

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 17

April 21-27, 2014

John 14:16-17:26

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

Week Seventeen Readings

<p>4/21 The Coming Spirit Jn 14:16-14:26</p> <p>Matt 18:7-18:35 Mrk 4:1-4:12 Isa 6:9-6:13 Deut 29 Mrk 4:13-4:20 Jer 21 Jer 34</p> <p>4/22 Keeping Commandments Jn 14:21</p> <p>2 Kgs 2:15-2:25 2 Kgs 3 2 Kgs 6:1-8:6</p>	<p>4/23 Jesus - the Vine Jn 15</p> <p>Pslm 80 Isa 18 Prov 16:6-16:11; 16:14-16:15 Ezek 15 Prov 20:28</p> <p>4/24 Jesus Overcomes Jn 16</p> <p>Pslm 77 Pslm 82 1 Jn 2:12-2:27 1 Jn 4:1-5:12</p>	<p>4/25 Peace of Heart Jn 16:33</p> <p>Eph 2:11-2:22 Prov 12:25 Prov 14:13-14:14 Jer 46-49</p> <p>4/26 The High Priestly Prayer Jn 17:1-17:26</p> <p>1 Pet 1 Isa 40:6-40:8 Matt 26:40-26:46 Luk 22:39-22:46 Heb 5:7-5:10 Heb 4:14-4:16 Eph 4:1-4:16 Pslm 68 Ezek 37</p> <p>4/27 Off</p>
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THE COMING SPIRIT – (John 14:16-14:26)

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was known as early as creation. The Spirit would work in and through a number of specially anointed people, like King David. But the Spirit was not indwelling God's people in the sense that we understand since Pentecost. Jesus, in his closing dialogue with his apostles in John 14-16 makes a number of promises about the Holy Spirit and the soon-to-come way he would indwell God's people.

In this section of John we read of the promise that the Holy Spirit who was *with the apostles* in the person of Jesus would soon be *in the apostles* (Jn 14:15-14:17). When that occurred, the apostles would remind the apostles of what Jesus had said and done, illuminating their minds and teaching them of its significance (Jn 14:25-14:26).

The context readings provide insights from both the Old and New Testaments.

Matthew 18:7-18:35 and Mark 4:1-4:20

We begin the reading with two gospel passages that are indicative of the memory and understanding that came to the apostles after the descent of the indwelling Spirit on Pentecost. These were teachings that even the apostles had trouble understanding without the explanation of Jesus.

In Matthew 18:7-18:35, Jesus spoke of the dangers of sin (7-9), the importance of the least of people in the eyes of the kingdom (10-14), and the need to forgive others who sin against you (15-20). Peter's response is to quiz Jesus on the precise limits of forgiveness.¹ Jesus then replied with a parable to give greater understanding of his teaching on forgiveness.

In Mark 4:1-4:12, Jesus told the parable about the kingdom of heaven, something that served the church well after making its place into Scripture. As it was taught, however,

¹ In fairness to Peter, he does ask if he was to forgive "seven times." Seven was a complete number and signified a full forgiveness. Jesus' response is 70 times seven. Jesus was not cutting off forgiveness at 490 times. Rather he was taking another "complete seven," multiplying by ten, which was a magnifier of numerical importance, and then multiplying that by seven. In other words Jesus was saying, "Don't just forgive completely, but more completely than you even thought possible. This is in our reading, however, because Peter should not have even needed to ask! Had he understood the teaching of Jesus, he would have better understood the role of forgiveness.

neither the apostles nor the non-followers understood what it meant. Jesus explained the parable a bit after quoting Isaiah 6:9-6:10 and Deuteronomy 29.

Isaiah 6:9-6:10 and Deuteronomy 29

The Isaiah passage is interesting because in it, we read of people who *could not* believe because they *chose not* to believe. God instructed Isaiah to keep preaching, even to a people who would hear but would not understand, would see, but would not perceive. The people on their own volition denied the truth and reality of Isaiah's prophetic message.

Deuteronomy conveys much the same message, but this time to the people Moses had led through the wilderness. At first blush, it seems as if God has mandated that the people not see or hear, as if God had made it so simply through fiat (Dt. 29:2-29:3). We understand the ideas and language a little better if we consider how Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 30.

