the saints in the land in whom is all [his] delights” (Psalm 16:3). Second, it ties into the prophetic promise of God in Christ as the one whom God would not let decay in the grace, but would resurrect (Psalm 16:10 and Acts 13:35).

Jeremiah 23:1-23:18

Jeremiah 23 also echoes the same themes, noting how God would hold accountable the lousy shepherds of Judah (“You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.” Jer 23:2). God would not stop with punishing the bad shepherds, however, he was also fully planning on rescuing the sheep with a prophetic promise of Jesus:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land (Jer 23:5).

Proverb 27:23-27:27

The day’s context readings end with the wisdom of Proverbs 27:23-27:27 explaining the pragmatic reasons for tending to business as a shepherd.

Apr. 9

JESUS – REJECTED AT TEMPLE; RECEIVED ELSEWHERE (John 10:22-10:42)

Jerusalem was the religious center for first century Judaism. The rabbis and their religious schools were there. The priests and sacrificial system were there. Jerusalem was the destination for the Jews’ religious feasts and festivals. There is a bit of irony as well as a warning and message that in Jerusalem Jesus was rejected, while in the countryside, people were moved in faith (certainly not all the time as we have seen in earlier readings). The responses are clearly contrasted in John 10:22-10:42.

Luke 5:12-5:16; 4:42-4:44

At times outside Jerusalem the crowds got so large that Jesus would need to find time to withdraw and pray in solitude. It was in these areas of faith that Jesus not only had many of his most devoted followers, but it was also where he worked many of his most moving miracles as we see in John 11.

JESUS RAISES LAZARUS (John 11:1-11:54)

Here we have the final section of John identifying Jesus by the specific phrase “Son of God.” This happened in Bethany, a small village just outside Jerusalem (2 miles) on the road to Jericho. Set against the context of Chapter 10 where Jesus fled Jerusalem to avoid the Jewish attempts at stoning him, this has Jesus returning just two miles outside Jerusalem’s walls, certainly not a risk free location!

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha, two ladies who lived in Bethany important to Jesus and his ministry. When Lazarus fell ill, the sisters sent a messenger to Jesus. Jesus responded to those around him,

This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it (Jn 11:4).

The story subsequently makes clear that the “Son of God” to be glorified through these events was Jesus.

After saying this, Jesus waited two more days before declaring his intent to go to Bethany. His disciples challenged the decision reminding him how close Bethany was to Jerusalem, where the Jews were waiting to stone him. Jesus explained that he was not afraid, but that it was time to go because Lazarus had “fallen asleep.” While Jesus meant that he was dead, the disciples took him literally and again urged Jesus not to go because he would surely wake up later. Jesus spoke more bluntly and said that Lazarus was dead! Jesus saw that in the events that were about to unfold, the disciples would experience something that would stick with them forever. They were going to see that Jesus was not speaking allegorically when he said he had the power of life!

By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. With Bethany a thirty-minute walk from Jerusalem, there were many from the city that had come to grieve with the family. Mary stayed at home grieving while Martha went out to meet Jesus. In the interchange Martha also joined the acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of God.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (Jn 11:21-11:25).

Jesus met up with Mary and went to the tomb where many were weeping and mourning. Here John made an interesting comment. In a story that is to show the glory of Jesus, and that shows his power over death, we have John putting in two words: Jesus wept. This, the shortest verse in the New Testament, shows a side to Jesus that is compassionate and caring. I suggest it is a part of the way this miracle shows the glory of God. God is not simply a being with the power over life and death. He is also a kind and loving God. His heart understands grief and agony, and it moves him. This is as much the glory of the Son of God as the power to raise the dead!

Some of the Jews noted Jesus was moved, but openly wondered whether or not Jesus could have saved him had he been there timely. Mary and Martha wondered the same. Jesus ordered the tombstone rolled back, over the protests of Martha who noted the smell would be potent. Standing at the face of the opened tomb, Jesus cried out to God, and then called Lazarus forth:

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this in account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

Lazarus came out immediately, still wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus ordered the family to unwrap him.

In the midst of this miracle, came the final downfall of Jesus. While many of the Jews present believed in Jesus after this, some returned the 1.75 miles to Jerusalem and told the Pharisees what had happened. At a meeting of the Chief Priests and Jewish ruling council, it was decided that something had to be done about Jesus, and the decision was made to put him to death once and for all.

Luke 10:38-10:42

We insert into this story an earlier visit of Jesus to Mary and Martha. It was the famous visit where Mary enjoyed Jesus' company to the chagrin of Martha who was spending so much energy as hostess she was missing the moment! Mary and Martha had great history with Jesus that preceded the plea for his help with their brother.

