

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 2

John 1:9-14

Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible were 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 two, along with the readings for week three appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Two Readings

1/6 The True Light Enlightens Jn 1:9	1/7 The World's Awareness Jn 1:10-11	1/8 The World's/ Believers' Awareness Jn 1:10-13	1/9 The Believer's Awareness Jn 1:12-13	1/10 Word Became Flesh Jn 1:14	1/11 And Tabernacled Jn 1:14
Gen 2:4--25	Mt 1:1-17		Mic 5	Mt 1:18-25	Ex 25
Gen 3	Jer 33	Isa 8	Hos 11	Isa 7	Ex 35-38
Rom 1:18-21	Mt 21:23-46	Rom 9:30-33	Jer 31:15-40	Lk 1:26-38	Ex 39:32-43
Job 29-30	Ps 118	Jer 31:1-14	Lk 2:1-23	Prv 8:22-36	Ex 31:1-11
Isa 2:1-5	Ps 3	Mt 2	Lev 12	Job 19	Num 7
Isa 42:1-17	Ps 14		Lk 2:23-52	Jer 10:1-16	
Pro 4:18				1 Jn 1:1-4	

John 1:9-14

THE TRUE LIGHT ENLIGHTENS (John 1:9)

John maintained his theme of Jesus as the light of the world emphasizing that Jesus, the light that “enlightens everyone,” was actually coming into the world (Jn 1:9). Here we find John continuing to echo the Old Testament recognition of Jesus as something beyond creation.

Genesis 2-3

In Genesis 2, we have a detailed creation account of God making a special man and woman – Adam and Eve. Starting with Adam, God formed a man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It was after God breathed into man that man became a no longer a shaped piece of dirt, but a living soul or creature. Man sought companionship from all animals, but none were sufficient. It was not until God made woman from the side of man that an adequate partner was found.

Things were good – really good. Man was living in a garden the Lord God planted in “Eden.”¹ Eden likely comes from the Hebrew root that means “pleasure” or “delight.” Man and woman² were in God’s garden, a place of pleasure and delight. The joys of walking with God in the cool of the day, of tending the garden, of easy food and godly purpose, were the normative for both man and woman.

Temptation, however, entered the garden and their lives. Genesis does not tell us that the serpent was Satan. That truth comes later in Scripture.³ We are told that

¹ Biblical archaeologists in days gone by were fascinated at the idea of finding the remains of the Garden of Eden. Genesis tells of its location as where one river divided into four (the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates). Unfortunately, only two of those, the Tigris and Euphrates, are known today. Efforts to find and locate the garden have never been fruitful.

² Reading the English Standard Version, we read of “man” and “woman” rather than Adam and Eve in Eden. This is because the name “Adam” has multiple meanings and the scholar translators are trying to determine where it is used in Genesis as a proper name. “Adam” can be a proper name but also is a generic term for humankind. Genesis clearly makes a play on the word and its similarity to the events. For example, Gen. 2:7 reads, “Then the LORD God formed the man [*adam*] of dust from the ground [*adama*] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man [*adam*] became a living creature. Similarly, a play is made on the name “Eve” [*hawwa*] which plays off the Hebrew verb for live.” This places Eve as the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

³ It is not until John 8:44 that Scripture clearly sets out the persona of the serpent. In the John passage, Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.

woman was tempted to commit moral rebellion by “the serpent [who] was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). The serpent seizes on the one area of the garden that was forbidden, consuming the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Through subtle half-lies, the serpent seduces the woman into making her own moral choices in rebellion against the morality of God. The woman then feeds the same sin to her husband, and at this point, things go from really good, to bad. Satan was able to shift man and woman’s trust away from God and his expressed will for man and woman’s good. Instead, man and woman decided to trust their own moral judgment and act disobediently to God.

God had told man, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). But, the serpent distorted that asking the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of *any* tree in the garden?’” The woman then replied, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, *neither shall you touch it*, lest you die.’” At this point, the serpent has misdirected what God said, and the woman similarly misstates the rule of God. The serpent then closes his temptation adding, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:1-5).

Here was the final half-truth deception. They would die as God said, not in the 24-hour day they ate of the fruit, but in the day/age they ate of it.⁴ The idea that their eyes would be opened and they would be like God knowing good and evil is the final seduction lie. The eyes were opened in a way never meant to be. Man and woman knew evil by experiencing it and taking it into themselves. Things would never be the same.