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then ... the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deut 30:1-30:6).

The problem was not simply God-ordained; it was rooted in the choices of the people.

Jeremiah 21 and 34

In Jeremiah 21, we read of God's judgment on Judah through the enemy King Nebuchadnezzar. The king was a student of history, at least in part. He sent an official and a priest to inquire of Jeremiah whether God might bring some deliverance like he did for Hezekiah before the Assyrian king (2 Kgs 18:17-19:37; Isa 36-37). In Hezekiah's day, the prophet Isaiah sent word to the king that God would deliver the city. As promised, a plague broke out in the Assyrian camp, causing the Assyrian king to abandon his siege and return home.

This was not to happen this time. King Zedekiah was no Hezekiah. God's judgment was not arbitrary or capricious. It was brought about by the sin of the people. It left those who heard Jeremiah's prophetic proclamation with two choices: stay in the city and suffer or leave the city and surrender (Jer 21:8-21:9). The plague was not coming into the Babylonian camp; it was coming into the city (Jer 21:6).

In Jeremiah 34, we read of the coming judgment through Nebuchadnezzar with the added emphasis he would burn Jerusalem with fire, basically destroying the entire city (Jer 34:2). We are not given details, and do not know if the king was trying to appease God or simply doing something more futile and administrative, but King Zedekiah announced a release of all slaves (Jer 34:8-34:10). But Zedekiah and the people reneged on the release and rebound the slaves, giving Jeremiah another way to express God's judgment over their actions. Just as Israel had been released from the slavery of Egypt, they would again be subject to slavery by the conquering Babylonians.

Apr. 22

KEEPING COMMANDMENTS (John 14:21)

Jesus was not teaching something novel when he instructed his followers that love should motivate their obedience. There has always been a difference between those who choose to follow God in obedience and those who don't. The Old Testament always provides rich stories of people who chose to follow God as well as those who follow the gods of their own making or creation.

2 Kings 2:15-3:27; and 6:1-8:6

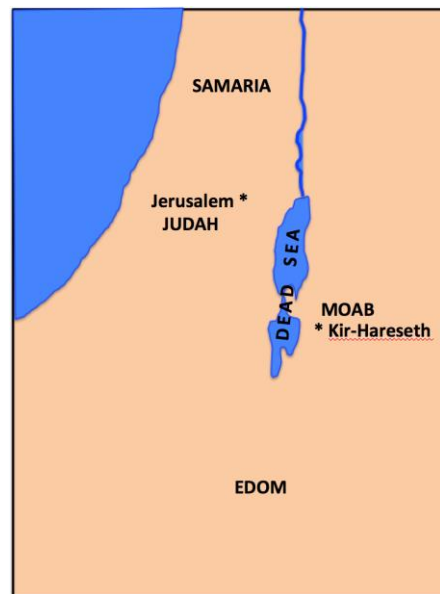
2 Kings 2:15-2:25 picks up the prophetic voice in Israel after God's taking up the prophet Elijah. Many looked for Elijah's body, but were unable to find it, and Elisha became the prophetic voice. Lest there be any doubt, two episodes illustrated his authority. In the first, he pronounced the Lord's healing on a distasteful well at Jericho. The second account has some boys mocking Elisha (they were calling him "baldy"!). Elisha was God's anointed, and calling out God's curse, two females bears came and "tore" the children.

The Hebrew word for "tore" is bq^{\prime} (בִּקַּעַ) and it means "cleave" or "cut open." It does not mean "killed." These events are hard for us to reconcile, not having more to the story. But we do see the importance attached to the ministry and authority of Elisha. His prophetic ministry among the nation would have, if heeded, kept the nation intact rather than letting it be torn asunder. Unfortunately his words often went unheeded.

In chapter 3, we read of the new king Joram of the Northern Kingdom (aka "Samaria" or "Israel"). He was a son of the wicked Ahab, and was not as bad as his father, but that is not saying much! To best set the scene, we need to understand a bit of the history and geography.

Samaria had vassal states, including Judah, Edom, and Moab. Moab, however, was in rebellion. Samaria's response was to get help from Judah and Edom in attacking Moab. The decision was made to attack from the south, coming in from Edom rather than from the north.