JESUS ANNOINTED AT BETHANY (John 12:1-12:11)

John continues with Jesus at Bethany, now just six days before Passover. This time we read of Jesus with Mary and Martha as well as Lazarus. Judas was upset over Mary anointing Jesus with a perfume that would have sold for a good sum. (John pointed out that Judas really just wanted the money so he could use it himself as "keeper of the money.") We get some extra insights by reading this story in Matthew 26 as well.

Matthew 26:1-26:16

The dinner John wrote of occurred at the house of Simon the Leper. After the dinner, evidently upset over the failure of Mary to give the money into the treasury rather than use it for anointing Jesus, Judas offered his services to the priests to betray the Lord. For that, the priests paid Judas thirty pieces of silver.

Deuteronomy 16:18-16:20

The actions of Judas, as well as the priests directly violated the law given in Deuteronomy 16:18-16:20. Accepting a bribe was not only wrong, but also it had damaging consequences.

A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous (Deut 16:19).

Proverbs 14:3 and 30:15-30:16

The proverbs are replete with instructions that distinguish actions of the wise from that of fools. We have selected here two proverbs, one that urges wise people to live carefully with their words, thereby avoiding the discipline that comes to fools. The second selection warns against the constant craving for things. Judas' love of money could never be sated.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (John 12:12-12:19)

John records the triumphal entry with the added note that his disciples did not, at the time, remember the significance of the events. That was done after the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Matthew 21:1-21:5; Zechariah 9; and Isaiah 62

Matthew records the triumphal entry quoting from Zechariah 9.

Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden' (Matt 21:5).

Zechariah 9 begins with an assurance that a day was coming when the lands of the nations would become the Lord's territory. It is tied in verse 10 to the coming of a new king into Jerusalem.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zech 9:9).

It is a magnificent statement and picture of Jesus as the king – "righteous," a savior, and humble, arriving on a donkey. The image also echoes the magnificent messianic prophecies of Isaiah 62.

There is shouting of praise as God comes to his people with salvation.

Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” (Isa 62:11).

This is a time of righteousness that shines for all the nations, not just Judah (Isa 62:1-62:2). It brings a new life and new name, as the people of God are likened to the bride for a groom (Isa 62:3-62:5).

Apr. 10

Matthew 21:6-21:11; 22:15-22:24; 23:37-23:39; 21:12-21:13; Isaiah 56

Matthew’s account of Jesus coming into Jerusalem the last week of his life record multiple events. We read of crowds praising his arrival, causing many in the city to look in to who he was and what he was doing (Matt 21:6-21:11). The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trap him into a crime against Rome, hoping that would spell the end of him, but Jesus was too smart to fall into their traps (Matt 22:15-22:24). Jesus knew the city for its history as well as its present. Jerusalem was a place where too many of God’s prophets had met an end (Matt 23:37-23:39). Jesus did not go in secretly or quietly. He went in firmly and with a message. He went to the temple and began cleaning house (Matt 21:12-21:13), quoting Isa. 56:7

these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Jeremiah 7-9

The first half of this contextual reading is frequently referred to as Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon or Temple Oracle. Jeremiah spoke out to the people about the lack of “magic” in the temple. Based upon superstition Many believed simply affirming words of false prophets that nothing could happen to Jerusalem because God would protect his “house” – the temple. Jeremiah called out such misplaced trust with great sarcasm:

Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD’ (Jer 7:4).

Not surprisingly, the priests of the temple took particular umbrage against Jeremiah and his proclamations. Jeremiah emphasized that God was looking for holiness and moral living from the people. Without true hearts and lives, judgment would come upon the people and the temple.

The people had taken religion away from its truth and from the relationship God had called forth from Sinai. Instead, religion had evolved into a superstitious set of rituals, many so far divorced from God and his holiness that “repulsive” seems too light a word. Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11 in a reference to the temple having become a “den of robbers.”

Jeremiah 8 continued to speak of the national sin, of God’s judgment and the coming despair. It is not something that brought joy to God. To the contrary, it brought great sorrow (Jer 9). Jesus was about to model the sorrow and suffering of God brought about by the sin of his people.

Matthew 21:14-21:22 and Jeremiah 24

Jesus also spent time healing the infirmed and ministering to those who had need. Once done, he did not stay in the city, but retreated thirty minutes outside the walls at Bethany. On his way back into Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. Passing a fig tree, he stopped and looked for figs. Seeing none, Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered at once.