After two chapters of “good” and “really good,” we read of the following progression of bad:

- The eyes of man and woman are “opened” and they become self-conscious of the nakedness. They futilely try sewing fig leaves together, an almost laughable gesture to hide their nakedness from the one that fashioned them! (Gen. 3:7).
- Man and woman start hiding from God out of fear (Gen. 3:8-10).

He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.”

⁴ Some suggest that man and woman did die that 24-hour day, but the death was spiritual rather than physical. That is not suggested in the text, but whether accurate or not, it does not change the point that Satan was deceiving with half-truths. It merely makes it a *different* half-truth.

- The blame game starts with man blaming woman for his sin and woman blaming the serpent. In fact, Adam even drops the suggestion that God is at blame for providing woman in the first place! (Gen. 3:12-13).
- The ease of the garden is replaced by painful childbirth and farming amidst thorns and thistles as man is expelled from the garden of pleasure and delight (Gen. 3:16, 18).
- The relationship between man and woman is altered for the worse (Gen. 3:16). Lamentably, man began lauding his superior strength over woman, rather than treat her as a full partner as God set up.

This progression and the ubiquity of sin explains Paul's understanding that: Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... (Rom. 5:12).

What happened? How could something so good become something so bad? Genesis does not give the great, deep philosophical answer. It simply states a few simple facts. God made man in his image. Included in this was man's free will ability to make moral choices. Man could decide to live in God's morality or strike out on his own, setting his own rules and living in rebellion to godly obedience.

Scripture teaches further that sin separates man from God, and that separation leads to more and greater sin. It becomes a vicious cycle that so pollutes humanity and the earth that a thorough cleansing is needed. Even that cleansing, however, does not stop the sinfulness of man.

Consequences come with sin. Genesis 3 sets out the curses that God described as following the sin of humanity. Those consequences affect man, woman and beast. The world is a different place, and the life that man had known was over.

This passage is not all bad news. It is the passage that sets into promise the coming of Jesus into the world. Since the second century, many in the church have seen the first prophetic glimpse of this good news (the "protoevangelium" from "proto" meaning "first" and "euangellon" meaning "good news") in the curses following man's sin. When cursing the serpent, God declared that:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

The "he" in this curse is from woman's offspring and it is "he" who will bruise the serpent's head. The offspring will win over the force behind the serpent, but at a

price (“you [the serpent] shall bruise his [the Savior’s heel]”). This bruising of the “heel” must reference the harm given to Christ on Calvary.

Further indications of God’s willingness and promise of providing even for sinful man are found in a parental act of provisioning that occurs even as he is expelling man from the garden:

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them (Gen. 3:21).

In a desire to provide clothing beyond the sewn fig leaves man and woman concocted, God takes an animal and sacrifices it so that its skin can cover the sinful bodies of man and woman. This seems to foreshadow the ultimate sacrifice that would give Christ as clothing to cover the sin of man and woman. Paul used clothing language when he explained to the Galatians:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

For Paul, the ultimate clothing of the believer was not the skin taken from a slain animal, but rather Christ himself – the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world.

Romans 1:18-21

Paul saw the events of Eden, as well as the subsequent actions of men in terms of darkness. Adam, Eve, and countless of their progeny in rebellion suppressed the truth. They ignore the plain God before them and are without excuse for failing to honor Creator God. Instead they opted for futility in thinking living in darkness, even as they think themselves truly enlightened. A great example is found in Job’s challenging of God.

Job 29-30

In these two chapters, as Job laid out his defense to his friends, Job spends most of his time attacking God. Job realized that he was living in darkness and his harsh words against God expose that darkness. Job thought God had abandoned him from the days when “by his light I walked through darkness” (Job 29:3). Job saw his days as ones where he went “about darkened, but not by the sun” (Job 30:28). As Job’s prosperity “passed away like a cloud” (Job 30:15), Job interpreted as God’s “cruelness” (Job 30:21).