The king of Judah participating in the war was Jehoshaphat. During the travel through the desert region of the south, the armies ran out of water. Joram blamed YHWH, the God of Jehoshaphat and Judah (and ostensibly the God of Samaria, although Joram had maintained his father's prophets of Baal). Jehoshaphat called for a prophet of YHWH. This was standard behavior for Jehoshaphat. Earlier he had called for prophetic insight into his actions with Joram's father Ahab. Joram's people knew of Elisha and called him out.



Elisha would have nothing to do with Joram.

What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother (2 Kgs 3:13).

Elisha did help, however, out of regard for Jehoshaphat, the obedient king.²

As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you (2 Kgs 3:14).

Elisha provided instructions for the kings to get water. The obedience of the kings flowed to their armies' benefit as they waited for the Lord to fill the dry streambed (wadi) with water the next morning.

The Lord gave the combined forces victory over Moab except for their capital city Kir-Hareseth. At that city, the king of Moab sacrificed his son to his gods, and the text does not say why the armies failed to conquer the city, but they left with "great wrath" on Israel.

² Jehoshaphat is remembered in Scripture for his walk with the Lord.

He walked in all the ways of Asa his father. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord (1 Kgs 22:43).

The reading then shifts to 2 Kings 6 through 8:6. Here we have more stories of the prophetic ministry of Elisha. Through Elisha, we see God's hand in big politics of the day as well as small events in individual lives. The section begins with Elisha directing the miraculous recovery of an iron axe head, something quite valuable in Israel's iron age. From the small personal event, we see a larger international event as Ben-Hadad the king of Syria began warring against Israel.³ Elisha was a consistent source of information for the Israelite king, much to Ben-Hadad's dismay. Ben-Hadad sent troops to kill Elisha, scaring Elisha's servant. Then in a magnificent image, God opened the eyes of the servant to see countless fiery chariots, indicating that God's support far outweighed any force brought against Elisha.

Ben-Hadad also laid siege to Samaria, causing tragic starvation so that even the king was distraught. Elisha was the voice of the Lord announcing the siege would end by God's hand, which it did immediately. The Syrian camp was plundered and the day was saved. The reading ends with a return to an individual story of God's provision for the Shunammite woman whose land had been taken by the king during her absence.

Apr. 23

JESUS – THE VINE (John 15)

John 15 continues Jesus' final dialogue with his apostles (John 14-16). It begins with Jesus using the metaphor of himself as the vine, God the Father as the vinedresser, and Jesus' followers as branches expected to bear fruit. Some branches bear fruit, others do not. Those that do are pruned to bear more fruit. Those that don't are removed. The top priority for the branches is to *abide* in Jesus, the rooted vine. Without that relationship, there will be no fruit.

³ Some cynics question the history of Kings because of the reoccurrence of Ben-Hadad as a ruler of Damascus (1 Kgs 15:18, 15:20; 15:20:1ff; 6:24, etc.). It seems he lived for quite a long time (100 years? Not likely!), or that there was confusion over the proper names of the kings reigning in Damascus. The cynics need not sound an alarm on this point! Ben-Hadad means "son of Hadad," Hadad being the patron God of Damascus. Above is pictured the stone carving of Baal Hadad ("Lord Hadad") discovered at Ugarit and dated from c. 15th-13th century BC.

It is quite sensible that multiple kings of Damascus might claim that title or name, or that in the least it might be ascribed to them by outsiders! The title would likely take many permutations, i.e., "Hadad-ezer" (Hadad is helper), etc. We know from Assyrian records that a century later at least one king of Damascus was being called "Hadad-idri," an Assyrian equivalent of the Hebrew "Hadad-ezer." Some suggest that Ben-Hadad was a dynastic name, each ruler under the god Hadad bearing the title of his son, hence "Ben [son of] Hadad." See, Boardman, John, Ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Cambridge 1982), Vol. III, Part 1, at 476.

Jesus did not newly devise the horticultural metaphor. For over half a century the Hebrew prophets had used this metaphor in various related ways as we see in the contextual readings below.

Psalm 80

This psalm begins with God as Israel's shepherd. Israel had been punished, and the psalmist was crying out for mercy. The plea was for God's face to shine and save the people. Starting with verse 8, the people are metaphorically referred to as a vine that God had brought forth from Egypt and planted with great care. The vine had grown marvelously, and spread throughout the land. But over time the success of the vine was challenged. It was as if the vinedresser had no more care for the fruiting branches. Enemies were eating the fruit.