Matthew was not telling these events simply to demonstrate a hungry Jesus was nothing to be trifled with. After all, Jesus could feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. This story is best understood with Jeremiah 24. The figs were used to represent God’s people. God builds up those that are good and bearing fruit. Those that are not, will wither.

Apr. 11

Matthew 22:34-22:36; Numbers 15:1-15:36; Deuteronomy 15:12-15:23; 18:1-18:14; 18:20-18:22; 6:1-6:9; Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:37-22:40

As a part of the entrapment efforts of the Pharisees, they sent a lawyer to test Jesus and his knowledge of the Law (*Torah*). The lawyer asked Jesus which of the Torah laws was the most important or greatest. There are many laws, some seemingly pointless and others that clearly are important to society and relationships (do not murder!) Jesus had a ready response, referring the lawyer to Deuteronomy 6:1-6:9 and Leviticus 19:18.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind [Deut 6:5]. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself [Lev 19:18]. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

Romans 13:8-13:10

Paul similarly summed up all the laws governing the relationships between people (so not murder, steal or covet) with the Leviticus 19:18 command to, “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Proverbs 22:26-22:27

This proverb actually concerns our behavior towards others in a difference sense. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, but sometimes that means not putting our neighbors in awkward positions. We should not be borrowing where we have no way to repay and our neighbor has to collect on the collateral to our hurt.

In other words, it is not fair to borrow what can't be repaid with the idea that the one loaning should then be unable to collect without hurting us.

Apr. 12

JESUS' TIME HAD COME (John 12:20-12:36)

As Jesus days drew to a close, his allusions to his coming death became greater and more blunt. The masses did not really understand what he meant, and we see in the Luke passage below, neither did the disciples!

Luke 18:31-18:34

There are few places where a prophecy is more direct than in this Luke passage. Even with this, however, the chosen twelve had no real idea what Jesus was talking about. It would not be until the advent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 that the apostles would *really* began to grasp what had happened. Secular man just doesn't see it without the Spirit.

Lamentations 4-5

There is a large scholarly consensus that Lamentations (at least the first four chapters) was written by one or more who were eyewitnesses to the fall of Jerusalem. The descriptions vividly convey the pain and agony of the events and the loss. The verses are not reconstructed or imagined anguish. They are filled with bitter experiences that have altered the life of the writer. While later traditions ascribed authorship to Jeremiah the prophet (who certainly composed at least one lament for King Josiah¹⁶), the author(s)

¹⁶ 2 Chron 35:25 notes,

Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a rule in Israel; behold, they are written in the Laments.

of Lamentations are unknown. The name of the human who wrote the laments is irrelevant in light of the subject matter of the laments!

A study of the laments could take different forms. It would be instructive to consider the themes expressed, because the lamentations speak to important theology about sin, confession, hope, mercy, and dependence upon God. The forms are also worthy of study for the way they give a formal expression of grief, as opposed to simply an emotional outburst. Not surprisingly, Jews today read these poems annually on the day set aside to grieve the loss of the temple (on *Tish'ah be'av*).¹⁷ Still another approach to study might lie in the various strands of thought that are found in the tapestry woven through the poems. The poems offer the prophet's insight into God's judgment for sin and coming grace. They also express the priest's liturgical expressions of confession and hope. A third strand is found in the wise man's struggle to understand the mysteries of suffering at the hands of a loving God.¹⁸

Instead of these approaches, however, we have chosen to simply consider each of the five poems, noting some important features of each, while trying to put the main thoughts into prose, leaving the poetry for further study and meditation.

Chapter 4 – The All-Encompassing Judgment

This is the fourth lament in the book. In it, several different groups become the focus of description and attention. The desolation of the city, with its gold dimmed and the temple stones strewn about, pales in comparison to what has happened to its people. The lament starts with the children. While even wild animals feed their children, in Jerusalem there is no such blessing. “The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them.” Those children that once had a good life, with wonderful food and fine clothing, were left rummaging in the ash heaps of the garbage dump simply to find something edible.

In this way, the “chastisement” of the Judahites was more severe than that of Sodom. The lament notes that at least Sodom's judgment came swiftly, as opposed to the prolonged misery of Jerusalem. People left behind are not recognizable. Their skin

Of course, we do not have the lament for Josiah still today, nor do we have the book of Laments that includes Jeremiah's lament for Josiah. From this verse, some argue that Jeremiah must have been the “lament” composer for Judah. Yet, this argument is refuted in the same verse that speaks of a book of laments. Clearly, others composed laments.