Into this darkened thinking, was to come one promised in Genesis 3, a promise further defined throughout the Old Testament, as we see in Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:1-5; 42:5-17

Isaiah was a prophet who prophesied roughly from 740-700BC in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Many of his prophetic words were understood by the Jews to be of the coming Holy One, the Messiah. The early church recognized these prophecies as not only pointing to Jesus, but being fulfilled in him. Isaiah is one of the Old Testament books most frequently quoted or referenced in the New Testament.

The Isaiah 2:1-5 passage is one that speaks of the coming Messiah. It frames the coming in the “latter days” which is the biblical term for the period between the Messiah’s coming and his ultimate return. The New Testament church knew they lived in the “latter days,” and we still live in them today. For Isaiah’s prophetic vision, the house of the Lord was to be established and “lifted up” (a term used by Jesus to speak of his crucifixion in John 3:14) so that “all nations” and “many people” would come to the Lord for teaching and instruction to “walk in his paths.”

Isaiah says this will be the “Word of the Lord” that goes out from Jerusalem as a judge who would bring ultimate peace where swords are beat into plowshares. Isaiah called this a time for the people to leave darkness and “walk in the light of the Lord.”

In Isaiah 42, the prophet explained that the coming light would cause his people to also become a light for the nations. As God’s people reflect the light of the Messiah, they “open the eyes that are blind” and bring out “from the prison those who sit in darkness.” This is all part of God’s coming plan to “lead the blind” and “turn the darkness before them into light.”

Proverbs 4:18

The short peace of wisdom in Proverbs 4:18 provides a classic example of the perspective of John’s claim of the role of Jesus as enlightening the world, and how it translates in the lives of those who follow the light out of darkness:

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

After the fall in Eden, God was not finished with humanity. God was at work and was moving to restore the lives of people from the darkness of sin to the light of

life. This is the work John proclaimed as the purpose of Jesus when he wrote, “the true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world!”

THE WORLD’S AWARENESS (John 1:10-11)

Jesus came into the world, to the very people promised by the prophets. Yet Jesus was unknown and not accepted while on earth, except for by a handful of people.

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew began his gospel with a genealogy, directed to demonstrate the lineage of Jesus was precisely that identified by the prophets. Jesus was from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, each of whom had received the prophetic promise that their seed would carry God’s blessing for the nations (Gen. 18:17-19; 26:1-5; 35:9-15). Jesus would establish the true eternal throne from David, also his forefather (1 Kg 2:45; 9:5).⁵ Jesus came to his own people, in precisely the way promised.

Jeremiah 33

⁵ There is some fun word play in Matthew dividing Jesus’ genealogy into precisely fourteen generations. Scholars recognize that Matthew’s gospel was largely targeting a Jewish audience. In this genealogy, we can see that in Matthew’s usage of “*gematria*.” *Gematria* is based on the fact that the Hebrew alphabet also served as the numbers in ancient Hebrew. Like many civilizations in the Ancient Near East, this enabled the Hebrews to find a numerical value in words. The numerical value often took on significance beyond the word itself. This practice went back at least as far as the Assyrian king Sargon II (727-707BC). One inscription of Sargon’s indicated he built the wall at the city Khorsabad 16,283 cubits long so that it would be the length of the numerical value of his name. (“*Gematria*,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Keter Publishing House 1972), Vol 7, at 370).

A number of scholars cite *gematria* as the reason for Matthew 1:17,

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

This comes in a chapter where Jesus Christ is first listed as the “Son of David,” a Messianic term, and is unique to Matthew’s gospel. Matthew sets his genealogy into three segments of fourteen, pointing out the “significance” of the sections at fourteen each (1:17). To do that, Matthew had to eliminate four known kings between Joram and Uzziah (Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, and Amaziah).

Why is fourteen so important to Matthew and his largely Jewish readers? Under the Hebrew *gematria*, fourteen is the number for David. The Hebrew spelling for David is *dwd* (דוד). The *gematria* value for each “D” is four (“D” is the fourth letter in the Hebrew alphabet) and the value for the “W” is six (“W” is the sixth letter in the Hebrew alphabet). So the fourteen generations are each a reflection of David. Matthew is not interested in truly listing every king. He is interested in driving home the point that Jesus is to be understood in light of his title Son of David!