The psalmist calls on God to look down on the vine again. God is called to restore his people. The language echoes strong New Testament ideas by referring to Israel (the vine) as both a "son" and the "son of man." It is through the raised up "son" or "son of man" that God was being called to restore life to his people (Pslm 80:15; 80:17).

Isaiah 18

In the prophetic passage, the Lord is a vinedresser who sits in heaven while the political mechanizations of humanity try to form alliances and military defenses. The Lord will execute his judgments like a vinedresser cuts out the shoots (that part of the plant that does not bear fruit) (Isa 18:5). In spite of all man's actions, ultimately the Lord does execute his own judgments on Judea and the other nations.

Proverbs 16:6-16:11; 16:14-16:15

The Proverbs teach that people are to live right before God. It overcomes the sins and errors made, and it brings a peace to life. Living right before God should trump the making of money and should direct the words we speak, as a reflection of God's values. If we think about how important it is to appease a king, shouldn't we spend even more energy seeking to please the Lord?

Ezekiel 15

Here again we get another Old Testament metaphor of vines and vinedressing. Reflective of the horticultural practices of the day, we read of the uselessness of branches that do not bear fruit. At least with a tree in the forest, you can use the branches for pegs or some other industrial or practical use of the lumber. But, not so for useless grape branches. The only use is to burn them for fuel. God said he would be doing that with the fruitless branches of Jerusalem, a concept echoed by Jesus in John 15:6.

Ezekiel 15 and John 15

<p>Ezekiel: The vine branch.... it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.</p>	<p>John: Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.... If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.</p>
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Proverbs 20:28

Many proverbs about kings take on an added element when we consider them applied to the King of Kings. In this proverb, we can see the throne of the King of Kings established and preserved in steadfast love and faithfulness. If his people abide in him and bear fruit, the fruit should be that of steadfast love and faithfulness.

JESUS OVERCOMES (John 16)

Apr. 24

This is the third chapter of Jesus' final discourse with his apostles before the crucifixion. In it, Jesus finished his promises about the coming Holy Spirit. The Spirit would come bringing conviction about sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8). The Spirit was promised to guide the apostles "into all the truth" (the basis for Scripture's authority), and to bring glory to Jesus (Jn 16:13-16:15).

Jesus knew that his apostles were about to face great tribulation and hardship – both before the crucifixion and after. History records that except for Judas, all the apostles met their end as martyrs for their faith.⁴ Jesus explained that this was not because all was lost and everyone was defeated. Rather Jesus was winning the victory and overcoming this world and its death. Once the Holy Spirit brought that conviction, it is what would energize the apostles and bring them willingly and even gladly into eternity through the martyrs' death. As Jesus overcame the world, so do those who abide in Jesus.

⁴ See, Church History Literacy Lesson 4 at <http://lessons.biblical-literacy.org/lessons/church-history-literacy/>.

Psalm 77

Psalm 77 has the psalmist crying out to God at a time of intense trouble. The psalmist can't sleep and is having trouble even praying about it (Pslm 77:1-77:4). The psalmist does reflect, however, and in that reflection comes a realization. It may seem that God has turned a deaf ear, but God is an overcoming God. He is holy, great, and the worker of great wonders. He is a redeemer. We see this historically and by faith know it to be true. In that we rest. Weeping may last for a night (or a week or year!) but rejoicing comes in the morning (or next week or next year!).

Psalm 82

In this psalm, the psalmist underscores that God sits enthroned and sees what is happening in the world. God is neither blind nor disinterested. God will come and mete out justly. This should change the way we live and act. We should also seek to be fair and just in our dealings with others. We should live expectantly with an assurance God will bring things to a just conclusion.

1 John 2:12-2:27; 4:1-5:12

John's epistles were likely written in the same time period as his gospels. Not surprisingly, many of the themes in the gospels are repeated in the epistles. One such theme is that of overcoming. In these passages, we read over and over that we have a status in Jesus as overcomers of the world, its system and its problems. John reminds the "young men" that they have "overcome the evil one" (1 Jn 2:13). As the "word of God abides" in them, they have assuredly "overcome" (1 Jn 2:14).