¹⁷ While reading, the congregation and the reader typically sit on the floor or on low benches in a posture of mourning. Reading Lamentations on the anniversary of the temple's destruction is a practice that dates back millennia. Even in the day of Jeremiah, there was a grieving for the loss (Jer. 41:4-41:5), a process that continued when the Jews returned from exile (Zech 7:3-7:5; 8:19).

¹⁸ La Sor, William, *et al.*, *Old Testament Survey*, (Eerdmans 1985), at 622.

bears the appearance of the impossible life they have before them. Death was a better fate than the misery of surviving.

No one ever thought that Jerusalem would be breached. Neither the Assyrians nor the Egyptians had ever been able to accomplish that military feat. The lament emphasizes that the defeat came from the LORD giving “full vent to his wrath” as he “poured out his hot anger,” and “consumed the foundations” of Zion. God accomplished what no enemy had before.

God did so because of the sins of the people. In addition to children, this lament demonstrates the effect of God’s judgment on the religious leaders, both prophets and priests. These leaders sins included more than their false teaching; it also included responsibility for spilling innocent blood. The “clean” priests were themselves defiled with blood, and relegated to wandering through the streets, blind and untouchable. People shouted, “Away! Unclean!” and “Do not touch!” These leaders were scattered, fugitives wondering earth with no home, and no honor.

The lament ends remembering how the “pursuers” were unavoidable. Like the other laments, the Babylonians are not mentioned here by name. Their name is irrelevant in the story. They were never the real judges of Israel. As Jeremiah and Ezekiel explained, they were simply God’s tools. This judgment was God’s judgment for God’s purposes. It was a punishment that would last until God’s purposes were “accomplished.” Then the people would be in exile no longer. But that was in the future. For now, the laments continue with one last one.

Chapter 5 – A Final Plea

In each of the first four laments (chapters 1-4), the words are beautiful, and the laments are written as acrostics, where each verse begins with each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Their acrostic form follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Scholars debate the exact reason for the acrostic, some believing it a part of the artistic touch. One prominent suggestion is that it puts a beginning and ending to the expressed grief that otherwise might ramble on and on. It is as if each poem expresses its measure of grief thoroughly, from A to Z.¹⁹

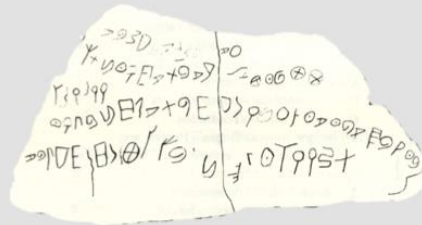
A second noticeable feature in the Hebrew that gets lost in translation is the pattern of the verses. For most of the poems, the first stanza has three Hebrew words (with three accents), while the following stanza has two Hebrew words (with two accents). This

¹⁹ See discussion in Hillers, Delbert, *The Anchor Bible: Lamentations*, (Doubleday 1972), at xxvff. One translation that tries to keep the acrostic feature is Knox, Ronald, *The Holy Bible*, Sheed & Ward 1950).

produces a pattern when said out loud where the second stanza “seems, as it were, to die away...and a plaintive, melancholy cadence is thus produced.”²⁰

HEBREW ACROSTICS

Acrostics are not unusual in Hebrew poetry. A number of Psalms follow an alphabetic pattern, with successive verses beginning with successive letters. In Lamentations, the first, second and fourth chapter/poems, each verse begins with successive letters of the alphabet. In the third chapter/poem, the stanzas are in an acrostic triplet, where three verses each start with the alphabet letter (verses 1-3 are *alef*, 4-6 are *bet*, 7-9 are *gimel*, etc.). The fifth chapter/poem is not an acrostic, but it does contain twenty-two verses, the same number as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 2-4 reverse the normal order of two Hebrew letters (*ayin* and *pe*) giving a good illustration of an alternate alphabetical order found in Psalm 9 and in the “*Izbet Sartah* Abecedary.” This pottery shard with writing pictured at the right was uncovered in excavations at Izbet Sartah (perhaps the Biblical Ebenezer) in 1974. The first four lines seem to be random letters, while the last line is the Hebrew alphabet written left to right! Scholars date this writing in the range of 1100 to 1000BC. This alphabet (called an abecedary because it is the ABC’s) reverses the order of the *ayin* and *pe* also. See, Wurthwein, Ernst, *The Text of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 1995), at 230f.