Jeremiah prophesied during the last days of the nation of Judah and into its early Babylonian captivity, called into ministry around 626BC going past the destruction of the temple in 587BC. Many of Jeremiah's prophetic words were understood by Jews and the early church to apply to the Messiah. We read such a prophetic promise in Jeremiah 33. Jeremiah prophesied not only Judah's fall, but also that it would be restored (Jer. 33:11).

It was after the land was restored that God would do a further work. God would fulfill that promise made over the centuries back to Abraham. Again in Jeremiah, he links this time of salvation and restoration to the offspring of David.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (Jer. 33:14-17).

Into the world of these prophetic promises came Jesus as the fulfillment. Yet as John explained, neither the people of the world nor the Jews received Jesus while he was alive. A good example of this is found in Matthew 21.

Matthew 21:23-46 and Psalm 118

Here we have the rejection of Jesus' authority, followed by two parables he told to illustrate the impropriety of the rejection. The priests in the temple challenged Jesus for the authority behind his teaching. Rather than give an answer they no doubt would not have received, Jesus pointed to John the Baptist (who did give authority to Jesus' teaching), asking if John was speaking God's truth. The priests knew that question was a political hot potato and refused to commit yes or no. Jesus replied that if they wouldn't answer him, he wouldn't give them any more information either.

At that point Jesus did, however, tell two parables that gave insight for any who would listen. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus noted the reception of a rebellious son who becomes obedient over the son who claims to be obedient, yet is rebellious. In the parable of the tenants, Jesus probed the priests on what an owner would do if his tenants killed the owner's son. The priests recognized the owner would put the murderers to death. Jesus then quoted Psalm 118:22-23,

where the stone rejected by the builders became the most important stone to finish the project, the “cornerstone.” The priests were smart enough to figure out Jesus was indicting their refusal to acknowledge him, they just couldn’t figure out what to do about it!

Psalm 3 and 14

Even as the priests rejected Jesus and sought ways to eliminate him, Jesus could walk in the security expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 3. With many foes around him, he could know, as could the Psalmist, and as can we, that God would be a shield and protector. That through God’s wisdom and care, salvation would come to the people. No one would have any authority over Jesus until and unless God allowed it.

Jesus walked through the time of darkness where people simply refused to acknowledge him and the light he shown. Psalm 14 shows those so “smart” they thought they knew better and could see through the Jesus claims were, in fact, simply fools with “no knowledge.” This is a passage Paul would quote in Romans as indicative of the entire world that lives without honoring God.

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” ... The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside... there is none who does good, not even one.

Romans 3:1-20

While Jesus spoke to the Jews, and while the Psalm was written as part of Jewish Scripture, Paul understood the indictment to be one with broad application to all people. As John indicated, the “world did not know him,” not just his own people. Paul explained this in Romans 3:1-20.

While the Jews had the blessing of being entrusted with the Scriptures, they were faithless. The Jews had the prophetic words attesting to Jesus, yet they rejected him. But just as indicting were the actions of the non-Jews. They also refused to search for God, living instead in their darkness.

This is the irony of people and their own wisdom. The idea that God would work as he did in Jesus just seems offensive to many and their “intelligence.” We see this prophetically explained in Isaiah 8.

Isaiah 8

God used Isaiah to predict the coming Assyrian conquest of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The people did not see the conquest coming, and they naively lived without regard to God, his law, his covenant, or his promises. The conquest occurred by the strong arm of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (726-723BC).

Isaiah equated the numbness and foolish non-recognition of this coming destruction to the reception of the Messiah in the later days. The hand of God was prophesied to be

And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken (Is 8:14-15).

Paul applied this passage to those who refused to believe in Jesus as Messiah in Romans 9:30-33.

THE BELIEVER'S AWARENESS (John 1:12-13)

While most did not receive Jesus, either among his people or in the world, some did. The same is true today. To those who did, John explained they became children of God.

Jeremiah 31:1-14

The prophet Jeremiah used the language of “children” of the Lord, comparing the remnant of God’s people to those Jews who survived the wilderness and entered the Promised Land at the time of Moses. The people would be “ransomed” and “redeemed.” Languishing shall end, and mourning will turn to joy. The “goodness” of the Lord will satisfy his people and they will have the comfort of God as their Father. We see this chapter of Jeremiah beginning to unfold in the nativity story recounted in Matthew 2.