This impacts the way we live. We are not to love the world we have overcome (1 Jn 2:15-2:17). It is passing away and we who have overcome should know that. Others will come with false teachings, approaching the church with falsehoods even about Christ. As Christ abides in us, and as we abide in him (themes also from John 16), we will be strong in the face of deception.

John urged his readers to carefully weigh what people taught, testing the spirits to see if they were from God or not (1 Jn 4:16). This is something we do as "overcomers," knowing the One in us is greater than the one in the world, else he would not have overcome! (1 Jn 4:4-4:5).

1 John is written more like a symphony than an essay. John doesn't move from point A to B to C on through point Z. Instead, he finds themes and plays them over and over with nuanced differences to heighten the effect and meaning. So we see in 1 John 4 and 5 that the theme of overcoming is interlaced with abiding in Christ, just as it was in 1 John 2. The theme is also closely linked with the Spirit of God testifying to Jesus,

bringing him glory. A careful reading of 1 John 4-5 readily echoes phrases and ideas from Jesus' discourse in John 14-16.

Apr. 25

PEACE OF HEART (John 16:33)

At the end of Jesus' soliloquy, he promises his followers peace, at a time when from the world's eyes there will be no cause for peace. The apostles are about to enter a storm that will last the rest of their lives. Yet in the midst of this storm, Jesus promises a peace that is uniquely found in him.

Ephesians 2:11-2:22

Paul explained the peace of God in Jesus was not simply an internal peace of mind or heart. It was also a peace that extended outward among nations and ethnic groups. There was no longer hostility between the Jews and Gentiles if they were in Christ. Christ made peace by making all people in him "one." This is also a peace that we believers have with God himself. Sin's offensiveness has been replaced by the righteousness of Christ. Paul's message was one of peace to all, both horizontally (to others) and vertically (to God).

Proverbs 12:25; 14:13-14:14

The Proverbs knew the importance of peace, and gave practical instruction about it. Proverbs 12:25 taught that while worry weighed down one's heart, good news and positive encouragement brought gladness. Proverbs 14:13-14:14 taught that laughter and joy are not always evidence of peace. Laughter can hide anxiety and joy can be brought to an abrupt end in grief. As a general rule, however, goodness will bring good fruit, and one who puts evil into his heart, will likewise bear bad fruit.

Jeremiah 46-49

These are four long chapters contrasting the peace of God with the judgment God visits on sin and evil. In these chapters, we read God's judgment on Egypt (Jer 46). The punishment was going to be thorough (Jer 46:25-46:26). God would also be judging the Philistines (Jer 47), Moab (Jer 48), Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam (Jer 49).

This is a judgment that should follow all who sin. It is the right judgment of a just God on the sin and abuses of humanity. Yet this is the same judgment that the believer in Jesus overcomes, just as Jesus overcame the world. This is the GOOD NEWS!

Apr. 26

THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER (John 17)

This is an amazing prayer Jesus offered immediately before being delivered up for execution. As we put some additional Scriptures around the prayer our insight grows into Jesus' state of mind, as well as that of his apostles. We also see the effects of the prayer on the church through one of Peter's and one of Paul's letters.

1 Peter 1 and Isaiah 40:6-40:8

In his prayer, Jesus prayed deliberately and carefully for his apostles. He prayed for their faith and faithfulness, trusting in the faithfulness of God to maintain the faith of the apostles. Jesus prayed for their sanctification and holiness. Beyond the apostles, though, Jesus specifically prayed for you and me! He prayed for all who come to faith through the testimony and works of the apostles (which rightfully includes Scripture).

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one (Jn 17:20-17:22).

This prayer is echoed by Peter in 1 Peter 1. Peter explained to a people who loved Jesus, even though they had not personally seen him, that their glory came from Jesus, the savior of their souls (1 Pet 1:8-1:9).

Jesus and his redemption were found prophetically in Scripture (our Old Testament). This same calling calls forth holiness by God's people, also something found in Scripture. Here Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-40:8, noting that everything we see is temporal, but what God says that is eternal.