In the last lament, the acrostic is abandoned. The lament holds twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the alphabet, but the words are not pretty, and neither is the message. This message is a deeply felt plea for God to change things, but it is written with no confidence that he would. It begins with a plea for God to take action out of respect for what had happened to the people. The nation had “fallen” and the people were “disgraced.” They had no hope of a future, but were “orphans” and “widows.” They bore the “sins” of their “fathers,” and the pain was bitter. Their “women were raped” and their “princes hung.” They were bereft of “joy,” living a life of hard “slavery.” Their “sin” had brought them “woe.”

The plea is then placed at the end, as at the beginning, but without an assurance God would act!

But you, O LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.

²⁰ This cite to 19th century Hebrew scholar Karl Budde (in *Das hebraische Klaglied*, 1882) is reproduced from Grossberg, Daniel, notes to Lamentations, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford 2004), at 1588.

Why do you forget us forever,
 why do you forsake us for so many days?
Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored!
 Renew our days as of old—
unless you have utterly rejected us,
 and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

This grim ending is so dire, that when Lamentations is read publically in a Jewish synagogue, the last verse is followed by a repeat of the second-to-last verse, “Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.”

Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is nothing positive to answer the laments of judgment.

THE UNBELIEF OF SOME JEWS (John 12:37-12:50)

Jesus was not some shot in the dark or some totally unexpected move of God that no one could have anticipated. Any student of Isaiah or many other parts of the Old Testament would have seen the clear prophesies that spoke of Jesus. Jesus made this point, to those of his day, and the point is no less true today.

Isaiah 53

Perhaps nowhere is the passion of Christ more clearly written than in Isaiah 53. This passage is so precise it seems easier to believe it was written by the church in the first century. Of course, we have manuscripts of Isaiah, including a great scroll found near Qumran in the Dead Sea area that easily predate the New Testament. No one disputes that Isaiah 53 was written centuries before Christ. A second option for the cynic is to see that the passion of Christ was made up and sculpted around the Isaiah passage. Of course, this might be easier to believe if the Christian faith took off a century or two after the alleged events. However, we have clear secular history indicating the large presence of the faith in the decades following the death of Christ. We have martyrs that died for the truth of what they believed within years of the events.

It leaves us reading Isaiah 53 moved and touched by the words that spoke of the Messiah and his actions to save a fallen people.

 he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (Isa 53:12).

Luke 13:6-13:9; 13:31-13:35

Jesus knew when to fertilize and when to judge. He knew when and where he was to meet his end. His actions were never a matter of fate; they were a matter of choice. His choice was made for a reason. These readings should inspire and move all of us to love and praise him.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 15

1. Jesus may not have healed our physical sight, but there is not a believer alive that has not been blessed by his live (and death). How are you at sharing that? How can you be better?
2. Faith is never simply an abstract idea or belief. It is a driving force that affects how we see the world and how we live in it. Where do you see your faith intersecting the ordinary common world and making your life different from those who live without faith?
3. Jesus is our shepherd, but he also charges his followers to be shepherds for those in our care. His leaders in Israel and Judah often failed miserably at that. Who are you in a position to nurture and bring along in faith? How is it going?
4. As Easter approaches, it always is good to ask the question and address what difference it makes in our day-to-day lives that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. How does it change you?

Week Sixteen Readings

<p style="text-align: center;">4/14 The Unbelief of some Jews (Cont'd) Jn 12:37-12:50</p> <p>Matt 16:1-16:4 Jonah 1-4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/15 Jesus Washes Feet Jn 13:1-13:17</p> <p>Luk 22:24-22:30 Lev 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Predicts his Betrayer Jn 13:18-13:38</p> <p>Matt 26:17-26:25 Matt 26:30-26:35 Prov 12:20 Prov 19:3 Pslm 55 Pslm 38</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4/16 Jesus – the Way, Truth, and Life Jn 14:1-14:14</p> <p>Job 34 Mrk 9:30-9:50 Zech 13 Prov 4:1-4:3; 4:5-4:13 Prov 7:1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/17 Loving God and Keeping his Commandments Jn 14:15</p> <p>2 Chron 29-31 Jer 26</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4/18 Loving God and Keeping his Commandments (Cont'd) Jn 14:15</p> <p>Isa 36-37 2 Chron 32:1-32:23 Pslm 48</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/19 Loving God and Keeping his Commandments (Cont'd) Jn 14:15</p> <p>2 Chron 32:24-32:26 Pslm 39 Isa 38 Pslm 60 Prov 12:28 Pslm 119:1-119:8; 119:41-119:48</p> <p>4/20 Easter - <i>Off</i></p>
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