Matthew 2, Micah 5, and Jeremiah 31:15-40

Matthew’s story of the birth of Jesus includes a visit from Magi, wise men from the east. The wise men stopped in Jerusalem to find out the prophetic words about where they could find the one “born king of the Jews” (Mt. 2:2). The reigning king Herod (who even killed his own son out of jealousy) was concerned. He summoned the priests and scribes asking where Scripture taught would be the Messiah’s birthplace. The scholars did not need to go home and ask anyone. They did not need the Internet to help them find the answer. The scholars were able to quote and cite Micah 5:2,

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days... And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

In a great illustration of John's point about the rejection by most and the acceptance by a few, the Magi went on to find Jesus in Bethlehem, while the priests and scribes who were able to quote chapter and verse simply went home.

Herod did not leave the information alone. He sent his soldiers to kill all the children under the age of two in and around the region of Bethlehem. Matthew explained this as fulfilling the Jeremiah 31:15 prophetic lament,

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

Jeremiah 31 does not end with the lament, however. God was at work at something much greater, and Jeremiah explained it prophetically. God was bringing about a new covenant. He was no longer going to simply place a written code before the people. God was going to write his law on his children's hearts. God was going to produce a united people who all have a relationship of intimacy with him.

Jeremiah explained,

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31-34).

The Hebrew word for “know” is *yd’* (יָדַע). It can mean simply an awareness, but within the context of relationships, can mean something much more intimate. This is the word used in Genesis 4:1 where it spoke of Adam and Eve’s marital intimacy (“Now Adam *knew* [יָדַע] Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.”)

This is John’s point. Those who believed in Jesus were given a relationship with God of intimacy.

Luke 2 and Leviticus 12

In Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus, Luke not only sets out Bethlehem, but also gives the presentation of Jesus at the temple. After giving birth, Leviticus 12 set out the law’s requirements for purification and presentation of a newborn child. Interestingly, there were two different options for offerings. The wealthier were charged with offering a lamb with either a pigeon or turtledove. Those who were poorer were instructed to offer simply two pigeons or turtledoves. Jesus’s parents were poorer and gave as they could, a set of the birds.

While there, one man who had been promised seeing the Messiah before his death not only saw Jesus, but was able to hold him, blessing God to the amazement of Mary and Joseph.

THE WORD BECAME FLESH (John 1:14)

John 1:14 is recognized by many as a key verse, if not the key verse in John’s gospel. We take five days to unpack this verse. We begin by focusing on the Word becoming flesh. The remarkable of this can get lost if we don’t remain cognizant of the start of John’s gospel where he detailed the Word was in the beginning and intimately involved with creation. Those are the verses where John explained the Word was God. Now John details God became human. This is the incarnation.

Matthew 1:18-25 and Isaiah 7

Matthew gives the account of Jesus’ birth, emphasizing the Lord’s role in bringing Jesus into life. Jesus was not born simply by the union of a man and woman. Jesus was a child of the Holy Spirit and Mary. Mary was still a virgin. Matthew quoted this event as a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, which reads,

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Many skeptics are quick to point out that when Matthew wrote of Jesus born of a virgin as fulfilling Isaiah 7:14, Matthew used the Greek word “*parthenos*” (παρθένος), which clearly means “virgin.” Yet the Hebrew of Isaiah, the critics add, speaks of an *almah* (עלמה), which means “maiden.” Now a “maiden” was typically a virgin, as a young unmarried woman; however, it is possible that Isaiah’s word might simply mean a young unmarried woman and leave no comment on the question of promiscuity. However, Matthew was not simply making up some idea that changed the Jewish understanding of Isaiah.

200 years before Jesus, the Jews translated their Scriptures into Greek in Scriptures we call the “Septuagint.”⁶ This allows us to readily understand the Jewish perspective of what Isaiah meant by *almah* at the time of Christ. The Jewish scholars translated *almah* precisely the way Matthew did, as “virgin” or *parthenos*.

The conception and subsequent birth of Jesus was not just another normal earthly event. In a special way, God had come among people. “Immanuel,” is the Hebrew signifying, “God with us.”

Lk 1:26-38

⁶ It is not surprising that after Alexander the Great’s conquest of the Mediterranean world, the Greek intelligentsia, including the ruling authorities, sought to have the Jewish Scriptures and other important writings translated into Greek. Greek was the predominant language of the educated from Egypt to India, from Macedonia to Modern Iran.