Matthew 26:40-26:46 and Luke 22:39-22:46

These two passages give some context around the Lord's prayer in John 17. Matthew tells that Peter, James and John (“the sons of Zebedee”) were invited to follow along while Jesus prayed. This certainly explains why John is able to record so much of Jesus' prayer. Matthew and Luke also record that the three *fell asleep* while Jesus was praying. Of course, if they had known the monumental nature of the prayer, and the historical significance of the moment, one readily suspects they would have found a way to stay awake. They just didn't realize what was really going on and what was at play.

Hebrews 5:7-5:10 and 4:14-4:16

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is frequently labeled "the High Priestly Prayer" because it has Jesus interceding on behalf of his people. That was the role of the high priest in the Jewish temple system.

In the Hebrews 5 and 4 passages, we read of Jesus as praying on behalf of his people as a great high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus interceded on behalf of humanity not simply by dying for sins, but also by praying for his people. Jesus' spent every effort for our salvation.

Ephesians 4:1-15 and Psalm 68

In Ephesians 4, Paul wrote of the unity of the church in Christ. This unity is a very specific point and request Christ set before the Father in his high priestly prayer of John 17. Paul contrasted the unity (one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father) with the diversity of gifts among the individual believers (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers) likening it to one body, with multiple parts and Christ as the head. In the process, Paul used Psalm 68 with an important and illuminating twist!

Paul quotes the first two phrases of Psalm 68:18, but then deliberately changes the next phrase for emphasis. Compare the two:

Ephesians 4:8 When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men	Psalm 68:18 You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men.
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The Psalm has the Lord ascending on high receiving gifts, as is right and proper for a king. But Jesus did things differently. He ascended on high, but not to receive gifts. He did so to give gifts! Jesus gives his gifts as high priest, ministering to the body he died to save.

Ezekiel 37

The unity Paul wrote of, that Jesus prayed for and then died for, was prophetically proclaimed in Ezekiel 37. This is a classic example of what Peter referred to earlier in our reading for this day that the prophets wrote of Jesus and were trying to discern as much as they could.

Ezekiel 37 begins with the vision of the valley of dried bones. Amidst the morbidity of this vision, lies a back-story that touches the heartstrings. This vision speaks not only to God's plans for his people, but also to his plans for Ezekiel.

In the ESV, there are three paragraphs to this vision. The first paragraph sets out the vision. Ezekiel is taken to an unspecified valley full of "very dry" bones. As a priest, these bones would be unclean for Ezekiel, but the text does not indicate any recoiling on his behalf. When asked if the bones could live again, Ezekiel does not answer, but leaves the answer to YHWH, for only YHWH would have the knowledge and power to bring that to pass! YHWH then instructs Ezekiel to prophesy life to the bones with the promise that God would bring the prophecy to pass, adding the flesh as well as the spirit/breath into the remade bodies. The end result would be knowledge of YHWH and his power!

The second paragraph is the narrative of Ezekiel doing as instructed. Ezekiel prophesies and the bones started coming together. In the words of the old song, "the toe bone connected to the foot bone!" After the bones reassembled, sinews, flesh, and skin came upon them, just as God promised. At this point there was no breath in the bodies. This passage frequently uses the Hebrew word for "breath," which is also the Hebrew word for "wind," "spirit," and for God's "Spirit." (*Ruach*). While there is room for wondering in its many uses exactly which meaning is intended, the import is easily captured. Ezekiel prophesies to the breath/wind/spirit or Spirit to "come from the four winds" and infuse the bodies with life. Much like the Genesis creation story, the humans are not active until they have spirit/breath. Ezekiel so prophesied and the breath came into the bodies that then "lived and stood on their feet."

The third paragraph gives insight into the layer of meaning for Ezekiel and his day.⁵ The "whole house of Israel" is represented in the dry bones. These are the desolate and defeated from Judah. These people feel not only dead, but also long dead! They claimed, "our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off." Walter Eichrodt paraphrased the feeling well:

They [the people of Judah] had regarded Jerusalem as the ultimate guarantee of their survival as a nation, so the effect of its fall had been to make them feel as if they had been given up to be the prey of death.⁶

⁵ We specify for Ezekiel and his day because the prophets are capable of multiple meanings. The New Testament church often reinterpreted prophecies as having another layer of meaning finding fulfillment in Christ and his body. Andreas Kostenberger notes the amazing similarity of the message of Ezekiel 36 (preceding the vision of the valley of dry bones) and the language of Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus. This sets the discussion with Nicodemus on the wind blowing and being born again of the Spirit. *Encountering John*, (Baker 2002), at 84ff.

⁶ Eichrodt, Walter, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, (Westminster 1970), at 509

YHWH then instructed Ezekiel to prophesy God's promise to open their graves, to bring them back to the land, and to put his Spirit into them. We should insert here, now that we have considered what God revealed to Ezekiel about the meaning, that YHWH gave a very specific instruction to Ezekiel in the first paragraph that has heightened meaning. Interestingly, Ezekiel's prophetic words were to begin, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" This is in stark contrast to Ezekiel 12:2 where YHWH tells Ezekiel that the house of Israel had "ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house." After the death experience of captivity, the dead who have no ears are told to "hear!" It is in captivity that YHWH would teach his people to listen to his voice! Like so much else in Ezekiel, this makes the point that YHWH is God, the one and only.

The second half of Ezekiel 37 ties very directly into the John 17 prayer on unity as well as Paul's Ephesian narrative on unity. The Lord told Ezekiel to take two sticks and write Judah on one and Joseph on the other. These two sticks stood for the people associated with each group, Judah being the southern kingdom and Joseph being the long defunct and dispersed people of the northern kingdom. God told Ezekiel to join the two sticks in one hand where God would make them into one stick.

This was a prophetic promise that God was going to take from among all the nations his people, and combine them into one whole. God would set his servant David as king, indicating, of course, the offspring of David, and all the people would have a singular shepherd. God would then make an everlasting covenant of peace, dwelling with them for eternity.

This passage is echoed not only in Jesus' prayer, but also in the Peter passage and Ephesians passage for the day. It is a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 17

1. Do we really see God's commands as guideposts to place us into the right paths for life? Where does faith enter into this picture as a part of obedience?
2. What fruit do you see in your own life, specifically as a fruit of abiding in Christ?
3. A fun exercise: Go through John 16 and circle the words "abide," "overcome," and "Spirit" each time they are used. Then go through 1 John 2 through 5 and do the same.
4. Thinking about the apostles falling asleep during Jesus' prayer in John 17, do you wonder what things you have missed out on because you were not able to be as obedient as you were called to be?

Week Eighteen Readings

<p style="text-align: center;">4/28 Jesus' Arrest Jn 18:1-18:27</p> <p>Matt 26:47-26:65 Ex 28 Ex 39 Matt 26:66-26:75 Matt 27:1-27:31 Prov 17:11-17:15; 17:20 17:23; 17:27 Prov 18:3 Prov 21:28 Prov 24:26-24:29</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus' Arrest: The Cup Jn 18:1-18:11</p> <p>Matt 26:36-26:39 Hab 2:6-2:17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4/29 Jesus Before Pilate Jn 18:28-19:16</p> <p>Pslm 78 Ex 29 Luk 22:63-22:71</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Peter's Denial Jn 18:12-18:27</p> <p>Luk 22:31-22:38 Luk 22:47-22:62 Pslm 12 Pslm 143 Prov 20:6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4/30 Jesus' Kingdom Jn 18:36</p> <p>Matt 13:10-13:17 Ezek 12 Matt 13:31-13:35 Ezek 17 Matt 13:44-13:51 Nah. 2 Matt 20:1-20:28 Matt 22:1-22:14 Mrk 4:26-4:34</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4/30 Cont'd</p> <p>Matt 25 Matt 18:1-18:6 1 Tim 6:11-6:16 Luk 13:18-13:21 Luk 18:15-18:17</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/1 God's Authority Over Rulers Jn 19:1-19:16</p> <p>Ezek 30-32</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/2 The Crucifixion Jn 19:17-19:42</p> <p>Matt 27:32-27:51 Heb 6:13-6:20 Heb 10:19-10:31 Prov 25:21-25:22 Matt 27:52-27:61 Mrk 15:33-15:34 Pslm 22:1-22:21; 22:25-22:31 Mrk 15:35-15:41 Lev 16</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5/3 The Resurrection Jn 20:1-20:29</p> <p>Matt 27:62-28:15 Mrk 15:42-16:20 Lev 23:9-23:14 Pslm 47 Pslm 107</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5/4 Off</p>
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