The name “Septuagint” comes from the Latin title of the translation: *Versio Septuaginta Interpretum*, which means “version of the seventy interpreters.” This also explains why the abbreviation for the Septuagint is the Roman numeral for 70 (“LXX”). Somewhere around 200BC, a letter from “Aristeas to Philocrates” was written containing an account, generally accorded to be legend in many aspects, about the writing of the Septuagint. In the letter, it is explained that the Alexandrian librarian Demetrius of Phalerum persuaded Ptolemy II (309-246BC) to enrich the library with a set of the Jewish Scriptures. The king sent ambassadors to the High Priest in Jerusalem asking for help. The High Priest sent 72 scholars (representing six from each tribe) to do the work. Supposedly (and this is generally deemed to be part of the legend as opposed to fact) the scholars finished their work in exactly 72 days. For more, see, Wasserstein, Abraham, and Wasserstein, David, *The Legend of the Septuagint, From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge 2006).

Most scholars recognize the process lasted much longer than 72 days. The first Jewish Scriptures translated were the Torah, the five books of Moses generally agreed to have been translated into Greek around 250BC. (Jobes, Karen, and Silva, Moises, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, (Baker 2000), at 29.) The remaining Jewish Scriptures followed, and many other Jewish writings were included as well. By the time of Matthew, these Greek translations were important in the Greek-speaking Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. Most Jews living outside the Semitic countries likely were more familiar with Greek than Hebrew.

The doctor Luke likely had a chance to speak directly to Mary about the experience. He includes more of an eyewitness account of how the angel told Mary, not only about her pregnancy, but of her cousin Elizabeth's role as the bearer of John the Baptist.

Proverb 8:22-36

Many see in this the fulfillment of the Proverb's 8 personification of wisdom. With verse 22, the Proverbs set out wisdom as possessed by the Lord and working beside him as a master workman in the Creation. All in anticipation of the day the Word would become flesh.

Job 19

Job was not clear in his understanding, but he spoke of his faith that a day like this would come. Job 19:25 gives his assurance to this effect,

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.

Jeremiah 10:1-16

The prophet Jeremiah contrasted the real God who would appear to those idols that the nations believed were manifestations of their gods on earth. The idols were merely decorated wood, with no ability to do anything at all. Not so the Lord. The Lord was not found in idols or other skilled productions of the local artist.

The Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King (Jer. 10:10).

As such, God puts to shame any other idea of God on earth. Any other image is a worthless delusion, the product of ignorant people.

1 John 1:1-4

In his first epistle, John wrote similarly to his gospel, adding a bit more emphasis. Not only was the Word of Life manifested on earth, but also John could affirm the truth of the *physical* incarnation. John and others had "seen" and "touched" the manifested Word.

God the Word became flesh. Real flesh.

THE TABERNACLE (John 1:14)

After beginning by speaking of the Word that was in the beginning and was creating the world as God, John gave new insight into the Word with the word “dwelt” in verse 14:

And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Exodus 25, 35-38, 39:32-43, 31:1-11; Numbers 7

The word that John has used for “dwelt” is the Greek verb *skenoo* (σκηνόω). It literally means, “to pitch a tent” or “swell in a tent.” It is a very important word in the Old Testament. The word’s noun form translates the Hebrew word *mishkan* (מִשְׁכָּן). This was the Old Testament word for the tabernacle built at God’s instruction.

Exodus 25 and 35-38 show in excruciating detail how the Israelites were to go about building the tabernacle. The people were to contribute to its construction, showing the human role in its incarnation. It was to contain an ark, with a mercy seat that would become very important in the purification of the peoples’ sin.

God blessed specific individuals with the skill necessary to bring about a precise construction of the tabernacle and its accompanying pieces. Moses specified that these workers had the skills because the Lord “has filled them with the skill to do every sort of work” (Ex 35:35). Thus they made the ark, the altar of sacrifice, the lampstands, the priestly garments, and the tent itself.

It was the place where the glory of God descended to earth, to the amazement of the people:

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

In the tabernacle, the people experienced the presence and guidance of God. When the glory of God was on the tabernacle, the people stayed put. When the cloud of glory moved from the tent, the people would pack up the tabernacle and follow (Ex. 40:36-38).

In Numbers 7, all the tribes consecrated the tabernacle, indicating the role that God's presence should play in the life of all Israel.

At this early stage, John is laying groundwork for the understanding that much of the Old Testament has found a superior level of fulfillment and meaning in Jesus and his new order.

John is telling us that Jesus was the real tabernacle or meeting place of God and humanity. In Jesus, we see the precise mercy seat, altar, and other appurtenances of the tabernacle, as we will explore in later lessons.

DWELT AMONG US (John 1:14)

In the tabernacle, or the tenting of the Word as flesh, we have John adding that the Word "dwelt among us." We see here a fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies and images.

Zechariah 2

Zechariah was a late prophet of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, active *after* the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity. He began prophesying in the second year of King Darius, which would be about 520BC. A good bit of his prophecies targeted the times when the Lord would come to his people in glory.

The people in Zechariah's day had lived for over a generation in captivity in Babylon. Many had returned to Judah, but many also stayed in Babylon, Egypt, and other lands outside the Promised Land. The people were sensitive to the idea of dwelling in foreign lands and of the opportunity to dwell in Jerusalem – "home."

In Zechariah 2, the prophet proclaimed that something unusual was happening in Jerusalem. There was a time coming where walls were no longer necessary. God would be setting up a Jerusalem where he would be the protector. And while the people of God had been spread abroad in lands, the day was coming when they would return to the land of promise and not just Jews, but Gentiles would join in the community of God. This would come about as God "roused himself from his holy dwelling" and chose "Jerusalem" and the "holy land" as the place where he would come.

And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you (Zech. 2:11).

The idea of dwelling with God had given meaning to the temple before its destruction. Not because the temple was inordinately special itself, but because it was signifying the presence of God among his people. We see that readily in many Psalms.

Psalm 84

Psalm 84 expresses the overwhelming joy of the writer being in the midst of God's dwelling. Speaking of the temple, the psalmist writes that he "longs, yes faints" for the temple courtyards. It was an opportunity to sing and worship God.

That singing and worship brings forth not only praise to God, but blessings to the worshipper. Those who find strength in God,

As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs (Ps 84:6).

We miss some of the significance of that in the English. In Hebrew, *Baca* (בכא) references "balsam trees," some holy land location now unknown. But as you say it, it sounds like the Hebrew word for weeping or wailing (*bachah* - בכה). This is the point of the Psalmist. Being in the dwelling of God takes the weeping moments of life and makes them nourishing springs for growth. Such is the transformational nature of God's dwelling with men. Of course, once John explained that Jesus was God dwelling on earth, this takes on a whole new level of praise, worship, and growth!

Psalm 43

Psalm 43 echoes the idea of Psalm 84. In this Psalm⁷, the writer is suffering through tough times from the treatment of ungodly people. The Psalmist knows the answers are not found anywhere but the presence of God. The prayer is that God would send his "light and truth" to lead the psalmist to the "dwelling" of God where praise will again be found. All of these words are echoed in the first 14 verses of John.

Philippians 2:1-11

In this famous passage of Philippians, we find Paul putting the incarnation into theological terms that are both moving and thought provoking. Fully consistent

⁷ This Psalm was originally part of Psalm 42. Reading the two together in English shows a common thought and repeated phrasing. In a number of ancient Hebrew manuscripts, they are joined as one.

with John 1, Paul explained that Christ Jesus was “in the form of God” but did not think it important to hold onto his “equality with God.” Instead Jesus Christ “made himself nothing” by being made into human form in the incarnation. Stuningly, even beyond this incredible self-emptying, the Messiah God then humbled himself before created humans by obediently allowing himself to be crucified.

Of course, that is not the end of the story. For God not only resurrected Jesus, but he bestowed on Jesus the name that is above every name. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow – Paul emphasizes “*every knee!*”

Luke 4:31-41

In this interesting set of passages Jesus heals a man with an unclean demon, followed by Luke referencing a number of other demonic possessions Jesus healed. In each of these, the demons cried out that Jesus was “the Holy One of God” (Lk 4:34) and “the Son of God” (Lk 4:41). The demons had better insight than many humans.

Week Three Readings

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